

DRAFT

DIVERSITY PATHFINDER : STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Hertfordshire Diversity Pathfinder embraces the specialist schools programme and other school development initiatives to create a strategy for school improvement which benefits all young people.
- 1.2. The current Hertfordshire policy on specialist schools was put in place when the expectation was there would be very few. To date there are eleven specialist schools in Hertfordshire. The government has committed to increasing the number of specialist schools. They wish to see about 46% of secondary schools as specialist schools by 2005 and in the longer term all schools may have a specialism.
- 1.3. As specialist schools increase in number a range of issues will arise. For example:
 - a) To provide diversity in an area it will be desirable to create a spread of different types of specialist school. Schools in an area wishing to secure similar status could work against this.
 - b) Schools seeking specialist status have to raise money from sponsorship. This may cause problems locally with a number of schools approaching potential sources of funding.
 - c) The demands placed upon specialist schools are considerable and the expectations are high. The Government target of 46% of specialist schools by 2005 is based on a number of schools being ready to take on the responsibilities of specialist status. Others will follow when they are ready and it will be important that any strategy provides additional support to accelerate progress where this is appropriate.
 - d) Specialist schools are required to link with another secondary school and with local primary schools to share good practice and ideas. As specialist schools increase in number some schools will find themselves working with more and more schools and issues of managing workload will arise.
 - e) Some schools will find it easier to become part of a network than others. For example, an isolated location will require particular solutions.

- f) Specialist schools will be required to benefit the community by providing courses and opportunities for people to be involved with the school. Links with local business's will be particularly important. Some communities are served by more than one school and as specialist schools develop arrangements to manage duplication will be desirable.
- g) The expansion of specialist schools will require the LEA to review its policies and services in order to respond to the different needs of schools. For example:
- The development of a network of specialist schools should allow students attending a particular specialist school to access the specialism of other schools. This has implications for the use of I.C.T. in delivering the curriculum to students in different schools.
 - The development of specialisms in schools and the dissemination of good practice has implications for the advisory service because there will be a wider range of opportunities for schools to obtain specialist advice.
 - The development of specialist facilities will need to be taken into account, in addition to specific grants, when planning the capital programme
 - The development of ICT to support the management and administration of networks of specialist schools will require the existing strategy to be reviewed
 - Arrangements for non-specialist schools will need to be developed in the context of a system where specialism is the norm.

2. THE PATHFINDER

- 2.1. The DFES recognises that the issues referred to above will have consequences for the way the school system operates in an area. For this reason it is supporting Hertfordshire as a Diversity Pathfinder in order that ways of responding to the issues can be found and disseminated to other L.E.A.'s.
- 2.2. The aim in Hertfordshire is to accelerate the creation of a greater proportion of specialist schools within a culture of interdependence and shared learning among schools in order to raise standards of achievement for all children.
- 2.3. The approach to be taken in Hertfordshire is as follows:
- a) The Pathfinder will apply to all schools –secondary, primary and special - and across the whole county.

- b) The Pathfinder will be taken forward within a framework which encourages the growth of specialist schools to take place in an considered and coherent way.
 - c) The Pathfinder Strategy will have a set of aims, outcomes, operational drivers and an implementation plan. This will be based on the anticipated areas of change and will provide everyone with an understanding of what the Pathfinder will be aiming to do and how it will do it.
- 2.4. The proposed strategy is attached. At this stage it is a draft and it will need to be developed in consultation with schools and others.
- 2.5. In implementing the Strategy account will be taken of the findings of the Ofsted Evaluation of Specialist Schools.

STRATEGY

3. AIMS

- 3.1 To develop a diversity of schools so that individually and collectively they can cater for the diverse requirements and aspirations of today's children and young people.
- 3.2 To develop further a school system in Hertfordshire which through diversity, offers:
 - wider choice for parents
 - greater capacity for school self-improvement and change, and
 - enhanced capacity for raising the standards of achievement of all children.
- 3.3 To develop within secondary schools special characteristics which are clear to the community.
- 3.4 To develop shared learning and professional support among schools in order to spread best practice among schools, both within and across phases.
- 3.5 To develop collaborative networks of schools – secondary, primary and special - which serve a local community by providing a range of learning opportunities appropriate to the needs of the children and adults in the community.
- 3.6 To build on existing collaboration between schools.

