

Press release for Ed Balls Minister for Education

Bedfordshire East Schools Trust (BEST)

BEST is an alliance of unique educational institutions committed to collegiate educational provision across our community. We will take collective responsibility for the success of all children in BEST schools. BEST will be a powerful voice and one local accountable organisation delivering a commonly designed curriculum from 2+ to 19. Our collective actions will show a widespread conviction that we mean business together.

The schools currently engaged in acquiring trust status are located in central Bedfordshire between the A1(M) and the A6. This is a rural area extending to approximately 250 square kilometers with a three tier model of lower, middle and one upper school - Samuel Whitbread Community College. Organised into three distinct geographical clusters the pyramid's schools as well as associated nursery and pre-schools deliver educational services to over seven thousand children and young people.

Whilst many of the schools in the pyramid have recently received 'outstanding' OfSTED reports, approximately 50% of pupils fail to achieve 5 A* to C grades at key stage 4 and fewer achieve this standard when including Mathematics and English. It is a classic 'coasting' situation which has been a problem for many years.

The schools have recognised that by working collaboratively within a mutual co-operative trust, they will be able to create a coherent 'all through' curriculum as well as a children and family services team which is multi skilled and able to support children and families throughout their time in BEST schools. The all through curriculum will be developed in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire, Caius College Cambridge, the Engineering Department Cambridge and Pearson Education, as well as Co-operative Group business partner. BEST is also working closely with the Co-operative College to develop the structure of co-operative multi school trusts and cross phase co-operation.

The co-operative model will enable schools to engage with and be responsive to the community as well as provide strategic direction. By working with other governmental departments such as the new Local Authority, Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust, East of England Development Agency and Building Schools for the Future (BSF), BEST will facilitate the co-location of services and accessibility for children, young people and families.

For too long, schools have been accountable to OfSTED and the Local Authority but not to the communities they serve. Having a mutual co-operative trust ensures that we have a democratic structure which serves, and is accountable to, our community.

The trust also has plans to develop a charitable trading arm to begin to develop a range of services to schools, such as recruitment, catering, grounds and buildings maintenance as well as bursary services such as budgeting, HR, personnel and eventually payroll. Other developments include cross phase data management, joint appointments and shared staffing where members of staff move through the phases with children to ease transition. Any surpluses made would be ploughed back into the Trust for its educational objectives.

Potentially there are twenty three schools that could join the trust and it is expected that schools will become full and associate members in waves. The first six schools are currently at statutory proposal stage with a further eight on the supported schools programme. Another six voluntary controlled/aided schools are preparing to become associate members.

The project is being managed by Ian F Kite who brings a wealth of experience both in education and project management. His recent experiences teaching in New Zealand have sharpened his view that, 'it is only with the support of families and the community that schools can deliver outstanding educational services and provide the learning culture children and teachers need to succeed'.

Adrian Rogers Headteacher at Robert Bloomfield Middle School

'Working in a Trust is an exciting innovation where we can have a structure which binds together a group of schools with a common purpose; to teach children to learn about themselves, their families, their communities and their future. 'Every Child Matters' is not intended for schools to deliver in splendid isolation; if every child does matter, then he or she should be given every opportunity to succeed and a group of schools working together with agencies who deliver joined up services to children, families and communities will be a powerful advocate for the success of each child'.

Chair of Governors at Derwent Lower School – Cathy Bailey

'Our declared intention is to work together for the good of children and their families as this is the only thing on which our trust should be focused. We have declared that we "mean business together" and we only want to work with partners who support this philosophy'.

Tim Ilett Chair of BEST Steering Group

'I think that BEST will enable the development of innovative strategies for the education of the young people in east Bedfordshire. There is no doubt in my mind that we are developing an atmosphere and culture of change and that through collaboration and sharing of best practice we will significantly improve the way young people are seen in the community and allow all of them to fulfill their potential.

Parent Sharon Kempson

'As our children progress within the system their personal situations, academic potential and overall progress will be properly transferred in a very personal and

protected way through the three stages that they will encounter. They will not be 'starting again' at each stage. Schools will be sharing their resources and strengths this will mean that pupils have greater access to a wider curriculum. I very much like the idea that BEST also intends to engage with local communities, parents and teachers'.

Student

'It was really great to go to the new students' evening and find teachers that I already knew there and Mr. Little who was our Head of Year in year 8 at Robert Bloomfield Middle School was also going to be our Head of Year at Samuel Whitbread in year 9'.

Local businessman Stewart Wilkes Director of Creative Edge Recruitment

'I am privileged to work with BEST as part of their centralised procurement team working on recruitment strategy. It is not only exciting to be involved in the project but also refreshing to work with an organisation that is truly forward thinking, with clear goals and a 'can do' attitude. It is good business for us but will also rationalise services, create a brand identity and also provide a career structure enabling staff to work across all phases and between schools – this is definitely a unique recruitment selling point for BEST schools'.

