

**SPECIALIST SCHOOLS**

**Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families**

Author: Jim Dalton, Assistant Director - Planning  
01992 555862

**1. Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 To explain the government's intention that specialist schools will be a key part of their proposals for a more diverse system, as expressed in the White Paper; and to suggest a strategy for responding to this in Hertfordshire.

**2. Summary of the report**

The specialist schools programme is being extended by the government and Hertfordshire has been designated as a Diversity Pathfinder authority to develop the specialist school model. The report outlines the current arrangements for specialist schools and explains the changes that the government is proposing in the recently published White Paper. The issues this raises for Hertfordshire are set out in the report. The report concludes by suggesting the steps that will need to be taken to develop a collaborative approach with schools for extending the number of specialist schools in the county.

**3. Conclusion**

The Select Committee is asked to consider the new approach to developing specialist schools set out in the report, so that the Committee's views can be incorporated into the planned development work.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The specialist schools programme has been developing since the mid 1990's. The number of specialist schools has grown steadily, and will now be significantly increased under the proposals in the White Paper "Schools achieving success" published last month.
- 1.2 The County Council's approach to specialist schools was agreed in 1998/99 - when the programme was smaller and fewer schools wanted to seek designation. The expansion of the specialist schools programme now requires a fresh response by the Authority to secure maximum benefit from the initiative, by spreading all the specialisms across the county and ensuring that specialist schools work with other schools to disseminate good practice and raise achievement.
- 1.3 The government has just announced that five LEAs will be designated as Diversity Pathfinders, to work with schools and the DfES to develop the ideas in the White Paper. Hertfordshire is to be a Pathfinder with the remit of extending the specialist school model.
- 1.4 This is an important initiative. It will enable schools and the LEA to work together on a strategic approach, and to resolve many detailed issues of approach and implementation. How this could possibly be done is suggested sections 5 and 6 of this report.
- 1.5 Pathfinder status will mean additional government funding to the LEA for the remainder of this financial year; and comparable amounts for the next two years.

## **2. Current framework for specialist schools**

- 2.1 In September 2001 there were 685 specialist schools nationally, about 18% of the total number of schools.
- 2.2 There are currently four specialisms: technology, languages, arts, and sports.
- 2.3 Designation is through a competitive bidding process to the DfES.
- 2.4 Schools must improve teaching and learning in their specialism, through a four year development plan. They must specify measurable objectives with targets for provision, take up and outcomes.
- 2.5 The schools need to contribute to other schools, working with at least five non-specialist schools, one or more of which must be a secondary school. Special schools are able to apply, but are encouraged to make a joint application with a mainstream school.
- 2.6 They must show how the wider community will benefit from their expertise and facilities; and the impact that will have on learning outcomes.

- 2.7 Post-16 take up in their specialism has to be broadened.
- 2.8 Schools must also address equal opportunity issues of under-achievement and access to the curriculum.
- 2.9 They must raise £50,000 in sponsorship, which must be given without conditions, and involve the sponsors in the school's future development.
- 2.10 They receive a one off capital grant of £100,000, which is added to the sponsorship, to improve facilities.
- 2.11 They are also given additional revenue funding of £123 per pupil up to a maximum of £123,000 per year, initially for three years. Funding for a fourth year depends upon achieving the targets. A further extension can then follow, through a new development plan.
- 2.12 Schools should consult the LEA before submitting an application.
- 2.13 There are now eleven specialist schools in the county:
- |                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Birchwood High                   | Technology |
| Hockerill Anglo-European College | Languages  |
| Presdales                        | Languages  |
| Goffs                            | Languages  |
| Dame Alice Owen's                | Languages  |
| Bushey Meads                     | Technology |
| Westfield                        | Technology |
| St Clement Danes                 | Languages  |
| Parmiter's                       | Technology |
| John F Kennedy                   | Technology |
| St George's                      | Technology |

### **3. White paper changes**

- 3.1 The government's goal in the White Paper is for a more diverse secondary system, with every school distinctive in the particular contribution it makes and supported to become a centre of excellence.
- 3.2 The values and principles that underpin the government's commitment to comprehensive education are reaffirmed in the White Paper; and the proposals are intended to "reduce the wide disparities in performance and make sure that every secondary schools offers its pupils the challenge, support and inspiration they deserve".
- 3.3 They signal their wish there to be 1,000 specialist schools by 2003 and 1,500 by 2005. The aspiration is for all schools that are ready to be specialist schools.

