

PLYMOUTH CAST NEWSLETTER – 24 January 2017

Dear Heads, Governors, Staff and Volunteers

In this newsletter, providing a regular update on developments across CAST, the focus will be on the:

1. Warning Letter dated 28 November 2016 from the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)
2. Background and Context for Receipt of the RSC Warning letter.
3. Plymouth CAST's Response to the OFSTED Inspection and the RSC Warning letter
4. Feedback from the Meeting with the RSC and Education Funding Agency (EFA) held on 20 January 2017
5. Feedback on OFSTED Inspections in January 2017
6. Thank you
7. Date of Next Newsletter: 8 February 2017

UPDATES

1. **Warning Letter dated 28 November 2016 from the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)**
I have received a number of queries regarding my comment that we had received a Warning Letter from the Regional Schools Commissionaire (RSC). I attach a copy of the letter but would like to put it into context below.
2. **Background and Context for Receipt of the RSC Warning letter.**
As you know, in October 2016 Ofsted carried out a focussed inspection of Plymouth CAST. The process started with the inspection of 9 CAST schools plus the re-inspection of 1 school where in June 2016 the safeguarding had been found to be ineffective. The results of these inspections were:
 - 3 Schools judged GOOD
 - 3 schools judged Requires Improvement
 - 3 schools judged Inadequate

The school re-inspected was judged to have effective safeguarding.

The following week Plymouth CAST Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) was inspected. There is no judgement on a MAT. Ofsted provided oral feedback on the 20 October 2016 and sent a letter to the Plymouth CAST MAT on 25 November 2016. The letter highlighted key weaknesses of Plymouth CAST summarised below:

1. The Trust is failing to provide effective challenge and support for school improvement.
2. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and directors of the Trust Board do not have a sufficient understanding of schools performance. Membership of the Trust has not led to higher standards of achievement in too many of its schools.
3. Some schools have seen a significant decline in their performance since they joined the Trust.
4. Trust leaders do not have the capacity to bring about improvement with the necessary urgency. They have been too slow to recognise and tackle weaknesses in the quality of

provision. They have not intervened quickly enough to secure or maintain the quality of teaching and leadership required for pupils to achieve well.

5. In 2015, overall pupil progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 was below average in two thirds of the primary schools in the Trust. Provisional results based on 2016 National tests show that 21 of the Trust's 32 primary schools did not achieve a positive progress measure for writing. Similarly, in mathematics, 23 of the Trust's primary schools do not achieve a positive progress score.
6. Trust leaders and board members do not have a clear strategy to tackle underachievement and disadvantaged pupils. They cannot account for the impact of the £2 million of additional funding which the trust received for these pupils in 2016.
7. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, vary too widely from school to school. These groups of pupils do not do well enough.
8. The Trust does not meet the statutory requirement to publish a scheme of delegation on its website and for all schools to have a copy of the scheme on their own websites.
9. The scheme of delegation is not fit for purpose. Lines of accountability within governance and leadership are blurred. It is unclear who is accountable for improving the performance of individual schools and the Trust as a whole.
10. Until very recently there was no overarching strategy monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures in the Trust's schools. Some schools have been too slow to comply with the trusts recently introduced safeguarding checks.

Ofsted then stated that it was their intention to inspect all of the other schools in the Trust before June 2017.

3. Plymouth CAST's Response to the OFSTED Inspection and the RSC Warning letter

The following actions have been taken in response to the oral feedback received from OFSTED on 20 October 2016:

1. The Chair of the Trust (Sir Brian Pearse) resigned and Sandy Alexander (the Vice Chair) was elected Chair by the Board Directors.
2. The CEO of the Trust (John Mannix) was put on special leave.
3. The structure of the board was changed to reflect Lord Nash's recommendation there should be no employees on a MAT Board of Directors. Three new Foundation Directors were appointed by the Bishop.
4. Two Interim Executive Officers were appointed :
 - Lisa Mannall who is responsible for teaching and learning activities; and
 - Kate Griffin who is responsible for all other areas of the Trust
5. All schools, due to be inspected between January and June 2017, had their safeguarding procedures reviewed and updated.
6. The websites of all schools in CAST were reviewed and updated.

7. A thorough review of Pupil Premium funding was undertaken to match actions with effectiveness.

In response to the RSC Warning Letter, on 16 December 2016 the Plymouth CAST Board approved and submitted our Action Plan to address the weaknesses identified by OFSTED. If the RSC considers the plan to be inadequate she has the option to exercise her intervention powers which could remove schools from Plymouth CAST.

4. Feedback from the Meeting with the RSC and Education Funding Agency (EFA) held on 20 January 2017

Board Directors and the Interim CEOs met with the RSC who expressed her satisfaction with the progress that has been made. The RSC was accompanied by a representative of the EFA who confirmed that the Pupil Premium money had been properly accounted for. The office of the RSC will continue to support and work with Plymouth CAST as we implement our Action Plan. Representatives of the RSC will be attending the next Plymouth CAST Board Meeting to be held on 6 February 2017.

5. Feedback on OFSTED Inspections in January 2017

OFSTED began the second phase of inspections in the second week of January 2017. Six schools have been inspected with oral feedback provided by OFSTED:

- 3 schools Good.
- 3 schools Requires Improvement (R.I.).

It should be noted that the oral feedback for the schools judged R.I. indicated the inspectors believed they were borderline good and there were no concerns regarding either safeguarding or governance.

6. Thank you

Thank you to everyone who is working hard to provide a safe supportive learning environment in which the children in our care can flourish and achieve.

7. Date of Next Newsletter: 7 February 2017

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandy Anderson'.

Sandy Anderson, Chair
For and on behalf of the CAST Board