Novelli Academy Chef Steven Kitchen

'Once again thank you for meeting to outline the vision and proposed formula [BEST Catering Services] to roll out across the trust which I feel I can be of valuable assistance in developing. It is important that we can educate children's taste for food as much as their hunger for knowledge'.

Langford Lower School Headteacher – Chris Watson

'We are particularly looking forward to working with Novelli and Steven Kitchen to develop herb and vegetable gardens for children to grow, harvest and eat healthy meals designed and presented to restaurant standards. Our strategy to integrate school services like catering into the curriculum I think will motivate children to try new foods and show that all people on a school site are educationalists'.

Peter James – Parent Hitchmead School

'There is more than excellent teaching going on here, there is caring and understanding staff who are vastly experienced and who initiate a wonderful sense of humour on a daily basis! With this in mind I feel that Hitchmead's expertise of 'special education needs' and excellent management of 'behavioural problems' will enable the trust schools to move forward working hand in hand, for the benefit of all, which falls in line the Governments 'Children Come First' policy'.

Christine James – Parent/Governor Hitchmead School

'As a Governor of Hitchmead Outstanding MLD School, the biggest plus I feel the Trust Status would bring to us is that it would be enable us to work very closely with partners and the community as a whole.

Even though Hitchmead is already an Outstanding School, I feel that working with a range of partners will make Hitchmead Outstanding Plus and enable us to re-focus, re-think, and always keep the ball rolling offering vast choices, thereby opening up more opportunities for education to enable us to have a clear vision for each child right from starting at school to the work place. Trust Status will I believe offer Hitchmead more freedom to make the right decisions and re-focus on improvements by cementing all parties together to bring the best result.

We in turn can offer the reachable target of Zero Exclusion to the other partners within the Trust and our vast outreach knowledge. Quite simply if different groups/partners centralise their expertise, each putting their unique knowledge into the pot, all standards will be raised by offering choice, sustainability and best practice thereby enabling benefit to all'.

Heather Hill Headteacher Raynesford Lower School

'Looking at the schools who have expressed a wish, and others who hopefully will be involved in the future, I see a large amount of expertise. Many of them were given a good or outstanding rating by OFSTED at their most recent inspection. From this we know they are extremely effective organisations. The trust now gives the schools the chance, in the words of John West-Burnham, to move from 'bonding to bridging'.

This could mean shared leadership from heads and other senior members, subject knowledge particularly from upper and middle schools and pedagogy within the lower schools. In support of the Every Child Matters document, the creation of the BEST will have the well-being of the child at its heart, to raise standards through personalised learning, care and support, to build the school community and support parents.

The area which I particularly wish to lead is that of learner voice. I would like all students and young children to be involved in the design and delivery of the services of the trust. This has several elements, as pupils can provide unique perspectives on learning and teaching, the development of pupils as researchers and the involvement on the design and delivery of services. In order for this to happen it requires the attention and responses of adults to afford opportunities to actively shape their role as education decision makers. I look forward to making this a reality.

Ian F Kite Project Manager

'Developing a multi-school pyramid communications infrastructure opens a whole new dimension for education in the community. With a standardized dialing plan, VLE with community and home connectivity, learners will be able to access education programmes at their local school. In partnership with the local authority, DCSF and the Co-operative Group, BEST can facilitate the co-location of education,

health and other services (post office, banking, retail outlets) developing schools as local hubs for the regeneration of our rural communities’.

The Principal of Samuel Whitbread Community College – Rob Robson

‘At Samuel Whitbread, we are very much looking forward to the formation of the Trust in April. We believe that it will give us a framework by which we can work with other schools and our partners to provide a coherent public service which is wrapped around children and their families. We decided to work with the Co-operative Group because it clearly holds the same values as we do and we are sure that they will be active partners in our desire to ensure that what we do is at the centre of our community’.

Full details of what BEST is seeking to achieve can be found on the BESTWeb www.best-schools.org.uk

Campsmount Technology College and Community Partnership Trust

Campsmount Technology College is located north of Doncaster and serves the ex-mining communities of Askern, Campsall and Norton. The community has struggled to recover from the devastating impact of the closure of the pit, the dominant employer, in the '80s. This resulted in over 65% male unemployment at the time. Unemployment remains well above the national average, and the schools last OFSTED Report indicates other characteristics of deprivation, a higher than average proportion of students eligible for free school meals and higher than average proportion of students with special educational needs.

The inspection described the school as 'a good and improving school with some outstanding features'.

Campsmount Technology College and the Community Partnership Trust are clear about why they want to become a trust. Their vision is 'Raising aspirations, raising achievement'. The trust involves Doncaster College, the Co-operative College, North Doncaster Rural Trust and Leeds Metropolitan University and is devoted 'to raising community aspirations through valuing education and training, embedding a lifelong learning ethos and actively promoting regeneration in the community'.

