

A MAJOR STRATEGIC REVIEW OF SCHOOL STRUCTURES CAN ENABLE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT



Two Tier school pattern

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EC Harris joined forces with VT FourS to support Suffolk County Council in its School Organisation Review. The review, which is being undertaken to raise educational achievement and improve opportunities for young people in the County, involves changing the existing three tier pattern of school provision to two tier on a phased basis (removing the need for ‘Middle Schools’).

As well as proposing the closure of all Middle Schools in the County, the review needed to assess the potential for two additional year groups of pupils to be added to every primary and secondary school. All school sites needed to be considered for their suitability and in one location a new secondary school site needed to be found.

Creating solutions

We were acutely aware of the different issues facing our varying stakeholders; from the Authority, to school staff, school governors and parents. In advance of the County being fully resourced, our team put in place a programme management approach, full governance structures and consultation processes that could be followed once the full team were in place. We had to carefully plan engagements and ensure all parties had an opportunity to input into the process, air their concerns and understand their role in the re-organisation in what was a highly sensitive major change programme.

EC Harris provided support to the initial stages of the review in the following areas:

- Options appraisals of school sites
- Assessment of the future school space requirements
- Identification of areas with high surplus places and proposals for their reduction
- Programme set up including full programme governance structure
- Managing meetings with stakeholders and councillors
- Preparation for and carrying out public consultation
- Provision of advice on strategic area reviews and the required statutory processes.

We were able to set up processes and structures that the newly recruited internal team could then follow for subsequent phases of the review and a governance structure that provided robust decision-making and clear accountability throughout a complex process, involving significant public consultation and involvement in generating solutions.

Adding value

The review has a very high profile locally, and the Council's scrutiny committee has praised the governance process, programme management approach and approach to public consultation that EC Harris put in place. EC Harris were seen as valued members of the Suffolk team in 'kick starting' this complex and brave change programme, in the face of significant public opposition.

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