

Choice and diversity: a policy paper for Education and Children's Services 2010



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1 Foreword by the Leader of the Council

Local government faces a period of profound change. The spending levels of recent years are unsustainable; in Richmond Council spending rose by 50%, allowing for inflation, since 1997. We have one of London's highest Council taxes. We intend to freeze tax in a recession. The easy option of asking hard-pressed people to pay more and more is over. Britain is broke. Yet, like other local authorities, we will be required by the Coalition Government to achieve savings of nearly 30% over the next few years. So, even if there were not a case for it, a comprehensive review of all services would be inescapable.

This administration supports what our Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, has called "a radical move to rebalance the relationship between people and their government". We must change the relationship between public bodies and local residents. Local people must be informed, engaged and, where possible, empowered to influence and direct the lives of their own communities. As well as consulting every household in the Borough on their local priorities in our All In One survey, we are trying new approaches to public involvement through conferences and working on local plans in partnership with residents. We will also publish a series of 'White Papers' on our policy visions to enable public understanding of, and involvement in, shaping our lives. National crisis always throws up major challenges. But it can be a source of strength if politicians and people stop shouting at each other and join to seek new, creative ways to achieve common ends. If we cannot do that here...then where can it be done?

It is right that the first White Paper is on our schools. We all owe much of what we are to our teachers. Good education never ends. In education, from parent to child and teacher to pupil, all that is good and beautiful in human nature, culture and experience is preserved and enhanced; all human creativity and inspiration is released; and the ancient bonds that draw us together and give us confidence as a community and a nation are shared and understood.

I salute the great profession of teaching and the outstanding work of most local schools. But more could be achieved. Standards in some places must be raised. Sixth form choice must come to this Borough. Schools should be at the heart of local communities. Unnecessary bureaucracy should be erased.

Education, nationally, faces enormous financial challenge and institutional change. We support the Coalition Government vision that schools should be independent of local authorities. We aim to make that a reality locally. We will also aim to work with other local authorities and partners so that the support for schools now offered by the Council is available in new, more efficient and responsive ways to those who want it. Change is coming to education in Britain – change we support. The focus of power will shift fast from Town Halls to schools. We want Richmond schools to be at the forefront of that change, helping to shape it. We should not let the future happen to us. We should work together and create a pattern that works for our children and communities.

CLLR NICHOLAS TRUE LEADER OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES COUNCIL

2 Introduction

On many measures, education in Richmond appears to be succeeding. Children's Services in Richmond upon Thames has been judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding'. Our secondary schools and Education and Children's Services have worked hard in recent years to achieve well recognised improvement. As a result the local authority's rank position for 5 A*-C grades in GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen to 25th place out of 151 local authorities nationally. Yet not all schools have achieved the same standard. Out of eight secondary schools (three of which are now academies), we still have only one that has been judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding'. It is reasonable to ask if, in a Borough of exceptional prosperity and high educational attainment, to be 25th with one outstanding school is good enough. We must aim to do better, and as a Council we must provide our improving schools the means to achieve this aim.

At primary level, Richmond upon Thames does even better. Indeed, it is ranked 1st nationally for Key Stage 1 results and also 1st nationally for Key Stage 2 results. However, we should not be complacent. Thirty six percent of our schools have been judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding'. We can still improve.

We are also facing severe pressure on primary school places due to changes in demographics, likely local development, and increased demand as the quality of our schools improve. This pressure will soon move up to our secondaries. We need a 10-year strategy to fill the gaps and anticipate future demand.

At post-16 level, we are one of the few authorities not to offer 6th form choice in our secondary schools, with the majority of students opting for their 6th form education outside of the Borough. This lack of local preference for 6th form provision needs attention. Furthermore, this is the only Borough in London which has no Roman Catholic secondary school. As a result, many outstanding pupils have to travel long distances out of the Borough for their chosen education.

The changes recommended in this White Paper are intended to continue the achievements and address the shortcomings set out above. Thus we propose:

- A 10-year strategy to provide adequate numbers of high quality primary places including the possibility of 'free school' status
- Increased numbers of high quality secondary places including Catholic secondary provision
- Creating sixth form provision on school sites
- Enhancing the freedom and diversity of schools through academy status for all schools on a planned and agreed path

