

Value for Money Statement

William Howard School (an Academy) Limited

Company number: 07698631

Year ended 31 August 2014

I accept that as accounting officer of William Howard School (an Academy) Limited, I am responsible and accountable for ensuring that the academy trust delivers good value in the use of public resources.

I am aware of the guide to academy trust value for money statements published by the Education Funding Agency and understand that value for money refers to achieving the best possible educational and wider societal outcomes through the economic, efficient and effective use of all the resources in the trust's charge.

I set out below how I have ensured that the academy trust's use of its resources has provided good value for money during the academic year.

Context

William Howard School is a large and successful mixed 11-18 academy serving the semi-rural community of Brampton and surrounding area.

Educational outcomes

In 2012 Ofsted judged William Howard School to be Good, with Outstanding Achievement.

Key achievements during the year to 31 August 2014 are detailed in our Annual Report which I would encourage parents to read. There are many positive indicators. The report concludes that the trust now assesses achievement to be Outstanding at Key Stage 5. Key Stage 4 achievement has dipped slightly, however it will be our priority to address these underperformances over the coming weeks and months. We will be equipped to determine whether our own self-evaluation for Key Stage 4 achievement remains at Outstanding for when RAISE online is published in December.

Focus on individual pupils

Strong provision is supported by highly effective vocational pathways, all underpinned by an outstanding student support structure which enables the trust to manage the differing needs of pupils. Students with special and particular needs enjoy an exceptional standard of provision and care to ensure that they have the same degree of opportunity as other students, including one to one support where appropriate. By contrast we are able to challenge those students that require more stretch.

Maximising progress and fulfilling potential are the key foci throughout the school irrespective of the students' starting points.

Improving educational outcomes and quantifying improvements

A range of action was taken in the year to 31 August 2014 to further improve the quality of teaching, as set out in the Annual Report. An example of this is our programme of lesson observations. 83% of formally observed lessons were rated good or better, representing a 3% increase on the previous year's observation data. Additionally, termly teaching and learning profiles have been submitted by curriculum leaders and as a result outstanding practitioners have been deployed strategically to support teachers with classroom practice across the school.

The Personnel Committee regularly reviews the staffing structure to ensure that staff are deployed as efficiently as possible to support an improved curriculum, and to target areas of the curriculum in need of development.

Collaboration

The school plays a key role in the RLA (Rural Learning Alliance), CASL (Cumbria Alliance of System Leaders) and CSLC (Carlisle Secondary Learning Consortium), supporting and collaborating with many other schools in the county and beyond. The school has supported other schools through teaching and learning and leadership programmes and works closely with local primary schools in a number of areas, including curriculum development to ensure a smooth transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.

The school is also preparing to play a lead role as part of a multi-academy trust from September 2015, and is currently sharing delivery and good practice with schools that are to become part of the trust. In time, this will enable us to drive up standards for least cost.

New initiatives

The academy trust has introduced a range of new courses including Travel and Tourism and BTEC Construction, and is able to introduce these whilst living within its means.

New systems of monitoring of teaching and learning were successfully adopted and are under review to further improve impact at all levels of leadership, leading to a much greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, enabling a teaching and learning profile across all areas of school to be established. New systems of performance management/appraisal were also developed providing a much more robust approach to an important area of school management.

Financial governance and oversight

The finance committee receives regular management accounts throughout the year and reviews the budget as it is developed. The committee also reviews the annual accounts and receives the external auditor's report. The full board of trustees approves the budget each year and is mindful of the need to balance expenditure against income to ensure the academy trust remains a going concern.

Better purchasing – ensuring value for money

Contracts and services are regularly appraised and renegotiated in a timely manner to ensure value for money.

Three year contracts are now used to ensure reduced cost where this benefits the academy trust (e.g. energy contracts, aspects of network maintenance). The energy costs reported in our financial statements to 31 August 2014 were £106k, £19k lower than in the prior year.

Options appraisals are carried out before purchases are made, including assessing the costs and benefits of alternatives over the longer term. A range of quotes is obtained for all major purchases so that the trust knows it is getting a good deal.

In 2014/15 the trust will further explore opportunities for cost savings through greater use of procurement framework agreements. The trust will also start looking at opportunities that arise from being part of a multi-academy trust, and expects to be able to obtain economies of scale.

Benchmarking

The trust benchmarks its costs against those of similar organisations to identify areas where savings can be made. In 2013/14, individual areas were benchmarked on an ad-hoc basis through relationships with other schools and academies and the academies FD forum network. In 2014/15 the trust will plan to carry out a more comprehensive benchmarking review.

Maximising income generation

The academy trust regularly explores different areas of grant funding. Academy Capital Maintenance Funding was received in 2013/14 which enabled repairs and maintenance to be carried out in areas of the estate. The trust will shortly be submitting a bid to the new Condition Improvement Fund.

The academy regularly explores opportunities to generate income through the letting of facilities to the local community and the provision of support services to local schools. The WHS Fitness and Wellbeing Centre is well-established and provides a community gym facility and sports facilities which are used extensively by local sporting clubs. The academy trust seeks to strengthen links with local primary schools (both feeder and non-feeder) through the provision of support services, for example PE support, music lessons, CPD, finance and payroll services.

Reviewing controls and managing risks

The academy trust operates a robust budget setting process which helps prevent waste by ensuring that budgets are sufficient but not excessive. Monthly budget monitoring reports are produced and reviewed by budget holders and any necessary remedial action is taken to address any significant variances that may have an impact on the budget outturn.

The academy trust ensures that all surplus cash balances are invested in interest bearing accounts to increase the level of interest earned. Work will continue in 2014/15 to improve cash flow forecasting and identify alternative accounts in order to maximise opportunities for income generation.

The trustees have determined that an appropriate, but not excessive, level of free reserves should be maintained. The reason for this is to provide sufficient working capital to cover delays between spending and receipt of grants and to provide a cushion to deal with unexpected emergencies such as urgent maintenance and to plan for future capital projects as well as fluctuations in student numbers from year to year. The level of reserves held at 31 August 2014 equates to nearly 2% of annual income.

Signed


Lorraine Hughes

Academy Trust Accounting Officer

Date: 11.12.14