

Social Impact of Population Change in Boston Task and Finish Group
Notes of Evidence-Gathering Meeting of 26th April 2012 (6.30 pm)

Present:

Councillors Paul Kenny (Chairman), Paul Gleeson (Vice-Chairman), Richard Leggott, Paul Mould and Judith Skinner [*Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Richard Austin, Mike Gilbert (Portfolio Holder) and Dr Samra*]

Observing: Councillor Brian Rush

Officer: Janette Collier

Witnesses giving evidence:

Boston College: Amanda Mosek (Principal)

Hawthorn Tree Primary School: Martin Lister (Headteacher)

Park Primary School: Carol Clare (Principal), Bridget McPherson (Vice-Principal)

Witham School Federation: Adrian Reed (Headteacher, Haven High Technology College)

Questions from members of the public:

How would you say schools are managing to cope with the sudden influx of non-English speaking children and how does their arrival affect what goes on in the class room?

At Park School it was not sudden; it has been five years since the children of new arrival families started at the school. It was very difficult to start with, but the teachers sharpened their practices and made the provision needed by employing two members of staff who teach English as a second language in separate classes as required.

Do schools get any sort of financial help when they accept migrant children in to their schools?

It began 5-6 years ago and this was raised with Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) immediately. We also spoke with groups of headteachers around the country about their experience. LCC began paying schools additional funding in 2007/08 and each year since. For every child new to a school without English the school receives an additional £1,000 and this continues for two years. From 2007/08 to 2011/12, being five years, Boston schools have received an extra £1.19m and it has been used to very good effect.

At present what percentage of your school is migrant and what is the highest percentage you would feel happy to accept?

At Park School, 62% of the children are from migrant families. The school is 100% happy, but it has no choice; there are strict admissions criteria and schools accept any child who meets those criteria.

But local children are not getting places....

At the present time, the pressure on places is in the very earliest years, i.e. reception and nursery, and many of the children were born in Boston. There are strict Government admissions criteria that have no relation to funding. The first preference is a child who has a statement of special educational need or is in care; the second, a child who has an older sibling already at the school; and the third, the distance of the school from home.

Are there any plans to extend any existing schools in the area or to even build a further school to cope with the sudden impact on the population of Boston by migrants?

LCC convened a meeting of primary headteachers recently; it is LCC's responsibility to ensure there are sufficient places. Since then, the primary schools have extended their intake to meet demand; Boston West and Hawthorn Tree increased from 40 to 60 children.

What are the benefits if any of having children who cannot speak English in your school and what are the bad points of this?

There are many benefits; it has opened up the world to the Boston children. They readily accept the new arrivals and enjoy finding out about their culture and vice versa. The same goes for the staff. And there has been a positive effect in terms of attainment. The staff use various strategies to help new arrivals mix with the others, for example splitting them up and emphasising that English is the language to speak at school, which they do, even in the playground.

In relation to the effect on indigenous children, when children of different nationalities started at the schools five years ago, the schools had to really 'skill-up' their staff in order to meet the needs of all individual children; therefore, all the children have benefited from good and outstanding teaching. One of the primary schools is the highest performing school in Boston and Lincolnshire and is 12th in the country – the high performance of Boston children should be celebrated. No one-to-one support is given to non-English speaking children, even at the start; they were thrown in at the deep end.

It is not so much an issue in primary schools; children pick up the language very quickly. It is an issue when a child comes to secondary school, e.g. at age 14, and has no English, yet the school is still expected to ensure they pass exams at 16; funding is needed to teach them one-to-one and to ensure they do not distract staff from the indigenous children.

There are over 60% non-indigenous children at one school so other children have to be bussed out to other schools; this could be better addressed. Do migrant children want to stay together and are they reluctant to learn the language?

'Migrant' is a misnomer; this is not a homogenous group. When the Portuguese first came the parents said their community is as diverse as others; they are all different. Many of the children are very keen to learn English and have tutors at home and are

doing well. Many are bi-lingual or multi-lingual. It can take a while but they soak it up.

We have a lot of schools in this country that are still classed as Christian schools, i.e. C of E or catholic. What religion are the majority of Migrant children and do you have children of the Muslim faith and if so does this create any problems?