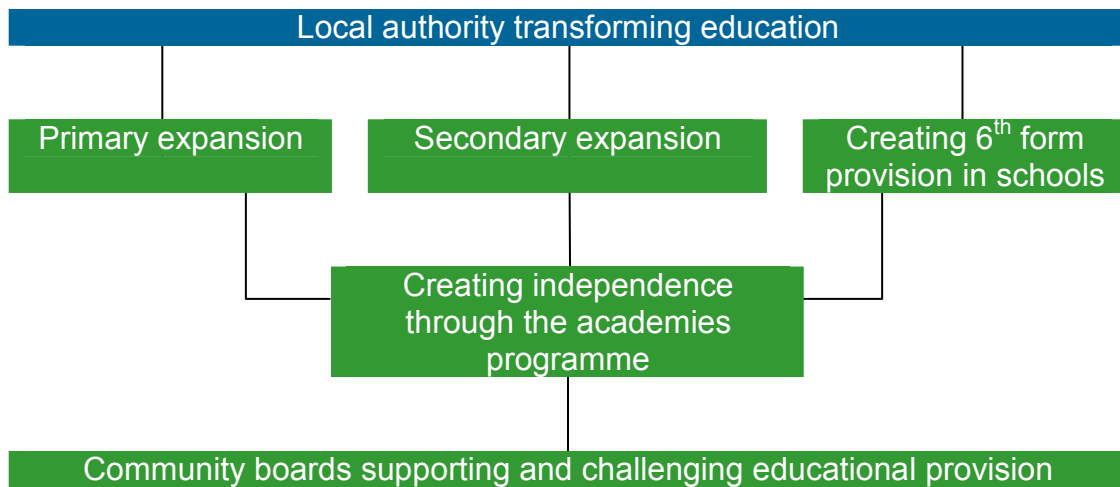
- Developing community engagement in education through the setting up of community boards to work with academies in local areas (the so-called 'quindrats')
- Moving from providing to commissioning high quality children's services

We are committed to driving forward with the proposed changes over the next three years. This model of educational change is detailed on page 6 and our pledge is outlined on page 13

3 A model for change

Our local education policy includes five key areas for change which are represented in the model for change outlined below. Local democracy and community engagement are driving forces in this change.

In brief, the policy involves expansion and broadening of provision in the primary, the secondary and the post-16 sectors. The model also positively embraces 'freeing' schools through the academies programme.



Local democracy overarches this model for educational change through the local authority's commitment to lead the process of change and build and support school independence and to promote choice and diversity.

Equally, local democracy underpins this model for educational change; we want academies to be locally created, locally supported and locally managed. We do not welcome the prospect of remotely managed schools, where chains of providers could replace local authorities and become equally inflexible and requiring of conformity. Community Boards will ensure local residents have a voice and can influence the educational offer in their community. We are committed to strengthening and structuring local voice to ensure it remains strong well into the future.

Each element of the model above is described in more detail in the following chapters.

4 Providing sufficient numbers of high quality primary places

Background and analysis

The local authority (LA) currently has: 40 primary schools (six infant, six junior and 28 all through primary). 25 of the forty are community schools, nine are Church of England and six Roman Catholic. We welcome faith schools. Policy is designed to maintain a balance of church and community provision to provide the greatest choice for parents.

There has been increased demand (for reception age places) for several years. This can be attributed to: significantly increased birth rates; more parents than ever before opting for the state sector as the primary schools' levels of achievement are so high; many small housing developments and conversions of large houses into flats (a policy the new administration is changing so housing provision and educational need are better balanced); and the economic downturn that has affected admissions patterns since the September 2009 intake.

The increase in births between 2001 and 2007 (25%) was sustained in 2008. It looks set to continue. Similar increases have occurred throughout Greater London, particularly in outer London and noticeably in all five of our neighbouring local authorities (Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow, Kingston, Surrey, and Wandsworth).

These figures lead to a prediction of shortfall of *at least* 300 pupil places by 2018. This figure is based purely on birth rates. If we also factor in possible substantial residential development on key sites in the Borough and continuing economic difficulties, the shortfall could become much greater. There is a clear case for increasing the number of places available in our schools.

Government and Council funding has allowed for the permanent expansions at five schools creating additional forms of entry and at the St John's Hospital site in the St Margaret's and Central & East Twickenham area. In addition, the LA has agreed with several schools a policy of a 'shared form of entry'. The strategy has already been implemented for 2009 and 2010 in three Roman Catholic schools. There is a further agreed shared form of entry within the Sheen area, and one may be agreed for the St Margaret's area.

Planning undertaken in the five quindrat areas has revealed pressure points for primary places in all five localities. Planned work for these is outlined in the background documents to this paper. Within the 10-year strategy all our plans will be reviewed on a two yearly basis to take account of any future growing need for additional primary places to those already considered.

We are committed to expansion in the primary sector and will develop additional shared forms of entry in selected schools and invest in future expansion work outlined in our background documents.

5 Providing sufficient numbers of high quality secondary places

Background and analysis

By 2014, we forecast that the current (2009 entry) capacity of 1,560 across the eight secondary schools and academies will not be enough to accommodate all in-borough children whose parents want places within them.

It has already been agreed that three schools which have become academies would increase in size with funding from the academies programme.

