

Councillor Alan Kendall

Executive Member for Education and Libraries



AC/CAM

22 January 2009

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Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Commission
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Dear Bob,

RESPONSE TO A REPORT BY A WORKING GROUP OF THE SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

CELEBRATING EAL: A REVIEW OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE IN BRACKNELL FOREST SCHOOLS

I am writing with my response to this report and to your letter of 24 November 2008.

The recommendations within the report have been considered carefully by the Social Care and Learning Management Team and by me. A response to each recommendation in the report was considered and approved by the Executive at their meeting on 20 January 2009.

I recognise the hard work that has gone into the production of the report and the sensitive way in which the issue was addressed. I very much welcome the report and its findings. I think that the most direct way to respond is by reference to each of the recommendations in the report.

The sections in italics are quotations from the report and use its numbering.

- 5.1 *The positive aspects of the increase in overseas pupils in Bracknell Forest schools be emphasised both in promoting the Borough and in terms of local press coverage. This might include a festival to celebrate diversity.*

A number of initiatives are planned to support this recommendation through the work of schools, the Bracknell Forest Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group and other local partnerships. The Council wish to work with Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action to support an event celebrating communities in

The Borough of Opportunity

the Borough. A calendar of events to celebrate school and community achievements will be produced and made available to the local press. The positive benefits of changes to the population of Bracknell Forest, in terms of economic well-being and cultural diversity, will be promoted through such events.

- 5.2 *Additional funding be sought from Central Government to address resource constraints arising from the extremely high number of first languages spoken in the Borough's schools which require it to produce materials in over 70 languages and not benefit from the funding system which provides resources based on the number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students rather than the complexity created by the amount of languages spoken.*

Since the publication of the Working Group report the number of languages spoken by pupils in Bracknell Forest schools has increased from 70 to 72. This has further highlighted the need to develop the confidence of teachers to support EAL pupils through the provision of appropriate resources and time to plan an appropriate curriculum. The current capacity of the Social Care and Learning (SCL) EAL and Diversity team will be reviewed to meet the increased demand for advice and support to schools. This work is supported partly by a ring fenced Government Grant (Standards Fund Grant 1.3 Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG)) and partly through local funding from the LA.

The EMAG funds available to the LA are due to increase from £61,192 in 2008 to £77,141 in 2010. The grant is allocated on the basis of a formula that uses the number of pupils whose first language is other than English and the number of pupils from minority ethnic groups who are underachieving at national level. The calculation only counts pupils who are both bilingual and from an underachieving group once. Finally the formula is weighted for free school meals. The Working Group correctly identified that this basis for allocating a grant fails to recognise additional budget pressures due to the diversity and range of languages.

The Director of Social Care and Learning will raise this issue with the DCSF and seek additional support.

- 5.3 *In the event that a fair funding deal which reflects the high number of first languages spoken in Bracknell Forest schools cannot be obtained from Central Government, the Council should recognise the challenge faced by its schools and provide additional financial support to enable the EAL & Diversity Team and schools to carry on their good and important work.*

The Schools Forum will be asked to allocate £50,000 from the Schools Budget to support the work of the SCL EAL & Diversity team as part of the 2009/10 budget setting process. Funding is proposed to be allocated to continue the Borough wide activities to promote community cohesion through support to pupils with English as an Additional Language via enhanced teacher training, specialist teaching assistants and translation materials. The existing service is currently provided on a temporary basis with funding due to expire at April 2009. The Council has been seen to take a proactive, and highly positive, role in providing support on EAL issues.

- 5.4 *The Sandy Lane Primary School model of dealing with significantly high numbers of EAL pupils with numerous first languages be adopted as best practice and disseminated to the Borough's schools.*

The approach taken by the head teacher and staff at Sandy Lane Primary School for supporting significantly high numbers of EAL pupils is detailed on the DCSF effective practice website. The SCL EAL & Diversity Team will continue to work with the school to map the effective provision that exists and to promote it more widely.

- 5.5 *Consideration be given to adopting a more centralised approach to EAL training for teachers and Bracknell Forest schools be advised of the availability of EAL training opportunities and encouraged to prioritise such events.*

The EAL & Diversity team offer a range of central and school based training for school staff. Introductory courses are available for teachers who may be unfamiliar with supporting EAL pupils. Network meetings are also organised where there is a focus on developing the skills of newly appointed and established EAL coordinators.