We don't tend to track children in terms of religion. We have a Buddist, but the children are predominantly Christian, some of whom are Roman Catholic. We hold assemblies and worship; children can be withdrawn from these by parents but none have been and there have been no problems.

How many migrant children are there on roll at Hawthorn Tree Primary School and what is the percentage and is this the reason for the extensive development of the school?

The term to use is 'ethnicity'. At Hawthorn Tree 9.3% of the children are of non-white/English ethnicity, i.e. 27 children of which 6 are Asian, Bangladeshi, Mixed Race and Indian and 21 are white European.

So what triggered the massive expansion?

Two years ago LCC approached Hawthorn Tree and Boston West schools in response to a range of indices including GP numbers. In 2012, it is currently estimated that the number of new Primary Schools required across England is 2000.

The immigrant population is expanding rather than the indigenous population; so that must mean it costs a lot more money?

LCC is very proactive and uses statistics regarding births to inform five-year planning for schools. It is not the case that "most children are migrants" in our schools. The makeup of the schools is always changing. Applications for secondary schools are made weekly and the growth at Haven High has seen the number of children increase from 500 to 900 and only 50% of that growth was due to migrants.

What was the additional funding paid to schools?

The schools received £1.19m additional funding from LCC. This did not come from the education budget; its source is not known.

Do the admissions criteria make it easier for children of different ethnicity to get in to the schools?

No, it is less easy, for example there has not been one case of a migrant child with a statement of special educational needs, because of the difficulty of identification and diagnosis.

Questions from Sarah Dawson:

Career Advice - do current educational pathways encourage young people's interest and progression into a career in agriculture? What do careers advisers / teachers / parents want and need to be persuaded that agriculture is the place for them? Would agricultural ambassadors coming into school help inspire and motivate the next generation for a career in agriculture?

We have lots of information and advisors who can adequately answer students' questions, but there are not huge numbers of young people interested. Boston College does not offer courses in agriculture; students would be referred to Riseholme College, Lincoln.

Changes to Connexions are likely to impact on the ability to schools to ensure all students receive adequate careers advice. There is not a huge amount of interest in agriculture, but you could come into the schools to talk to the children about the benefits of the industry.

Employability Skills - how can we get the education system to prepare young people more efficiently for world of work – how much scope is there for forming strong links between business and schools? What are your thoughts on developing a new standard for schools that allows them to achieve 'employability status' allowing schools to engage with business, e.g. approach to image / knowledge of what the industry has to offer / how you persuade children to get interested.

Job vacancies in agriculture are not open to students. For example, I checked for apprenticeship vacancies today and there were none. Boston College holds careers events to get people along, but it is difficult to get anyone from agriculture to come and talk to students.

Apprenticeships: how do we encourage learners taking an apprenticeship to have necessary basic skills – is there a need for pre apprenticeship training programmes? How much awareness is there amongst learners about apprenticeship schemes within agriculture and horticulture?

I was talking to the regional director for apprenticeships today and asked him; many children are involved in agriculture but they have had to knock on doors to get it when it should be the other way around. We have 9 apprenticeships with good support. It is the employers who have to become engaged. The industry is beholden to liaise. There is a whole range promoted by Government. We would snap your hands off.

Work Experience - what can be done to assist young people in obtaining genuine workplace experience? What more can the farming industry do to encourage people to take an interest and get experience? What arrangements are in place currently between schools and the farming industry to increase uptake for work experience? There is a suite of ways of getting engaged – what do you think of ambassadors?

Children need impartial advice and guidance; we welcome any way of promoting opportunities for young people.

With respect to post-16 provision, I have interviewed over 80 young people from secondary schools. I look at the courses they want to do and their career aspirations and not one is interested in agriculture. You have got a real job in promoting it.

I take that on board, but schools are academically driven and it is about “academic excellence” versus the hard work ethic; there is an imbalance which is seriously systemic.

But what I have been talking about is the perception of young people. Our doors are always open; the agricultural industry needs to look at this.

Boston College offers a part-time job scheme for students; some are interested in part-time work in the fields but none of them have been able to get any.

In secondary schools, children are less and less driven towards academic courses and university, because they do not want the huge debt it incurs. They are crying out for other routes; this is an opportunity to be grasped.