It has also been agreed that from 2010 entry onwards, Grey Court's admission number should be temporarily increased to 240 to deal with the pressure in that area and, as Teddington's rebuild is completed, that its admission number will be increased from 225 to 232. Christ's School would like to increase its intake by one form of entry if investment in adequate buildings were available.

Also, as primary places continue to rise, those cohorts will feed through from 2016 and 2017 to create Year 7 numbers well in excess of 1,600. It will therefore be necessary to give consideration to increasing the admission numbers in the secondary sector significantly. Some of this increase can be absorbed by the expansion of Christ's, Grey Court, Orleans Park and Waldegrave, but more capacity is still likely to be needed.

A combination of increased numbers of children baptised Roman Catholic in the borough and anecdotal evidence that local Roman Catholic parents find it increasingly difficult to obtain places for their children in out-borough state-maintained Catholic secondary schools means that the demand for an in-borough state-maintained/funded Catholic secondary school is likely to increase.

Also, with a possible rebalance of demand for post-16 provision, there may be a further requirement to develop buildings' capacity.

It has been anticipated that the equivalent of two secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic) will be needed by about 2015 to meet the demand for places. We are considering reconfiguration of current resources and provision in order to arrive at solutions to provide additional places, which could involve working in collaboration with schools, colleges and other local providers.

We are committed to the secondary expansion programme and will undertake feasibility for one, possibly two, additional secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic) in the borough.

Background and analysis

It is our ambition that school sixth forms be established within the borough to attract the very best teachers, sustain high standards and increase choice and diversity alongside the existing provider.

The five secondary schools and three academies in Richmond upon Thames currently have no post-16 provision. The previous government did not exploit the opportunity to help provide 6th form education when funding these Academies. We hope that the Coalition government may take a more positive position, especially in the context of a planned transfer of schools to Academy status. Local schools and academies have maintained a position that they would wish to move to 6th form choice together rather than individually. We will seek to facilitate that change.

In terms of buildings, the nature and size of the provision will determine cost. We will consider all options, including private funding, to ensure school buildings are 'fit for purpose' when delivering sixth form provision. As this is linked to school places, further funding around demographics may be required. We will work closely with central Government to agree funding streams to support this commitment in the hope that Richmond's united Academies could act as a beacon for encouraging schools in other authority areas. We will also seek active co-operation with the private sector to enable the provision of specialist subjects, where they might not otherwise be sustainable in schools.

Schools will also need to free up class space to take sixth form students. It is proposed to reduce the intake at each school to accommodate this. As the intake numbers decrease at existing secondary schools, additional places required for the incoming Year 7 students will be provided by a proposed increase from four to five forms of entry in an existing Richmond upon Thames secondary school (Christ's) and new school building projects (including one Roman Catholic) at two other Richmond upon Thames sites.

This will be a co-operative project, not a Council-imposed one. We intend to create a post-16 forum to consult on and propose the best way to create a network of sixth forms across the Borough. However, the Council's purpose is clear. This will not be a talking shop; it will be designed to agree practical routes to early and significant opening of 6th form choice, which we believe is in the interest of local schools and students alike. We will work with the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and central Government to assess resource needs.

We are committed to creating post-16 provision in all Richmond upon Thames secondary schools and will achieve this through a phased approach over the next two years and a reduction in the size of secondary school intakes to plan for this.

Background and analysis

As the Academies Act 2010 becomes embedded in practice, the Council will work closely with the government to provide clarity and support for our schools in moving through to academy status. The coalition government and the local administration are committed to this in order to:

- give schools the freedoms to enhance ongoing improvement;
- put decision making in the hands of front line services;
- increase local accountability;
- build on current excellence and make it sustainable in the long term.

The initial criteria for academy conversion outlined by the Department for Education (DfE) were: an outstanding Ofsted judgement; a healthy budget; and a commitment to partnership working with at least one other school. These criteria have now been 'relaxed' to include schools that are ranked as good with outstanding features and to include other schools, providing they work in partnership for improvement with a high-performing school.

The majority of Richmond upon Thames primary schools (36 out of 40) are graded as good or outstanding from their previous inspection. Almost all have healthy budgets and, through five local groupings, the so-called 'quindrat' model, all are involved in partnership working for school improvement. Therefore, the borough is in an ideal position to move our schools through to academy status. This is our intention.

We aim, working together with our schools, to support them converting to academy status over a three year period. One scenario could be that all secondary schools and some good/outstanding primary schools convert in the first year, with two further tranches of primary and special schools supported by the local authority to convert in the second and third years.

There is already an infrastructure through the quindrats for providing mutual support and taking on the role of running more local services. Many schools in the borough also have the expertise and capacity within their workforce to support others with school improvement initiatives. We will be working to help shape these structures to support our network of academies.

