

EDUCATION VISION FOR CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE – A RECONTEXTUALISATION

BACKGROUND

1. The Central Bedfordshire Learning Transformation Programme Board was originally agreed by the Executive of Central Bedfordshire Council in 2010 to oversee the delivery of Building Schools for the Future and Extended Schools existing policies. It was also tasked with helping officers develop proposals for the four sequential reviews of teaching, learning and school provision outlined in the Council's 2010 Education Vision statement. However, since that Education Vision and the four area reviews were agreed with schools, national and local education policies have radically changed following the May 2010 general election and local elections in May 2011.
2. On completion of the first of these four area reviews in Dunstable / Houghton Regis in June 2011, the Council stated its commitment to the new coalition government's education policy by encouraging schools to take advantage of the freedoms now available to them to seek structural changes themselves. A number of schools in Dunstable/Houghton Regis have taken the initial steps in this process and the Council is responding positively.
3. The following four paragraphs provide a commentary on what has changed in the 18 months since the CBC Education Vision was agreed.
4. Commentary on the changing educational landscape

While many elements of the coalition government policy set out in the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (November 2010) and the 2011 Education Bill/Act continue or develop aspects of previous government policy such as early intervention, early years, raising participation age, school floor standards, a focus on year on year progression, promotion of collaboration and federation and on schools becoming academies; there are other aspects which are very different. The performance framework of central, local and school level targets has been removed. Central 'field forces' and local School Improvement Partners no longer monitor school performance – only Ofsted remains. There is no longer a requirement for Councils to maintain a Children and Young Peoples' Plan and the future of Children's Trusts is unclear. Council responsibilities increasingly focus on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Financial uncertainty makes planning difficult. While Standards Funds have been replaced by the smaller Early Intervention Grant, even this funding stream is only secure until 2012 and the government is currently consulting on sweeping proposals to school funding from 2013.

5. There is now a strong emphasis on autonomous schools taking increased responsibility for the development of local improvement capacity. The addition of Free Schools, UTCs and Studio Schools to the existing Academy designation and a dramatic acceleration in the conversion of schools to academy status has become a key national and local CBC policy. By the end of the financial year around half of CBC school pupils will be educated in schools that are not maintained by the Council. No Council in the country is moving faster on this agenda. Cuts in Council budgets, the creation of Teaching Schools, the expectation that Council support to schools will be provided *only* in the event of school failure and that this support will be commissioned through Teaching Schools, or other providers - have all led to considerable reductions in the school improvement resource at CBC. The Localism

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Act 2011 and the Open Public Service White Paper will add to the development of 'big society' features of education as town and parish councils bid to take on the running of local services, learning from the experience of school governing bodies which have been providing such services through local management of schools, over the past 23 years.

6. Finally, National Curriculum reforms heralded in the 2010 CBC vision statement have been cancelled and although a new curriculum review is now set to report in 2012, it will not have statutory implications for academies, free schools or studio schools as they are exempted from National Curriculum legislation. The Tickell review has broadly supported a continuation of the EYFS and FSP (in a conflated form) and the Bew review has signalled the continuation of end of KS2 statutory tests (with an increase in teacher assessment of writing). End of Key Stage outcomes thus look set to continue to feature as key measures in the new performance system.

7. Implications for the 2010 Education Vision

It is clear that while it remains vital that we to continue to review the impact of population growth on school provision, the changes outlined above have created a context where changes in school designation and organisation and changes in school improvement functions are swift, dramatic and are occurring simultaneously across Central Bedfordshire. This requires a revision both of the 2010 Education Vision statement and a rethinking of the role and remit of the Transforming Learning board that must now bring strategic thinking and steerage to changes that are often deeply structural, locally driven and complex, while at the same time support the underpinning principles of the Education Vision in order to ensure that improving achievement and outcomes for Central Bedfordshire learners does not become sidelined.