The school curriculum: how best can we work together to reflect agriculture as an industry of the future rather than a career of last resort? What more can be done to improve the co-ordination between schools and local businesses and are there other partnerships that have been successful in other industries which we could learn from? There is a real need for a co-ordinated approach – what can be done to improve it, e.g. placements, student credits in the industry? There is a lot of good stuff done at primary level relating to food etc, but it is cut off at secondary schools.

We would snap your hands off! Have a team of young people as ambassadors and come in and talk to students and offer work experience.

You are not correct in saying that nothing is offered at secondary schools relating to food; healthy eating schemes etc are also part of the statutory curriculum in secondary schools. Other organisations have teams who visit the schools, e.g. the forces, health service etc, and they are always welcome. Get a team together. You need to break the stereotype that young people have.

Questions to Sarah Dawson

You talk about apprenticeships, yet most work goes through agencies and gangmasters?

There is a 50/50 split between permanent and seasonal work. Apprenticeships are a way of engaging school leavers with all types of industry. However, with the farming industry, they need preparing. Industries could do more about improving the ability and demand for apprenticeships and they could do more in schools too.

Apprenticeships are about bringing young people into the industry, for example there are roles in mechanics and engineering, and introducing school leavers into a role where they learn about it and decide on a career.

I'm aware of some businesses within the protected horticulture industry in Yorkshire has taken on apprenticeships in a big way. Modern industry is very technical compared to 5-10 years ago; it is often specialist now and young people can't be thrown into it from school. I know of one particular company who have seen over 60 horticultural apprenticeships through business and retention within the industry is very high. I accept that other parts of the industry are not so proactive. Seasonality is the biggest barrier to apprenticeships in some cases. Apprenticeships can lead to satisfaction, a job, higher wages; they take on a great deal of knowledge and it is a very positive way forward.

How have you managed to make the industry so attractive to migrant workers?

From many employers I've spoken to about this they already have the ethic of the industry; they do not see it as demeaning and are very much encouraged within their own countries and economies so they have a very positive viewpoint before arriving in this country. I accept the need to improve the industry's image, definitely; but society is continually driving academic excellence, where does this leave unachievers?

The agri-food industry is growing. There was a 2.1% increase last year in full-time employment within the agriculture; a 4.5% increase in part-time employment and there was a 3.2% increase across the country.

Where do you advertise jobs?

We advertise in the local job centre and predominantly in the two local newspapers though they put ads on notice boards too. A one-stop shop point of reference is needed locally. We need to ensure we've got seasonal / low skill work but also show that there is progression and a career from that to encouraging through businesses locally. It is frustrating. There is a wealth of knowledge and ability for the work to be done locally; a more co-ordinated approach is the way forward.

Questions to witnesses resumed

Farming machinery needs quite highly skilled operation – are careers staff able to explain this? Are young people encouraged to consider the 'pack-house' scenario?

Boston College uses the information provided by industry; it is usually web-based. If business studies students can't go straight into the industry as managers they would have to start at the bottom and they are not keen to. We get nothing in terms of information. What about open days?

It would help if the industry offered work experience and part-time job opportunities; students would be very keen and it could help encourage them into what appears to them to be a 'closed house'.

Questions from Members

I have asked a number of local young people why they do not go into local food and food processing industries and they tell me it is twofold; familiarity and reputation.

What are you doing or what should be done to improve the reputation of local work in these industries and what opportunities are there for work placements from your school or college?

We would welcome the industry to come along, talk to students, attend open days; we would be thrilled.

With respect to under-16s, there are very clear guidelines regarding where you can place a young people for work experience, e.g. Year 10 must not be placed where there is a high rate of mechanism. Also, the Government is going to remove statutory work experience for under-16s.

There are many career opportunities associated with our local food and farming industries. Do you offer qualifications which would be of value in these industries and if so which ones?

Riseholme College, Lincoln offers agriculture courses. Boston College does offer some courses that would potentially be helpful in leading to a career in agriculture or associated industries e.g. a motor vehicle course.

Young people are identified as unwilling to work having perhaps unrealistic expectations; is this your experience of them?