Support plans have now been produced for schools in the Borough with relatively high EAL numbers. These include details of staff training and professional development that are discussed with each school and delivered 'in house' to all school staff.

Members of the EAL & Diversity team attend national training and liaise with other providers to ensure that training for Bracknell Forest schools is appropriate to their needs and reflects current good practice in this area. The work of the EAL & Diversity Team is fully aligned with that of the SCL School Improvement Team.

- 5.6 *The current provisions to cater for post-16 EAL students be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently accessible and effective to meet requirements and promote attainment.*

The Local Authority is undertaking a review of the provision for post-16 EAL students who require additional support. Major developments are planned related to 14-19 provision including the introduction of a new range of diplomas in all Bracknell Forest schools and Bracknell and Wokingham College. The needs of EAL students will be considered in planning future provision and in training programmes for staff. The work of the EAL & Diversity team will be expanded to cover post-16 students and an induction and support pack is already in production.

- 5.7 *Consideration be given to establishing a central co-ordinated EAL resource of foreign texts for all the Borough's schools to utilise as required.*

The EAL & Diversity Team, working with the School Library Service will provide advice, guidance and recommendations to schools on suitable texts and reading materials. The EAL Handbook produced by the team provides guidance to schools on developing their resources and further information is available on the

bfinclusion website. As the Bracknell Forest Learning Platform develops, further resources will be made available to schools. The Resource Centre based at the Bracknell Forest Education Centre holds a small stock of texts and this will be expanded to include a wider range of books in community languages.

- 5.8 *(h) Working Group Recommendation The possibility of linking pupils of a common language between schools be investigated to enhance friendship and support opportunities and ease introduction into new schools and communities.*

Plans are in place to strengthen the links between schools and between schools and their local communities. This is currently happening within the Sandhurst cluster of schools in partnership with the EAL & Diversity Team who provide support and act as a link to foster relationships.

The work of the Sandhurst cluster of schools will be reviewed and used to inform the development of further clusters, to be set up across Bracknell Forest.

- 5.9 *The school administration / registration process be strengthened, with application forms available in all community languages, to ensure that further ethnicity information, such as whether other languages are spoken, is sought in respect of pupils and that records follow them through the school system to enable accurate EAL and diversity data to be collected.*

The statutory School Admission Code does not allow for any questions to be included on the initial LA school admission form that may be perceived as potentially discriminatory. This would include the home language of the applicant. Schools can request this information on their registration forms. However, the SCL department will continue to collect information related to ethnicity where possible. Application forms can be translated into community languages where necessary.

The EAL & Diversity Team will continue to work closely with schools to ensure that staff are confident in acquiring relevant details from families and children so that these may be recorded on relevant databases and information systems.

- 5.10 *The use of the school census data for EAL planning be reviewed to see whether it could be usefully supplemented with other relevant data.*

The school census data is used to inform the EAL & Diversity Team's action plan as well as to prioritise support for schools. This data source is supplemented by information received from schools.

The Council's Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group monitors the ethnic make up of the Borough and information is shared with the EAL & Diversity Team in order to assist with planning. The key annual information available to this is the Schools Census and Department for Work and Pensions Registration data. The schools' pupil data set is the most up to date information available on the ethnic population in the Borough, the 2001 census date now being significantly out of date.

- 5.11 The capacity of the EAL & Diversity Team be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that it remains commensurate with the anticipated future increase in the number of EAL pupils and equipped to meet the associated challenges.

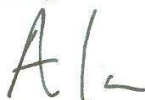
The Directory of Social Care and Learning will regularly review the capacity of the EAL & Diversity Team to continue to provide professional and dedicated support, matched to the number of EAL students in schools. The data related to the progress and attainment of all minority ethnic pupils, including those with English as an Additional Language, is also analysed to determine trends and plan future support.

Your letter also suggested that we consider holding an awards evening for EAL students. Whilst I agree that such an event would be beneficial in celebrating achievements we will need to be clear about the criteria that are used to identify the children and young people. I am happy to discuss this further with members of the EAL and Diversity team.

I will be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 19 March to present this response and to answer any questions that members may have.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Alan Kendall, consisting of the letters 'A' and 'K' in a stylized, cursive font.

Councillor Alan Kendall