CHANGES MADE TO THE 2012 EDUCATION VISION FOR CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

8. We continue to want children and young people to enjoy their childhood and to have the best possible start in life. We want every child to do well at school, to make friends and to build strong relationships with their family. By the age of 19, as young adults, we want every young person to have the knowledge and skills and qualifications that will give them the best chance of success, so that they are prepared to take their place in society as a happy, healthy, contributing and confident citizen.

To achieve this the 2010 Education Vision was underpinned by seven key principles. Following an analysis of the current context (summarised above) the following amendments to these principles are now proposed. These amendments reflect changes in the role of the Council and of central government and also take account of the increased need for the Central Bedfordshire school system to be one in which all education partners work together through well-informed, effective and sustainable processes that develop talent and expertise building the system's local capacity to provide excellent learning for all our children and young people.

9. Revised Principles

(Revisions are shown in italics)

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In Central Bedfordshire, all partners will work together, share information and develop successful approaches to learning which have the following principles at their heart:

Principle	Comment
1) <i>That there is a need to raise standards and to improve outcomes for young people.</i>	The Council aspires to significant improvement in GCSE outcomes
2) <i>That continuity of provision across the 0 to 19 age range creates a 'one phase' approach to learning.</i>	Points of transfer create significant barriers to progress that can be countered by concerted efforts to create continuity of expectation and learning and increase progression and a "3 to 19 approach across schools in partnership.
3) <i>That schools should be based around communities and the needs of their learners.</i>	The Council will lever in community resources where possible to support schools and parents.
4) That what is best for children and families should be at the centre of any change.	The Council has a role in advocacy for good outcomes for children and families
5) That as far as possible services should be <i>commissioned and delivered locally.</i>	Commissioning is the expected means by which Councils and others ensure local delivery by encouraging school to school partnerships and supporting the work of training schools..
6) <i>That new models of leadership and governance for schools are considered.</i>	Academy chains, collaboration, federation and shared governance models increase the quality of the education offer and create opportunities for improvement led from within the local school system.
7) <i>That all partners will capture what is working well and publish this in ways that allow others to learn from the success.</i>	Teaching has historically been practiced in isolation and mechanisms for capturing and sharing what works are underdeveloped in the education field. Recent research has shown than school systems that get from 'good to great' make practice public and available for others to learn from.
8) That stakeholders will use this vision to	All partners will work together to

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inform the way they respond to changes in local and national educational policy contexts and set revised priorities. Changes the 2010 versions of these principles are shown in italics	support the vision of Central Bedfordshire as demanding excellence in teaching and learning in all it's schools..
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NEW PRIORITIES IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

10. The policy and contextual changes that demand this adjustment to our Education Vision principles also create new priorities for the way we work together to optimise learning¹. These new priorities fall under three headings. The first applies to all learning focused organisations in Central Bedfordshire and relates to the increased pressure for systematic **early intervention**. All partners are also involved in the other two priority areas but the Council has a specific role in addressing them successfully. These are the priority areas of **commissioning** and **partnerships**. The specific nature of the role of the council in these priority areas is created firstly by government expectations that councils *commission* rather than provide services directly and secondly by changes proposed in the current Localism Bill and Public Source White Paper which are discussed in 3.3 and 3.4 below. Getting our work in these new priority areas right should also provide the means by which the Council can further transform and consolidate its relationship with schools in Central Bedfordshire which was a key strategic ambition set out in the 2010 Education Vision and 2011 CYPP.

PRIORITY 1. EARLY INTERVENTION.

11. The Allen Review (HM Government 2011) has set out how early intervention not only benefits its direct recipients right now, dramatically improving their life chances, but also how EI benefits future society which is spared considerable costs to social, judicial and health systems that would be incurred if the early interventions are not made early enough.
12. With direction from the Health and Wellbeing Board and strategic advice from the Transforming Learning Board the Council will work to develop an Early Intervention strategy for vulnerable children and learners in Central Bedfordshire. This strategy will not confine its work to the very young but will recognise that in the fields, for example, of adolescent mental health or disengagement from education and training at 17, effective early intervention is critical to long term success. Central to this approach will be a shared, detailed and constantly updated map of needs.

