

Notes of Discussion Evening 17 October 2016

Multi-Academy Trusts: Responsibility and Accountability
Andrew Yarrow, Regional Academy Director, Oasis Community Learning

Mr Yarrow gave a brief outline of the work of Oasis Community Learning, which was set up in 2004 with the express purpose of transforming learning, lives and communities through the development of the Oasis Academies.

The vision of Oasis Academies is to achieve Exceptional Education at the heart of community. As well as delivering first-class and innovative education, Oasis builds 'hubs' in the areas in which it works, creating safe and inspiring local neighbourhoods that provide integrated and diverse services to benefit the whole person and the whole community.

Oasis Community Learning seeks to create and sustain a network of excellent learning communities working in the context of the Oasis Ethos where every student can reach their full potential. Oasis believes this can be achieved through clear leadership, outstanding staff, a positive and affirming environment, strong partnerships between students, parents/carers and the local community, along with the wider national and international links.

Chairmen and Governors of any education institution are not, of course, necessarily educationalists. The strategic priorities are to raise the bar for all, develop further capacity and close the gap.

4.5% of the funding comes from the General Annual Grant, and further income from non-government sources, which Oasis is now trying to increase, especially through training, although it is not likely to yield vast amounts of money.

The Oasis Community Learning Board comprises a Group CEO, responsible for all Oasis' charities, a Chief Executive Officer, Regional Academy Directors and Academy Councillors, who ensure their ethos pertains. One of the problems is that if you haven't got enough capacity, you cannot move schools on.

Can one make everybody better (including Heads)? Oasis firmly believes that we can all learn from others, but that work is developmental and involves constantly pushing boundaries, although not in a coercive or threatening way. They organise annual, termly, half-termly meetings for all leaders, teachers and administrative staff, involving Key Performance Indicator analyses. Inclusion, especially of deprived or disadvantaged students, is extremely important.

Members of the Company discussed the wider picture, and the fact that education appeared to be moving towards a two-tier system. Academies have access to funding but some, especially Primary Schools, do not. Mr Yarrow felt that the reality was far from black and white, and stressed the importance of collaboration, especially partnership with others, which has been very successful in getting his institutions working better. Oasis schools work closely with other schools outside Oasis; often informally or, for example, the new Graduate School of Teaching.

Members of the Company enjoyed the discussion, which carried on long after the formal end of the proceedings.