

Okehampton Youth Council
Meeting Monday 9th June 2025 at 4pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Fore Street, Okehampton EX20 1AA

Minutes

Welcome and apologies – Ava, Ellie, Niamh, Lily, Martha, Corin (OYC)
Emma, Abi, Richard Christine (OTC) Liz (DCC) Rachel Shaw (CEO DMAT)
Apologies: Meda (OYC)

Youth Council Questions for the CEO of the DMAT

1. School Performance

- Could you please provide insight into the challenges currently faced by the school in terms of performance and outcomes?

She is currently running two trusts and is passionate about ensuring every child gets the best start in life, recognising that poor grades can limit future opportunities. Originally from Devon, she values giving back to the community. The rural location of the school means access to opportunities is limited. The school has struggled with performance, frequent changes in leadership, and a lack of stability. She believes consistent leadership is essential for improvement and the pieces of puzzle are now in place. School leaders are now being held accountable, and urgent improvements are needed, especially in behaviour and overall performance.

2. Support for Teacher Wellbeing

- What measures are being taken by the DMAT (Dartmoor Multi-Academy Trust) to support the mental health and wellbeing of the teaching staff?

The school has experienced frequent changes, leaving staff feeling fragile and fatigued. Stable leadership is now in place, and change is being carefully managed. The focus is on stability first, ensuring any initiatives directly benefit students. Staff workload and the curriculum are under review, with an aim to make work more meaningful. Unnecessary tasks, like reports with no clear value, are being eliminated. Honest communication with staff is a priority. Improving attendance and behaviour is crucial, as both significantly impact staff wellbeing and teaching quality. Leaders are also working on refining the school's vision and values in line with the trust's priorities.

3. Teacher-Student Ratio

- What is the current teacher-pupil ratio at the school, and how does this impact the learning environment?
- How is the school addressing ongoing staffing shortages, and what steps are being taken to ensure consistent and effective teaching?

Current staff to pupil ratios are 24:1, but government funding changes may increase class sizes to 32–34. Funding shortages are driving this growth. Teacher recruitment is difficult due to high local house prices and living costs. National shortages in computer science, maths, and language teachers add to the challenge. The school is working to reduce teaching outside subject specialisms and is actively recruiting maths specialists.

4. Uniform Policy

- Could you explain the rationale behind the school's uniform policy, specifically the decision to not allow female students to wear leggings?

She was not sure why leggings could not be worn but would find out.

- Is there a reason as to why there is a uniform policy?

While not intending to undermine the uniform policy, she felt that learning is more important. Non-uniform days can be intimidating for some students and highlight socioeconomic differences, whereas uniforms provide a sense of equality. Uniform promotes respect for the school, its rules, and each other, though this depends on how it's enforced. Leggings were mentioned as a point of interest; requiring all girls to wear trousers might disadvantage some, suggesting a need for discussion. Uniform helps reduce pressure about clothing choices and supports a sense of equality. Pupils should show respect for the uniform, the school environment, and one another. There is understanding of differing views, such as those around wearing white shirts.

5. Sixth Form Collaboration with Tavistock College

- What is the reasoning behind the decision to have Sixth Form students share lessons with Tavistock College, and how does this impact students' experiences?
- What is the situation with sixth form going forwards?
- 6th form infrastructure – will there be a café still next year?

Only a small number of students are applying. Around 8–9 students per A Level course are needed to make subjects viable. The reopening is seen as fantastic news, offering students more choice and access to education but reduces numbers staying at Okehampton. A consultation on related matters is about to be published. Current sixth formers could help by speaking to Year 9 and 10 students to encourage uptake. Some students feel disconnected due to a lack of lessons in Wardhayes, their usual social base, which is sometimes used for college meetings. High living costs are contributing to recruitment difficulties. Devon is the 6th lowest funded out of 300 areas. Plymouth receives more funding than Devon. Transport costs significantly impact the funding formula, which varies by county despite a national education formula. DMAT heads are now responsible for their own budgets, a change introduced by Rachel, leading to improved transparency. Technology is being trialled to allow students to join lessons remotely (e.g. FaceTime for Tavistock

sessions), though currently there are no scheduled face-to-face lesson times. The school is currently out to tender for an IT infrastructure upgrade to better support remote learning. There was praise for the staff running the sixth form and noted the importance of staff shout-outs and recognition. The café will still be in place next year.

6. One-Way System

- Could you explain the reasoning behind the implementation of the one-way system in the school?

The decision was made by school leaders, primarily to ensure safe movement around the school. Some corridors can feel intimidating, especially for younger students. Having everyone move in the same direction helps reduce chaos and makes the environment feel safer and more manageable for Year 7 and 8 students.

7. Toilet Facilities

- There have been concerns regarding the cleanliness and availability of the toilet facilities. What steps are being taken to address these issues and ensure a hygienic and accessible environment for all students?

Cleaning contracts are currently under review across the trust. Concerns have been raised about the quality and upkeep of school environments, including when areas were last decorated. Capital funding is available and will be used for projects such as IT infrastructure and a redecoration programme, which includes toilets. The trust serves over 3,000 children, and the £1 million capital funding must be distributed across 19 schools. Toilets have not always been seen as safe spaces and are sometimes locked due to supervision challenges. The lack of caretakers is contributing to a backlog of maintenance tasks. Students are reminded to respect school facilities.

8. Safety

- Could you do more to make sure minorities such as people of the LGBT community feel safer?
- Is it possible to provide workshops on education about minorities such as LGBT?

Pupils should be given the opportunity to provide feedback on any aspects of the school environment where they feel unsafe. Recent concerns have arisen regarding misogynistic behaviour, with some male pupils treating female staff inappropriately. Discussions have already taken place with staff from local sports clubs to address related issues. The curriculum should be of a high quality and promote values of respect and equality, encouraging pupils not to judge others. These principles should be embedded within everyday school experiences rather than relying solely on standalone workshops

- Could you please provide more lockdown drills?

It's important to strike a balance between ensuring staff are well-equipped to keep pupils safe and not causing unnecessary anxiety among pupils by making them feel overly at risk. Only two sessions have taken place. Care will be taken not to overwhelm pupils with too many sessions, maintaining a balanced and thoughtful approach

- Could you explain why the nurse isn't in on Thursdays and Fridays?

Did not know the answer

- There has been some speculation that the Enrichment Week at Oke College may be stopped in the near future. Is there any truth in this and if that is the case, what are the reasons for stopping this?

This was not something she had heard.

9. Education

- How is the school providing education on adulthood and how to pay taxes?

Curriculum content needs to be delivered earlier to ensure pupils are well-prepared, particularly for those who enter the workforce directly after Year 11. This is now being prioritised more heavily.

There is potential to involve student voice in the review of the curriculum, although it must remain aligned with the requirements of the exam board. Meaningful engagement with pupils in this process could be both feasible and valuable.

The Executive team has been stripped back with the CEO taking on more of the roles and responsibilities.

How can you work with us going forward

Understanding what want to achieve and bring about change. Need to work with Mr Smith for day today education,

Outcome of consultation requested.