

Education and Inspections Bill

Meeting with Laura Moffatt MP

8th March 2006 - House of Commons, London

Present:

Jacqui Weller - *Teacher, Bewbush Primary*

Tracey Mitchell - *TA Bewbush / Governor Gossops Green*

Gillian Miles - *Headteacher, Bewbush*

Sue Ashby - *Teacher, Langley Green Primary*

Debbie Lewis - *Deputy Head, Langley Green Primary*

Andrew Hodson - *Deputy Head, Maidenbower Junior*

Chris Murphy - *Headteacher, Maidenbower Junior*

Vince Burke - *Headteacher, Our Lady Queen of Heaven RC Primary*

Marianne Wogan - *Teacher, Our Lady Queen of Heaven RC Primary*

Victoria Fifield - *Student Teacher, St Wilfreds*

John O'Malley - *Teacher, St Wilfred's*

Sonia Older - *Teacher, Hazelwick*

Martin Brown - *Teacher, Hazelwick*

After introductions, Laura invited everyone present to contribute their thoughts, concerns and expectations on the proposals set out in the Education and Inspections Bill.

The meeting was to be an informal sharing of views which would be noted and which Laura agreed to ensure would be put directly to the Secretary of State.

Admissions and Parental Choice:

- Concern was expressed that the local authority were reporting no year 7 places available in Crawley for September 2006. There was some disagreement around the table with other schools reporting differently.

Laura agreed to follow this up with West Sussex.

- The feeling was that in West Sussex it was all about parent power – appeals being generally upheld with individual schools having little or no say.
- Concern was expressed that on occasion this allows families about whom a school had child protection concerns, to ‘slip through the net’ and was therefore at odds with the Every Child Matters agenda.

- The White Paper proposal to allow parents the choice of 3 schools with transport being provided was generally seen as a potential nightmare in Crawley both in terms of expense and children being sent back and forth across the town on busses and taxis.
- Although it was acknowledged that in reality a minority of parents have always opted to send their child/children to a more distant school, the important thing is for every school to be good because people would generally prefer to send their children to the nearest school which is part of their own community.
- The view that better schools inevitably also means sink schools was expressed.
- In reality, many parents, particularly in the more difficult areas, don't choose a school at all – they simply turn up at the local school in September. That's why all schools need to be good schools.

Parental Involvement:

- Parents need more support in order to help them support their kids because successful schools are always based on supportive, caring and involved parents. Increasing parental involvement was generally seen as a good aspect of the White Paper.
- Schools need a good social mix to function well.
- There is concern that the White Paper will benefit Middle Class children and not working class children – it is a missed opportunity.
- ALL parents do want good things for their children – so the question is how do we engage with all parents? That is what the White Paper is about and although a challenge for some it is generally thought to be a good direction in which to move.

Trust Schools:

- Many concerns were expressed about the detail of Trust schools, how they would be set up, funded etc....
- There was general acceptance that diversity brings advantages to schools.
- Working with partners and with other schools as promoted in these proposals was generally welcomed.
- There was concern that the private sector would not be interested in investing in 'sink' schools which, if correct would mean Trust Schools would disproportionately benefit the better performing schools.
- If a two tier system does evolve this would be an assault on comprehensive education.

Faith Schools:

- The view that faith schools are socially divisive because they are about selection by faith and therefore cannot truly be part of a comprehensive education system was expressed.
- The contrary view that faith schools provide a multi cultural, multi faith based education to the whole community was also expressed.

Extended schools:

- The view that this encouraged parents to extend the time their children spent at school when it would be better to mould policy around encouraging mothers to stay at home and care for their children.
- There was significant enthusiasm for the possibilities that extended school proposals in the White Paper may offer to schools, students and parents.
- There is a real need for additional funding which is long term if this is to become a reality. At present it is very hard to sustain developments like breakfast clubs when funding can not be guaranteed for more than a year and therefore contracts are short term etc....

Special Needs:

- It was felt that special education was not fully or fairly funded by West Sussex which would present a real problem with the personalising of education in the White Paper.
- There are no additional 'pots' of money available in West Sussex as is the case in inner cities like London.
- The feeling that government funding was not fairly distributed by West Sussex Education Authority was widely expressed, with a lack of recognition from West Sussex of the special needs in the North of the County and in Crawley in particular.

Key Themes and Recommendations

Fair funding

There needs to be a real focusing in on smaller areas of deprivation in generally prosperous parts of the country outside of big cities.

This should include ensuring that local authorities distribute central funding on a clear needs led basis.

Good Schools

There is absolute agreement that the objective of ensuring that all schools are good schools is right.

Parental involvement was similarly seen as crucial to all good schools.

There is enthusiasm for the concept of working with partners, both within education and from the private sector, but genuine concern about the ability of weaker schools in difficult areas to attract such positive partnerships.