

## EDUCATION WHITE PAPER OCTOBER 2005

### HIGHER STANDARDS, BETTER SCHOOLS FOR ALL IMPLICATIONS FOR HEREFORDSHIRE

#### PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CABINET

16TH MARCH, 2006

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#### Wards Affected

County-wide

#### Purpose

To receive a report on the local implications for Herefordshire of the Government's latest white paper on Education published in October 2005.

#### Key Decision

This is not a key decision

#### Financial Implications

There are no immediate financial implications

#### Recommendation

**The proposals in the White Paper be noted as a significant reference document for the current and future development of both the quality and provision of education in Herefordshire.**

#### Reasons

Attached at Appendix 1 is the Ten Policy Briefing Paper, which provides a succinct and comprehensive summary of the White Paper. The briefing paper commentary on pages 15-18 describe some of the tensions and contradictions contained in the White Paper.

At the time of writing this report, the proposals in the White Paper are the subject of considerable debate nationally and it is difficult to predict with any degree of certainty the precise nature of any legislative outcomes. A Short Guide to the Education and Inspections Bill 2006 is attached at Appendix 2.

#### Considerations

1. The White Paper's central theme is that increasing parental choice and giving greater autonomy to schools will lead to higher standards. However, every government for the last two decades has subscribed to this belief and locally

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Ted St George, Head Of School Effectiveness on 01432 260803

Herefordshire schools already enjoy significant levels of autonomy over the budget and the way in which the school curriculum is organised and delivered. Herefordshire Council has actively encouraged schools to develop individually whilst working together in partnership with it and each other. Any limitations on schools are set mainly by national policy, for instance on testing and the national curriculum, and the code of practice on admissions. Indeed it is difficult to identify what could not be done now by schools that requires changes in law proposed by the White Paper.

2. The proposals in the White Paper do little to resolve the paradox of increasing parental choice and competition between schools, whilst ensuring the Every Child Matters agenda is met, particularly in relation to the most vulnerable pupils and families.
3. It can be argued that the revised role for Local Authorities (LAs) to act as commissioners of services and champions of children and parents is a natural extension of the Every Child Matters vision and supports its practical implementation. LAs will be able to re-focus their energies and resources on the needs of the groups of children most at risk. However, the debate surrounding Trust Schools and admission arrangements has highlighted the risks that schools across England, mindful of published league tables on examination results, attendance and exclusions, may seek to covertly 'select' pupils. This could have a very negative impact on the delivery of the five outcomes of Every Child Matters particularly for the most vulnerable groups of pupils.
4. Some of the proposals in the White Paper are likely to have a limited impact locally. For instance:
  - (a) The greater powers of intervention in failing schools are not necessary currently since the Council has a good record in this area, both in the very small numbers of such schools and the speed in which they have been turned around.
  - (b) At a time of falling rolls and some very good Sixth Form provision, it is difficult to imagine how new schools or increased Sixth Form provision would be either sensible or justified whoever may suggest it, including parents. [Separately to the White Paper the DfES has suggested that all specialist colleges should be able to develop post-16 provision]
  - (c) If the number of schools remains the same, parents are more likely to be offered their first choice of school as spaces become available, particularly in secondary schools. The limiting factor will be the cost and availability of personal or school transport.
  - (d) Cost and transport are limiting factors. The White Paper suggests that students entitled to Free School Meals [2015 at present] would be entitled to free transport to school if they lived more than two miles but less than six miles from any of three schools as measured by a straight line between school and home. Although the motive of providing choice to less well off families is admirable, the details of the proposals create some oddities in its application in a County such as Herefordshire e.g. Pupils entitled to Free School Meals living in Leominster would not be eligible for free transport to any school other than the Minster. Pupils living south of the River Wye in Hereford could be entitled to free transport to Whitecross High School and Aylestone. Others in South Wye living within the two mile radial distance of these schools would not be entitled yet their journeys might be equally long

because of the river. All of this assumes children are offered places at alternative schools, and there is a proposal for 'banded' admissions, allocating a percentage of places to pupils from areas of disadvantage. The White Paper suggests that this is explored in 'pathfinder' projects. School transport is a major issue in the County and it would be useful to explore how improvements could be achieved by moving away from the 1944 two mile and three mile eligibility criteria. However, the make-up of 14 high schools in the County is not generally so skewed to suggest banded admission system would bring significant benefits.

5. The key education issue facing Herefordshire is how to maintain and further improve educational standards in the County at a time of falling rolls.
6. The numbers of children known to be living in Herefordshire as at 31 August 2005 is as follows:

<b>AGE GROUP</b>	<b>CHILDREN IN COUNTY</b>	<b>CHILDREN ON ROLL</b>
0-1	1695	0
1-2	1770	0
2-3	1723	0
3-4	1707	379
4-5	1722	1486
5-6	1917	1720
6-7	2038	1816
7-8	2039	1823
8-9	2044	1800
9-10	2146	1872
10-11	2023	1851
11-12	2000	1914
12-13	2119	1896
13-14	2201	2045
14-15	2165	2061
15-16	2137	2001

7. The numbers of children attending the 104 maintained schools in the County is given in the second column. Some children attend maintained schools in other counties and some attend private schools. From past experience each age cohort tends to reduce in size due to mortality, or out migration exceeding immigration.
8. However from these figures and projection of future births it is expected that the numbers of children in schools will continue to fall over the next 10 years.
9. The White Paper does not address the issue of falling rolls directly, but there are a number of references which could have an impact. It is proposed that the School Organisation Committee be abolished as they 'add to bureaucracy and give a bias in favour of the status quo'. Powers to decide on School Organisation issues will transfer to the local authority. However it does state all 'new schools will be trust schools'. In this respect the White Paper proposals surrounding "Trust Schools" may be helpful and act as a driver for re-thinking how schools are organised and led locally.
10. The Trust School Prospectus has just been published and states, "There is no single blueprint for Trust Schools". This is potentially good news because groups of schools within defined geographical areas of the County (or in faith groups) may

wish to consider acquiring Trust status or adopting a federated model in response to the falling roll. This could provide a very creative solution to educational provision in an area where there are several very small schools, recruitment is difficult (particularly to headship) and a new model of school leadership needs to be developed.

11. There are risks, however, associated with what is currently known about Trust Schools, particularly in relation to individual schools operating on their own as Trusts and with governance and admissions. Nevertheless, despite the national controversy surrounding the idea, Trust Schools or the less radical federated school may be the proposal in the White Paper that is of most interest to Herefordshire and the problem of the falling roll.
12. The DfES is organising a consultation exercise on the White Paper and invited Herefordshire, as a rural authority, to send a delegation of ten parents and parent workers, including two Council Officers, to a meeting in London on 8th February. There is a further consultation with fifty local parents in Herefordshire on Saturday 4th March. It is to be welcomed that the County has been asked to contribute to the White Paper debate.

## **Risk Management**

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Ten Policy Briefing - Schools White Paper

Appendix 2 - A short Guide to the Education and Inspections Bill 2006

### **Background Papers**

None identified