We find very few out of hundreds; they are desperate to work, but they need jobs to go to. The Government was encouraging 50% of young people to go on to university, which was unrealistic. We have to investigate to ensure young people are not 'NEET', i.e. not in education, employment or training. If they are unsure what to do they go on in education because there are no job opportunities. Young people are desperately keen to do apprenticeships, but employers have to offer these. The Government grants of £1,500 for eligible employers to offer young people employment through the apprenticeship programme should encourage them to come forward.

Would a local careers fayre in say May be of any use in getting young people into local employment?

This is a very good idea, but May is a bad time because of exams. National Careers Week would be better (*held this year 5th - 9th March*).

How many students are there in total attending your college? What is the breakdown of nationalities? What is the gender mix?

Boston College has 8,802 students of whom around 2,000 are full-time. There are 76 nationalities, from Russian to Welsh, and 79% are English. The gender ratio is 49% male; 51% female.

How many students do you have involved in "English as a second language" courses? Are your courses for "English as a second language" oversubscribed? Have you had problems funding "English as a second language" courses?

There are 1740 full-time students aged 16-18. Courses for speakers of other languages are oversubscribed. There have been no problems funding the courses, but some students have to contribute. The college also runs courses in English and maths which are open to anybody; most people on the courses are English.

What with targets, SATs tests etc, schools have all gone down the academic route; have they gone away from the practicalities?

If you write to your MP about schools' year-on-year targets, competing etc, I would sign it! Not all young people are academic and schools need a broad, balanced curriculum and a range of courses, after which we look to local employers to take them to the next stage.

Are your results based purely on qualifications?

Yes and no. There are benchmarks for all schools, i.e. 5 GCSEs including English and maths plus any other 3. For primary schools the benchmarks are for English and maths.

How many staff do you employ? What is the breakdown of nationalities? Do you have any issues with recruiting staff who are from European cultures?

There are 520 members of staff at Boston College of whom 440 are white British; 20 are from black minority groups; and 4 are 'white other'. We make active efforts to try and recruit from as many nationalities as possible to reflect the makeup of the students.

What multi-cultural/integration work do you do within the college? What kind of events have you done? What events have you got planned for the future?

We have done masses of work. We have six strategic priorities. One is equality and diversity; everyone at Boston College has training and it is embedded in the curriculum. We have to secure social cohesion. Examples of events are the "Speak Up, Speak Out" event at the Holocaust Centre, Newark at which a lady who had been in Auschwitz spoke to the students. Another is the big event coming up in May at the Princess Royal Sports Arena.

With your overseas students who live on campus or within the town do you have any tensions that they have reported to you?

Generally, no; they tend to stay together. There was one incident when an international student was attacked by four English youths. Also, we were told about bullying of foreign students on the buses, which we stamped out.

What things can Boston College do to improve social integration within Boston?

We think it is key. There is languages support, the Hate Crime Awareness and the student union 'I am Me' initiatives. There is monitoring of relevant data and training in equality and diversity. There is an equality and diversity group which meets regularly with external representatives on it and they all work together to make improvements. Boston College is also on the Tension Monitoring Group and has its own community cohesion strategy, though this is not a mandatory requirement for colleges.

Do you find that your courses for building work such as plumbing are oversubscribed? Are they mainly taken up by locally born students? Is there a need to develop more of these courses?

The construction courses are not oversubscribed; students are predominately English.

Due to the large number of people who have moved to Boston in the last ten years, has this had a financial impact on Boston College? What has the down side been to your college? What have the benefits been to your college?

It has had a positive financial impact on Boston College. There are nearly 1,000 non-English students. Generally, no-one has said anything negative about them; they are hard workers who regard their education as a privilege. They can access any help, e.g. careers services, which more use. It has helped improve the work ethic of the English students; there are no negatives.

How many pupils are there in total attending your school? What is the gender mix?

Park School: 147 male; 118 female
Hawthorn Tree: 49% male; 51% female
Haven High: 52% male; 48% female

Could you tell us how successful your school has been with its exam results? Which are you strong subjects and are there any that need improving? How has that changed over the last 10 years?

At Park School, the SATs 2011 results were 85% in English and 91% in maths, with a combined result of 85%. Park School came top in Lincolnshire with one of the other Boston schools.

At Hawthorn Tree, the results were 74% combined English and maths; 76% in English and 79% in maths.

