

## SCHOOLS IN OXFORDSHIRE AND THE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Briefing Notes

#### What Does the Council Provide?

Ten years ago, the Conservative-run County enthusiastically worked with the then Coalition government at Westminster to hand over many of its schools to “academy chains”. At present the Local Authority only runs two of the secondary schools in the County, and, when private schools are taken into account, fewer than half of primary schools (139 out of 315). Of special schools only 6 out of 18 are run by the County.

The Green Party opposed these privatisations, and in the long term we want to see all children attending common schools and learning to get along with a wide range of people. We see this as essential to any idea of democracy. At present however we accept that we must make the best of the resources still in public hands.

We believe that the surviving County schools should develop good practice in preparing our children for the world that awaits them. They should be fully resourced in order to do so, and the local authority has to be robust in seeking such resources from the UK Treasury.

#### After the Pandemic

The Covid crisis has made it clear that schools have many roles in addition to formal learning. They are places where children learn social skills about “getting on with each other”; they have a general duty of care that often involves them working with other local welfare agencies. They are also impacted upon by wider social issues.

As vaccination allows social life to return to something like “normal”, many parents and carers will have concerns about sending their children back to school although they will also see the benefits that a successful return to be with friends can bring. It will be important that they are listened to by schools and not put under pressure to meet the expectations of central government.

Local authorities need to be prepared to stand up to pressure from Whitehall to proceed faster than they think wise. They must be clear that the goal of making schools places where children are happy and fulfilled takes precedence over re-imposing national assessment tests.

#### Inclusive Schools

Greens believe that schools should be places where children and young people feel welcomed, valued and safe, and where they are nourished in every aspect of their being. We believe that at all times the well-being and holistic development of the child has to be at the core of schools; they are or should be communities of learning before they are educational institutions.

For that reason we favour a policy of including as many pupils in mainstream school as possible. We do recognize that for some, school is not a nurturing place, and we believe that appropriate environments have to be created for such children to achieve and feel fulfilled.

Children are educated out of mainstream schools for many reasons. They may have difficulties in learning; they may be undergoing a personal and/or family crisis that impacts on their learning; they may have problems with their health, mental or physical. However, pressure on special school places

often means a long wait for a suitable school to be found, and/or for a number of pupils with additional needs to be placed out of county. In some cases they are educated at home with tutorial support. For some children these are long-term arrangements; for others a respite which enables them to re-enter mainstream schooling.

Green councillors will argue for the full resourcing of special schools to be fully recognised in assessing teacher workload. The same applies to the provision needed to keep children with difficulties in mainstream education, and for the work done with external agencies to achieve that aim.

#### Learning to be Good Citizens

The Green Party fully accepts the recommendations of the 1998 Crick Report on Citizenship Education, to which successive governments have tended to pay lip service. We fully accept its key notion that schools should encourage children from an early age to feel that they have a responsibility to those around them, and a right to be heard. We agree with Crick that schools should model the democratic values that they promote.

We want schools to encourage children to think about the environment we all share. We support learning about the science of ecological stability, and we also support teachers who introduce learners in an age-appropriate way to the moral questions posed by a transition to an ecologically balanced world. We will support and encourage schools to see their physical environment as a learning resource, through visits to nature reserves, working farms, projects such as school gardens, promotion of outdoor learning pedagogy, forest schools, etc.

We will encourage schools to help learners to understand about the buildings in which they are learning, and what is involved in making sure they are safe and environmentally sound. We want them to understand about the physical environment of their schools and how it can be nurtured and helped to flourish. We will support teachers in doing this and provide resources and training where needed.

#### Safely to School

We want to encourage and enable environmentally responsible and safe ways of children getting to and from school. We will encourage “walking trains” and “cycling convoys” and safety audits of routes. This may have implications for general traffic planning in the area, especially near the school buildings.

We will encourage schools to hold road safety events that encourage sensible and safe practice in walking and cycling.