

SESLIP AD Education Network

STRATEGIC EDUCATION SYSTEM WORKSHOP
SUMMARY OF WICKED ISSUES & NEXT STEPS



16TH JUNE 2023

Outline programme and aims

Aims:

Practical problem-solving of wicked issues currently facing us across the middle tier and lessons to learn.

Cross-cutting themes: accountabilities, co-production, legacy liabilities, safeguarding.

Shared principles across the South-east for the middle tier of education.

Outline Programme

10.30 am	Welcome & introductions
10.45 am	Each strategic body's working principles and three 'wicked issues'
11.00 am	Roundtable discussion about a wicked issue, through school scenarios (3 groups)
11.45 am	Short break
Midday	Roundtable discussion about a wicked issue (3 groups)
12.45 pm	Feedback summary from facilitators / reflections and take aways.
1.00 pm	Lunch
2.00 pm	Short meeting for AD Education Network



Wicked Issues 1: DfE Regions Office

- **Inflation:** High levels of inflation mean that the funding provided to public services is not buying as much as it once did. When combined with rising energy costs, it is becoming increasingly difficult for schools and other services to balance the books.
- **Small, Rural Schools:** For academy trusts, these schools often represent a high risk with regard to financial viability. We recognise that for LAs they are sometimes integral to the sufficiency of school places in a planning area and it can be costly in both the short and long-term to close them when the need arises. There is scope for partners (MATs, Diocese, LAs, DfE) to join up and plan the school landscape for the future more intelligently.
- **Affordable, Specialist Provision:** The newly published SEND AP Plan talks about provision that offers the *right support* in the *right place* at the *right time*. For too many of our young people this is not a reality. The costs incurred when sending a young person out of LA to independent provision can be crippling. More needs to be done to ensure we are prioritising our most vulnerable young people.



Wicked issues 2: Ofsted's perspective:

Persistent pandemic legacy – attendance; behaviour; serious knowledge gaps; wellbeing.

The 'middle tier' – scale; demographics; accountability that matches current responsibilities.

Mobilising a locality – how do we tackle tricky problems together as an area, including perennially underperforming schools?



Wicked Issues 3: SESLIP AD Education Network

- **School sustainability** and the management of this strategically. The pressures are currently strongest for the primary school sector and in rural areas.
- **Strategic partnerships:** Clearer working together between strategic partners (LAs; Ofsted; Regions Office) that provides consistent, timely, joined up intervention with schools with weaknesses;
- **Vision vs challenges:** Where the central vision and direction for schooling meets multiple challenges being faced by schools in the South-east:
 - Cost inflation and funding
 - Emerging sufficiency gaps (for example across early years and specialist provision)
 - Persistent post-covid disadvantage gaps
 - Recruitment and retention of school staff
 - Low morale and high pressure accountability systems



SESLIP AD Education Network

Summary of feedback from scenario discussions

- There is a need for flexibility within the current arrangements so 'middle tier' partners can discuss together and problem-solve knotty problems (disseminating what the sequencing of this can look like would be helpful too)
- Opportunities for system leaders to discuss together what is in the best interest of all CYP; structural changes can then follow. Acknowledge some large, national trusts are more reluctant to engage with discussing 'local best interests'.
- The importance of undertaking some horizon-scanning and scenario planning around certain schools / localities to inform discussions about future plans with school leadership & partners
- Reminder that LAs are politically-led, place-based organisations; sometimes effective change is about deflecting attention or generating positive 'noise' to counteract the negative.

Other points

- There is a place for big picture discussions: e.g. local accountabilities for education, moral purpose
- Retain a central focus on the best interests of children and young people.



SESLIP AD Education Network

Next steps

- DfE Regions: information to assist better communication and partnership:

 - Names of academies team members & areas they cover
 - Specialist focus of each region team (e.g. South-east = early years)

Future topics (consideration through scenarios where possible):

- Single academy trusts (SATs) – viability, quality of education, preparedness for the future
- Schools where there is no suitable sponsor / receiving MAT
- School improvement resource – parity between maintained & academies (latter have access to school improvement funds / days of support)
- School improvement - extra requirements for maintained HT to become NLE

Actions

- Chris to draft poll about pattern & location of meetings
- Poll about topics for future & ideas for involvement with dioceses & trust CEOs
- Offer to provide a briefing for SE Lead Members Network