At the other two primary schools, the result was 81% for one. The result for the other was 84% in 2011 after coming back from 62% in 2010 and 48% in 2009 at which time it was in an Ofsted category.

The secondary school result was 53% achieving 5 A-stars in English and maths.

Are things improving?

The arrival of non-English speaking children has made us raise our game; it has quite clearly not had a negative effect. The results success is down to leadership, management and the quality of teaching.

What multi-cultural/integration work do you do within your school? What kind of events have you done? What events have you got planned for the future? How does your school engage with the parents? What kind of activities do you offer to the parents? Do you offer any support to parents who might require help to improve their own education?

At Park School, this has been very successful in breaking down barriers. At the age of 3-4 years, children immediately learn about other cultures through the International Primary Curriculum; learning that people are different but equal and this has a major impact on the school's ability to cater for integration of children from other nationalities. It is very skills-based and children develop early learning skills almost seamlessly. Parents are being integrated too, with involvement on the governing bodies, fund-raising and adult learning classes. There were tensions in the early days, but they are extremely rare now. Internationalism is embedded at the school.

At Haven High there is a range of different activities open to all of the children and parents; children need to understand differences. The school has very experienced and well-qualified staff.

It is very similar at Hawthorn Tree. There is induction for parents of children new to the school. 'Personal Histories' was a joint project with Boston Borough Council, local schools and higher education, which celebrated music, culture and art across different countries and generations. This was to support community cohesion in Boston.

Do you have any social tensions within your school? Could you give examples of things that create tension in your school? Have you got some examples of good practice in dealing with these tensions?

This is very rare at Park School. There were tensions with parents initially, five years ago, but it is very rare now. There was only one incident reported to the local authority relating to racism in the last academic year and there has been none this year. The school tries to 'myth-bust' as much as possible, for example by explaining that the school has no control over admissions.

At Haven High children are working and mixing together and tensions have virtually disappeared. Staff are required to log incidents and racial incidents are down virtually to nothing.

Staff are fastidious in recording incidents and there have been very few incidents at Hawthorn Tree and they are usually down to parental attitudes.

We need to speak to the Local Authority (LA) about developing more places in primary schools – is there anything else that can be done to enhance the school service?

Yes – schools receive substantial funds and they are used without disadvantaging British children. However, there is a trigger factor to the funding, which is that there needs to be 15 or more non-English speaking children at a school, or they need to be 5% of the total number of children. As smaller schools expand, they won't activate that trigger even though there can be as much of an impact. Therefore, the trigger should be removed so that schools can still get additional funding.

Is a further school needed to absorb migrant children?

Yes and the Government is keen to see a range of schools, for example free schools. The current pressure is on the primary schools. Haven High is full due to changing attitudes; there are a lot of secondary schools that aren't full.

A new school is needed in the centre of the town. Park School has applied to build a new one in 2013 and will hear whether this is successful by the end of July.

If not?

It is for the Local Authority (LA, formerly the Local Education Authority or LEA) to ensure there are sufficient school places for children.

Children are having to go on buses and taxis from town to school in Butterwick!

Yes, that is our argument – it is a disgrace. We need to ensure the LA meets its responsibility of meeting children's needs.

Is there a temporary fix, e.g. using portacabins?

They are subject to the LA's submissions scheme. Park School has just got two. Schools are tied by the LA with respect to the PAN (the pupil admissions number), which the LA sets. For there to be more places in local schools the LA has to be lobbied.

The Task and Finish Group is meeting with local politicians from the County Council and other District Councils on 30th May – are there any other issues the group should raise?

Boston College is expanding and is fine. It would support a free school, though the LA still controls the PAN. Hawthorn Tree needs to get additional funding from the LA quickly as the necessary 'trigger' has not been activated, though that is not down to non-English speaking children; there is a range of reasons.

The LA needs to make some quick decisions; I will ask the Leader of the Council to write to the County Council Leader regarding our concerns.

The LA will tell you that their hands are tied by Government.

Mark Simmonds MP will be meeting with the Task and Finish Group on 8th June.

Where does the £1,000 per child additional funding come from?

You will need to ask the LA.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for attending and for their contributions.

(The meeting ended at 8.20 pm)