One of the challenges of meeting a commitment to convert all Richmond upon Thames schools to academies is that Foundation or Voluntary (VA) schools must first consult their Foundation and then gain consent of the Foundation Trustees before applying to convert. We hope that it may be agreed by the Department for Education and the Dioceses that these schools would work as clusters of Voluntary Aided schools (similar in status to academies) with one overarching Trust – i.e. the relevant Diocese.

We are committed to providing a structured approach to support all Richmond upon Thames schools to become academies over a three year period.

8 Developing Community Boards within the quindrats

Schools work best when they have the active support and engagement of parents and local communities. Schools should reflect the aspirations and ambitions of the best and most positive in those communities, in their ethos and in their high expectations of every child. The Council does not accept that any child is destined to be a 'low achiever'.

Schools should be focal points in communities, sharing facilities and providing outreach programmes, but also welcoming practical voluntary and business support. School communities should not have a 'drawbridge' mentality, closing their doors to others when the day or the term ends. Most of Richmond's schools provide outstanding examples by open days, fairs, making facilities open for public meetings and, in some cases, shared use of facilities. A school is strengthened by such community links.

However, there is scope to develop existing relationships and to expand and formalise processes amongst local parents, businesses and community groups.

We also believe that the governance rules of Academies should be reformed to enable models whereby the representatives of local communities (not local authorities) can have a more direct influence on the school. Handing over control to remote providers risks weakening links between management decisions and local communities. That, in turn, may lead to missed opportunity in generating the kind of community confidence that can transform schools. We are actively discussing such models with central Government.

Where governance does not allow for significant community involvement, we propose the creation of Community Boards. These would initially be enabled and promoted by the local authority in partnership with the emerging Academies. They would meet on a regular basis with each federation of schools in order to ensure that educational provision responds to local expectations and to promote community engagement with, and volunteering in, schools.

The challenge will be to ensure that Community Boards, as non-statutory bodies, are empowered to influence local educational policy. Each Community Board would:

- include membership from parents, local businesses, schools and community groups;
- meet three times a year with representatives of the federation of schools;
- consult widely on both educational and wider community needs;
- working with schools, seek to promote community support and volunteers to extend school activities available to pupils.

We are committed to developing Community Boards in order to involve, consult with and inform their residents; and to promote a culture of local democracy and community voice.

9 Moving from provision to commissioning

Local authority structures will also change. As schools transfer to Academy status, the nature of old-style Local Education Authorities will alter. Local Authorities will still have statutory functions, some of considerable importance and many potentially demanding in resource terms. But the case for direct provision of centralised services will be eroded. Cost pressures will mean that if local authorities do not innovate or work in partnership in a planned way, they will be forced to by financial necessity. Richmond believes that both school quality and community provision could be better sustained by cost-cutting and innovative change. We expect the old LEA will not exist by 2014.

Our plan is to move towards a commissioning model and to outsource Children's Services to new providers.

Currently, a number of alternatives are being explored which include:

- creation of a social enterprise (partnership) with teams from at least one other neighbouring authority to provide a wide range of children's services across two councils;
and
- the transfer of specific school support advisory staff into a separate joint pan London trading company to provide services to schools across a wider geographical area.

The benefits of these two recommended models of service delivery are:

- on-going savings to Richmond upon Thames Council;
- sustained services to local residents and schools.

The Council may choose to commission targeted and specialist services to ensure:

- high quality provision for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities;
- high priority to safeguarding young people;
- excellent value for money.

Schools and academies will be able to commission school improvement services to ensure:

- workforce development opportunities;
- high quality teaching and learning;
- continual academic achievement;
- excellent value for money.

We are committed to providing efficient and effective delivery of services and reducing service costs to the Council.

What we will have achieved by 2014:

- **The guarantee of a place at a high performing primary school for every Richmond upon Thames 5 year old**
- **The guarantee of a place at a high performing secondary school for every Richmond upon Thames 11 year old**
- **The guarantee that every 16 year old young person in Richmond upon Thames will be able to continue their education in school until they reach 18**
- **The guarantee that every Richmond upon Thames parent will be able to choose from a range of high quality educational provisions including academies and ‘free schools’**
- **The guarantee that every Richmond upon Thames resident will have a say in the education offer in their local area**
- **The guarantee that Council spending will be reduced and that Children’s Services will be cost efficient**

11 Background papers

Academies in Richmond upon Thames: delivering the new administration's vision for choice and diversity, Education, Children's and Cultural Services, September 2010.

Post-16 education in Richmond upon Thames: delivering the new administration's vision for choice and diversity, Education, Children's and Cultural Services, September 2010.

Primary school places in Richmond upon Thames: delivering the new administration's vision for choice and diversity, Education, Children's and Cultural Services, September 2010.

Community engagement with schools and academies: establishing Community Boards, Education, Children's and Cultural Services, September 2010.

Putting the new Administration's Policy into Practice: A discussion paper, Education, Children's and Cultural Services, September 2010.