- 3.4 The White Paper proposes that all schools should have a distinctive ethos and identify their role. To help schools prepare for this there will be a new 'working towards' status.
- 3.5 The number of specialisms will increase to eight by adding: science, business and enterprise, engineering, and maths and computing. The timescale for this has not yet been given, but it is likely that the first applications will be made in March 2002. Advanced specialist colleges and advanced Beacon and Training schools will also be introduced.
- 3.6 There has not yet been any new government guidance on the extension of specialist schools. The White Paper reinforces all the aspects of the current framework that contribute to raising achievement and there is likely to be fresh guidance.
- 3.7 All specialist schools will still abide by the law on the National Curriculum, and by the law and code of practice on admissions.
- 3.8 There is an added emphasis in the White Paper on schools sharing best practice with each other and learning from what successful schools do.
- 3.9 Collaboration will be facilitated by enabling schools to work together, jointly developing centres of excellence or complementary specialisms.

#### **4. Implications and issues for the LEA**

- 4.1 The proposals in the White Paper have significant implications for Hertfordshire.
- 4.2 Potentially every secondary school could become a specialist school; and by 2005 the current number of 11 could increase to about 40 in line with the national prediction. This raises issues of the geographic spread of all the eight specialisms; and the number of specialist schools needed in each quadrant to benefit all schools and community needs.
- 4.3 The way in which schools determine the direction they want to go in, and acquire 'working towards' status, will require careful introduction, in order to exploit each school's strengths yet at the same time avoid local 'clashes'.
- 4.4 Mechanisms for linking specialist to non specialist schools, including primary, secondary and special schools will need to be considered to facilitate sharing best practice.
- 4.5 Existing arrangements for post-16 collaboration could to be developed to make explicit how each specialist school would contribute to broadening post-16 take up in that collaborative group which could also be expanded 14-19.
- 4.6 Already schools are finding it hard to raise the required sponsorship and establish business links. Increasing demands on employers raises issues of a co-ordinated approach by schools, the LEA and the employers' organisations.

- 4.7 The issue of selection will also need to be considered. Specialist schools can select up to 10% of their intake by aptitude for their specialism.
- 4.8 The role of CSF staff in supporting schools to develop their new role and facilitating the spread of new ideas and best practice will need consideration.

## **5. Proposals**

- 5.1 The proposed strategic response to secure maximum benefit in Hertfordshire from the government's intentions is:

to work with schools on a collaborative approach;

to spread all the specialisms across the county; and

to ensure specialist schools work with all other schools to spread good practice and raise achievement.

- 5.2 The features of this approach would include;

(i) criteria for agreeing which schools would work towards which specialism, to ensure an appropriate number and range of specialist schools in each quadrant and to avoid the wasted effort of too many applications than are likely to be accepted;

(ii) mechanisms for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each potential specialist school, to help schools meet the DfES requirements for designation;

(iii) guidance on how post-16 collaboration would harness the strengths of specialist schools in each collaborative group, to benefit all students and provide continuity 14-19;

(iv) joint approaches with the employers' organisations and the Learning and Skills Council, to involve business in schools' development and help raise sponsorship;

(v) conditions for ensuring that capital projects at specialist schools tie into the Authority's Asset Management Plan, so that these schemes relate where appropriate to other projects and the potential leverage of 'joined up' funding is exploited;

(vi) expectations on how specialist schools should spread good practice and help their communities, so the whole school system benefits and there can be no perception of a 'two tier' system;

(vii) mechanisms for giving practical help to schools that have not yet achieved specialist status; and

(ix) a timetable and processes for introducing this approach; and doing it effectively and efficiently for both schools and the DfES.

## **6. Process and timescale**

6.1 The detail of the DfES's expectations of the Authority as a Pathfinder are not yet known, but in order to develop a collaborative approach with schools, the following steps are suggested.

(i) Create a Pathfinder working group from the LEA and the Hertfordshire Association of Secondary School Headteachers; October and November.

(ii) Appoint a lead officer, possibly a seconded headteacher or temporary consultant; October and November.

(iii) Map the current position by establishing from those schools that have already indicated their intention to prepare an application, how far they have progressed; and finding out from other schools if they have given any consideration to specialist status; November.

(iv) Develop the criteria in the working group so that:

- we are able to move quickly to introduce the new approach;
- the issues in section 4 and the features of the new approach in section 5 are clarified and resolved in detail; and
- trenches of applications to secure the new approach are ready for designation from September 2002-September 2005; December and January.

(v) Report to Cabinet in January.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 The Select Committee is asked to consider the new approach to developing specialist schools set out in the report, so that the Committee's views can be incorporated into the planned development work.

Documents used by the author in preparing this report: The White Paper "Schools achieving success" published by the government September 2001.