Its consultation document states - 'the CCPT will be a co-operative trust that will establish long term and sustainable partnerships with a wide variety of other organisations. As a co-operative trust we will adopt the values and principles of the co-operative movement'.

The document states that the trust will 'provide a mechanism for all members of the community, especially parents and carers of the children and young people to have a voice in the development and management of the school. This will be achieved through their membership of a forum that will appoint trustees.'

Campsmount are now in the final legal consultation stages and are expected to become a co-operative trust later this year.

Headteacher Andy Sprakes commented... "Campsmount has improved significantly over the past few years and I see the establishment of a Co-operative Trust as the next progressive stage in our development. The Trust will ensure that the community, learners and other stakeholders have a key strategic role in the development of learning opportunities and service provision that will impact on educational standards and improve life chances across the community."

Sutherland Business and Enterprise College

Sutherland Business and Enterprise College in Telford is a small but growing secondary school, with just over 600 pupils. The school is in a challenging area,

with OFSTED describing it as 'having a higher than average proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, attainment on entry below average, and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties above the national average'.

The OFSTED Report described Sutherland as 'satisfactory and improving, and with a determination to eliminate weak teaching and provide professional development for school'.

In 2007 the school successfully applied to become a Specialist Business and Enterprise College, with Midcounties Co-operative Society as its main sponsor. It is now an active participant in the network of co-operative Business and Enterprise Colleges. Head Teacher Steve Wall is currently encouraging a cluster of at least eight schools, possibly more to become involved in a co-operative Trust, adding 'I am confident that the trust will enable us to embed the co-operative values driven approach that we have adopted. We see the trust as providing a method to improve on the way we work and improve the quality of life for our school, our community and its residents'.

Sutherland Business and Enterprise College, together with Sir Thomas Boughey Co-operative Business and Enterprise College in Staffordshire recently attended the Co-operative Party annual conference where Ed Balls made the announcement of support for Co-operative Trust Schools - interviewing participants and Ministers.

"Coop party Congress has been really Fun!" - Toby Hayward - Year 11 pupil.

"I was a bit worried at the start of the day when interviewing ministers.....but by the end of the day I couldn't wait to go into the conference room and grab the next one of stage! It made me far more confident and ready to face the adult world when I leave school next year" - Jaskarandeep Brar - Year 11 pupil.

"I've never been to London before....and to be right in the centre was very exciting...and so close to the Houses of Parliament. Meeting Mr Balls and presenting him with a school T-Shirt was the highlight of the day for me. He asked me what I was studying and what I wanted to be when I left school...meeting so many people who were interested in what we were doing made me feel active and involved in something that affects other peoples lives." - Victoria Handley - Year 11 Pupil

"Attending congress and actively involving themselves in the day helped our pupils develop self-confidence and build their capacity to make decisions and take responsibility. It has also helped give them a voice in the life of their school, in their communities and in society at large. As a result they have come back far more aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, more informed about the social and political world, more concerned about the welfare of others and more able to articulate their opinions and arguments. The whole experience has

improved their ability as citizens to make their own decisions and to take responsibility for their own lives and their communities." - Carl Ward - Director of Innovation & Development, Sutherland Co-operative Business & Enterprise College.

Reddish Vale Co-operative Trust

Reddish Vale Technology College is the first school in England to become a co-operative trust, with the Reddish Vale Co-operative Trust established in March 2008.

Reddish Vale is a large secondary school, with nearly 1400 learners. OFSTED describes it as serving an area of relative disadvantage, and like Campsmount, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and those with learning difficulties and disabilities is higher than the national average. Its most recent OFSTED Report in 2007 described the school as good with some aspects, such as provision for care, guidance and support outstanding.

The Reddish Vale consultation document emphasized its tradition of embracing innovation and change stating 'in 1995 we were one of the first schools to become a specialist school. We now want to become one of the first to become part of a co-operative trust'. It added, 'the co-operative trust will give us a stable platform on which to build partnerships and continue to develop to meet the changing needs of our local communities'.

Phil Arnold, Director of Schools Improvement, emphasized how the Trust was enabling the school to seize new opportunities:

"Working with our partners we are keen to pursue new capital funding to complement our BSF plans and seek ways to engage young people through social enterprise. The 'My Place' programme, for example, has offered young people hands on opportunities to develop and manage a youth co-operative. They have come together through membership of the trust to bid to deliver sport, leisure, information advice & guidance and a safe place to be in the heart of their community. Their bid "Our Space" has a co-operative enterprise – run by young people for young people - as its centrepiece".

In a meeting of young co-operators at the school these young pioneers were clear "if you want an exciting range of facilities and activities for young people get us fully involved in the design, management and delivery, that way you know it will continue to work".