PRIORITY 2. COMMISSIONING.

13. Done well, commissioning is a process which goes beyond the mere transactional and can bring about cross-organisational understanding, mutual accountability and high quality practice. This is because good commissioning processes require both the commissioners and the commissioned to attend to, understand and articulate details of process that are not always surfaced or fully understood in more traditional approaches to contracting or procurement. As such, commissioning can be one means by which all partners in the wider Central Bedfordshire learning community

¹ These priorities for the way we work together do not change the priorities of Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services which remain (i) helping children and young people to achieve more and transforming our relationship with schools, (ii) protecting children and keeping them safe; (iii) reducing child poverty and the effects for those living in poverty and improving early intervention and prevention; (iv) targeting the most deprived areas and vulnerable groups to improve children's emotional and physical health.

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can utilise highly visible, highly transparent processes that in turn build such a level of trust in the system that any partner can commission or be commissioned by any other with a high level of confidence in the quality and impact of service that is designed and delivered. Evidence to support this approach is emerging in the correlation that exists between good commissioning systems and good safeguarding.

14. Central Bedfordshire retains its responsibility for commissioning sufficient school places and will continue to make the information behind this transparent and visible to all. We will seek to learn further from the best commissioning systems and, with strategic advice and direction from the learning transformation group, develop current systems into an approach that delivers high reliability, high quality improvement while at the same time develops trust and mutual accountability and also captures successful practices making it possible that all can learn from them.

PRIORITY 3. PARTNERSHIPS

15. Good commissioning and good partnership are mutually interdependent: each strengthens the other. A major government policy ambition now is that more services are delivered more locally than has previously been the case; tailored to specific local need and circumstance. Furthermore, where it is possible to do so, this is to be done through voluntarism or in the course of another local service delivery, reducing cost and increasing the joined-up experience of users. These principles are not new to the school sector. For 23 years groups of volunteers have governed schools entirely by these means. Furthermore a complex range of local private and voluntary sector partners have grown up around schools supporting culture, health, sport and links with local business. Greater diversity in schools in Central Bedfordshire demands stronger and better designed partnership working.
16. For such partnerships to develop, partners need access to a system that provides high quality local information and data. They need to trust the system and the motives of other partners who all share a goal – the learning and achievement of all children and young people in Central Bedfordshire. Furthermore, as partners we all need to recognise that it is in our interests to prioritise professional learning in our partner organisations if we are to grow a local resource of high quality, highly skilled professionals. Hargreaves and others have demonstrated that in the knowledge business the most successful organisations become successful by creating partnership approaches that allow them to compete and collaborate at the same time. With strategic advice and direction from the Transforming Learning Board we will learn from successful partnership working between schools and others, develop the role of governors, research and broker high quality intelligence in order to help to facilitate successful partnership working and the growth of successful, independent partnerships.
17. The Council has identified performance at KS4 and post 16 education, employment and training as its key education priorities from 2012 to 2015. Attainment at KS4 has risen by 10 % points since Central Bedfordshire Council came into existence and numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) have been low compared with the national average.
18. Other areas that for reasons of performance or policy will need to be in focus for the coming year or more are Early Years, KS2 performance and the Raising Participation age.
19. Early Years provision remains a national and local priority. Over the coming year Central Bedfordshire Council will be reconfiguring a key component of provision in

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this sector: its Children's Centres in order to improve the way resources are targeted to need in line with the Council's priorities.

19. Attainment at KS2 in Central Bedfordshire is now the second lowest in England. We are the lowest performing council amongst statistical neighbours on every KS2 indicator. We will work with middle schools and key partners in order to secure improvements in 2012 to make up the ground lost in 2011 and to build long term capacity for sustained improvement.
20. The Raising Participation age will require all young people to remain in education or training up to the age of 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015. To qualify as education or training activity must be accredited and be for a minimum of 20 hours a week and will demand that the 12% of the Central Bedfordshire population of 17 and 18 year olds currently not in education or training are fruitfully and purposefully engaged. This will therefore be a major priority for providers and partners over the coming five years.

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