

Letter from Councillor Brigid Jones to all Birmingham Schools

11 July 2012

To all Birmingham Schools

As Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services I attended the annual Secondary Head Teacher's conference on Friday 6 July.

At the conference I started discussions on a way forward for Birmingham Schools, which will be shared and shaped with all phases.

Our intent is to bring together the wide ranging views and school organisation models, across our Birmingham family of schools, to form an overarching co-operative trust to which all schools can choose to belong.

We want to work with you to help design this alternative offer which adds value and support to each individual school within, without disrupting those on a chosen organisational path or indeed the current networking arrangements.

At the conference I said: "I am proposing to you today, the beginnings of what I hope you will agree is an added value approach, and will welcome ideas on how this should work for the success of all. To build on the school as an excellent community service with social responsibility at the centre of all its component parts – a cooperative model going forward, allowing real partnership between the council, the school community of parents, governors, leaders and our most important teachers and learners"

Since my appointment I have worked with Council Officers and Head Teachers and met with organisations to learn from their experience.

Working with Head Teachers, Teachers, school staff, Governors, children and young people, through their representative forums we will finalise an option for implementation in the Autumn Term.

The way forward will be shaped with you but the founding principles are:

1. To create a trust based on co-operative principles
2. To build this from the strengths of current partnerships and consortia
3. For schools to be the principal partners along with the local authority
4. To potentially harness the expertise of local universities and business communities, such as the Chamber of Commerce or the LEP, as partners
5. To give it a level of school improvement rigour that would make it an excellent home for struggling schools
6. To protect staff pay and conditions
7. Not to force schools down any route: staying with current arrangements will remain an option for all schools.

At the conference I also started discussions on offer to all our young people which will truly prepare them for the world of work – a Birmingham Baccalaureate, a school leavers qualification which will be shaped by employers, schools and the third sector to give our young people the skills they need to thrive in our local economy.

I hope that you will support me in going forward to give all of our young people the skills and opportunities to move into working life or on to higher education.

In the spirit of cooperation, I am asking to work with you to help build on and strengthen the Birmingham Family of Schools, to form a new strengthened and even more supportive relationship between the Local Authority and Local schools, guided by you, governors, parents and the children and young people who we are all here to serve a partnership with all stakeholders across every level of society to ensure that we are all doing the best we can do by our young people, ensuring that no child in Birmingham is left behind.

We as a council are tackling this head on, treating educational achievement not just as a schools issue, but as a:

1. health issue,
2. housing issue,
3. safeguarding issue
4. jobs and prosperity issue.

Our intention is to protect school autonomy and terms and conditions of employment, and to build on and strengthen the great things schools already do together. We want to ensure that the hard work and expertise of all who contribute to the attainment for all are recognised and rewarded.

Rather than allow a national tide to tear up our supportive structures I propose we grow and own them, creating a vehicle which can be a home both for excellent schools to share and for struggling schools to learn and improve. I would add that if Michael Gove is targeting uncooperative Councils, I would like to assure him that we intend, through your support, to be very co-operative indeed.

I would also like to propose that the co-operative is open not only to Local Authority schools but also to those schools with a sponsor or partner of their own who want to join, without disrupting local arrangements.

Both the Birmingham Baccalaureate and the co-operative trust are big goals. I look forward to working with you to realise them.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Brigid Jones

Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services

Copies to Unions and Teacher Associations All Councillors