4. OUTCOMES

- 4.1 Higher levels of achievement at Key Stage 3, 4 and 5.
- 4.2 Higher levels of participation post 16 and post 19.
- 4.3 Broader curriculum in secondary and primary schools.
- 4.4 More opportunities for children to learn out of school time.
- 4.5 More opportunities for parents and adults to engage in learning with children.
- 4.6 Increased standards of teaching and learning in secondary schools.
- 4.7 Enhanced leadership in secondary schools.
- 4.8 Higher expectations of success for children within the networks of schools.
- 4.9 Greater engagement of parents, local employers and adults in the work of schools and in learning opportunities at the school.
- 4.10 Accelerated pupil achievement in the specialism of the school.
- 4.11 Accelerated pupil achievement of targeted groups e.g. gifted and talented and looked after children.

Note: These will be turned into measurable targets by the Steering Group.

5. OPERATIONAL DRIVERS TO ACHIEVE THE AIMS

5.1 Local Collaborative Management Arrangements

- a) Headteachers of secondary schools will find it helpful to meet in area groups to consider the implementation of the Strategy in their area and to resolve a range of issues that include:
 - which schools will apply for which specialism and when
 - which schools will work together
 - how sponsorship money can be raised
 - how schools seeking specialist status on a later time-scale than others might be supported
 - how best secondary, primary and special schools can work together with the minimum of bureaucracy
 - what an appropriate community programme will look like
 - how to maintain the 14-19/16-19 collaborative arrangements

5.2 Expansion of Specialist Schools

- a) To increase the number of specialist secondary schools in the county and ensure that there is a geographic spread and a spread of specialisms so that there is diversity offering choice for parents and from which schools can learn from one another.
- b) All schools can become specialist schools. A school that acquires specialist status accepts the aims of the strategy and the expectation of maintaining the development of that specialism and renewing it every four years.

5.3 Collaborative Networks and Good Practice

- a) Establish arrangements within each quadrant and across the county that will enable schools to disseminate and share good practice with specialist schools and other schools. This would involve creating arrangements when professionals can meet and agreed arrangements for dissemination, e.g. video conferencing, seminars, visits.
- b) The arrangements should embrace not only the work of specialist schools but also that of other school improvement activities, for example, Beacon schools, advanced skills teachers, leading maths departments as well as research and best practice from outside the county. Also it would include a schools own initiatives to improve and the work of special schools.
- c) The networks would build upon those which already exist especially the 14-19 collaboration groups and involve colleges.

5.4 Working with and benefiting the Community

- a) As part of the arrangements within Children, Schools and Families service for working in communities, networks of schools will be supported in working together to plan and deliver:
 - learning opportunities for children outside school hours which involves parents and adults; and
 - learning opportunities for parents and adults during and outside school hours.
- b) The above will involve local businesses, employers, leisure providers and voluntary sector organisations.

5.5 Use of ICT across Schools

- a) All the above will involve the development and widespread use of ICT for:
- teaching and learning
 - sharing good practice across schools
 - delivering the community based programme of activities

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Time-scale

- a) The time period for the Pathfinder is three years: 2001-2004. During this period there will be:
- An increase in the number of specialist schools. The nature of the specialist schools programme means that schools will bid at different times and may be expected to acquire specialist status in September 2003, 2004 2005 etc. It currently takes between 9 and 12 months to secure specialist schools status so it is unlikely that September 2002 is a realistic start date for any school not already well into the process.
 - The development of the arrangements for sharing good practice needs to be developed across the county by September 2002 to accommodate existing specialist schools and others such as Beacon schools and Advanced Skills Teachers. The arrangements need to have the capacity to develop in response to increasing levels of activity as more schools acquire specialisms.
 - The arrangements for supporting schools community programmes need to be developed in advance of September 2002 as a contribution to Children, Schools and Families strategies for working in local communities. These arrangements will need to be accelerated early in 2002.
 - The development of ICT to support the aims of the Strategy needs to start in advance of September 2002. This will build on the current work with N.G.F.L.

6.2 Submitting a bid for specialist school status

- a) Schools will wish to be ready to take on the opportunities, responsibilities and demands of specialist school status before making a bid. They will also wish to have discussed locally which specialism they will pursue in order to secure local diversity.

- b) In respect of schools being ready to make a bid it is expected that they will fall into three broad groups:
- Schools that are ready to make a bid and are either well advanced for September 2002 or could receive specialist status for September 2003.
 - Schools which are almost ready to make a bid and who could receive specialist status for September 2004.
 - Schools which are not ready and would need to work towards specialist status for September 2005 or later.
- c) In respect of schools in an area wishing to establish similar specialisms, an open process of discussion will need to take place in seeking a spread of specialisms. This will need to take account of schools which choose to bid later for specialist status and the readiness of schools in respect of:
- Teaching and learning
 - Management
 - Community based activities
 - Skills and capacity in networking with other schools and agencies
- d) Achieving specialist status is not easy. Bids have to be of high quality and schools are expected to meet the requirements of specialist school status otherwise funding and status are withdrawn.
- e) The attachment to this report –Bidding for Specialist School Status indicates how schools might wish to consider their readiness and the criteria that could be used to resolve any problems arising from nearby schools wanting to bid for within the contest of this strategy the same specialism. The intention of the LEA is to support all schools which met the intentions set out in this strategy.

6.3 Support from the LEA

- a) All schools will receive support from the LEA:
- Schools which are ready or almost ready to apply for specialist school status will receive support for:
 - preparing and writing the bid for specialist status
 - raising the matched funding from sponsors
 - preparing to engage with the arrangements for sharing best practice across the county
 - developing the schools' community programme within its local network of schools

- Schools which are working towards specialist status will receive support for:
 - achieving a step change in progress
 - achieving specialist readiness in the area(s) appropriate for the school
 - managing change and self evaluation

BIDDING FOR SPECIALIST SCHOOL STATUS

1. The DfES sets out detailed guidance on how to apply for specialist school status and this needs to be considered very carefully before embarking on making a bid. The guidance covers all aspects of making an application and the sponsorship and development plan indicating that applications need to be robust, for example:
 - Schools need to have had a good track record in the specialism or if not, then their plans for a new focus are realistic (para 17)
 - Where current examination performance is modest, there must be either evidence of improvements over the recent past or convincing evidence that with specialist status they will be able to achieve a step change in performance (para 20)
 - Schools with weaknesses are unlikely to be successful unless they can present a convincing strategy of how specialist school status will help them achieve the challenging but realistic targets set for specialist schools (para 21)
 - A range of specialisms is looked for in an area and by implication schools close to one another bidding for the same specialism are unlikely to be successful (para 33)
 - The quality of the bid has to be high and the subsequent performance of the school has to be such as to meet the targets set by the DfES otherwise the funding is removed (para 70 and 159)

2. For a school to be ready to bid it should:
 - have been on an improvement trend for a period of at least two years;
 - have the capacity to continuously improve over an indefinite period; and
 - in the proposed specialist area improvement should have been greater than in any other area of the schools work and the potential for providing leadership in the community and to other schools (primary, secondary and special) exists.

The evidence that a school might look for to assess its readiness is as follows:

- Evidence of rising trends at KS3, KS4, post 16 (last three years) OR justification of any drop and convincing plan to rise in 2002
- Meeting annual targets
- Evidence of improvement of under-achieving groups of pupils
- Evidence of improvement in quality of teaching and learning throughout the school
- Evidence of successful monitoring of students progress
- Evidence of improvement in attendance
- Evidence of sustained or increased numbers on roll
- Evidence of existing relationships with business and employers
- Evidence of strength in chosen specialism
- Increased take up (over time) of specialist subject/s
- Evidence of close attention to literacy skills
- Effective use of ICT
- The quality of leadership is rated as good by Ofsted.
- The quality of teaching is rated as 60% good and better and less than 5% unsatisfactory by Ofsted.
- Evidence of collaboration in the 16-19 strategy
- Evidence of ethos
- Evidence of benefiting the community
- That in the area of specialism:

the department obtains support for pupils learning from outside the school (list – for last 2 years);

the department provides learning opportunities for the local community (list for the last 2 years);

the department has supported curriculum development in other schools (list for last 2 years).

3. A bid for specialist school status requires the endorsement of the LEA. For the LEA to endorse a bid the school will need to accept the Diversity Pathfinder Strategy and have followed its processes and provide the evidence set out above.
4. A bid for specialist school status requires the endorsement of the LEA. In the event that two schools near to one another wish to bid for the same specialism it is hoped that they would be able to resolve the issue locally and between themselves. Schools may well feel that they have more than one option for a specialism. In the event that the matter cannot be resolved the LEA would broker discussions between the two schools and, if necessary, take a decision on which school to endorse. In this case the LEA should draw on the above evidence.