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by a session on *Devolving Power: what, to whom*. The speakers were Nick Herbert, Eric Pickles, Caroline Spelman, Owen Paterson and Grant Shapps followed by an open debate. The next session was *Influencing Behaviour* with very thoughtful contributions from David Willetts, Andrew Lansley, Greg Clark and Jeremy Hunt. After luncheon, Francis Maude, Liam Fox and Simon Milton spoke about *Public Services and Bureaucracy* with another open session. Finally, David Cameron summed up what he took away from the day and strongly supported the concept of devolution to individuals, communities, councils in that order. Lord Blackwell, Chairman of CPS closed the proceedings. Here is a link to the CPS web site: www.cps.org.uk.



31 January: Visit to North Oxfordshire Academy

Michael Waine and I visited the North Oxfordshire Academy that has replaced Drayton School. We were met by Cllr Nicholas Turner who is the Council governor and Mrs Ruth Robinson, the Principal. She talked us through the changes she has implemented since taking up post and took us on a tour of the Academy. The children are still housed in the old school campus but the Principal has made significant changes. She summarised them under three key headings:

1. **Behaviour** – a behaviour code was agreed and published. Parents were asked to attend a meeting to understand what was expected. This was not an invitation but a request to attend and the attendance was impressively high. Behaviour has improved considerably; it is supported by a member of staff specifically employed

for the purpose; children are encouraged by a mixture of punishments and rewards. Permanent exclusions are rare.

2. **Curriculum** – the curriculum has been broadened to include a much stronger vocational emphasis and to enable all children to achieve their potential. This seems to have been achieved without any damaging branding of children as academic or non-academic.



3. **Expectations** – there is a huge focus on achievement and on high expectations. Initially, there was considerable staff turnover of what I guess was an exodus of those uncomfortable with the new regime. They were replaced and expectation and high standards is now firmly inculcated into the school's ethos.

Michael and I were hugely impressed by the change wrought by the principal and new governing body in the short time they have been in place. We sought to ask the question “why could the County Council not achieve this sea-change?” The answer is a difficult one. I have two ideas to offer. Firstly, change at senior management level signalled a determination to raise expectations and standards; those who did not feel able to rise to this challenge were able to exit with dignity and fairness. Secondly, the focus is palpable. It is a focus on achievement; on aspiring to each child's skills and interests. This focus is projected through the staff by a rigorous performance appraisal system. It works. It is producing more motivated, more socially acceptable children with a better chance of succeeding in life. This has been achieved in the original campus; soon, the children will be enjoying a substantial refurbishment and new build. We need more of this in our educational system.



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Here is a link to the Academy's web site: <http://www.northoxfordshire-academy.org>



31 January: Visit to Hanwell Fields Primary School

After our visit to the Academy, Michael Waine, Nicholas Turner and I visited the new primary school that serves the recently built housing estate at Hanwell Fields to the north of Banbury. We were warmly welcomed by the head, Mrs Jane Haggitt. This school has filled up from the new estate and plans are now well developed for a major extension. The school had a very tranquil and unhurried atmosphere. There was wrap-around child care on offer which the head was able to use to support the school budget. The school faces challenges as it grows – not least the building programme that will shortly start and the conflict between the school that would like to have a single second phase project to plan for the maximum numbers to flow from the housing development while the school property service would rather plan one step at a time and on the basis of firm evidence of numbers.

Here is the school's web site: <http://hanwell-fields.oxon.digitalbrain.com/oxon/schools/hanwell-fields/frontpage>



1 February: Briefing for MPs

MPs attending: Andrew Smith, Ed Vaizey
Agenda: Budget briefing for 2008/09, World Class Economy, Provision of Post 16 Education in Oxfordshire Special Schools, Waste management in Oxfordshire - recent developments, Sustainable Community Strategy, Place Survey,

Comprehensive Area Assessment, Sub-national Review of Economic Development/South East Plan.



2 February: Bicester welcomes back its troops

It was a great privilege to attend the welcome home celebration for Bicester's Pioneer Corps. These were jointly sponsored by Bicester Town Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. The day comprised a service in St Edburg's Church, Bicester, followed by a Parade, March Past and Salute in Market Square and then an open invitation to the Pingle Field with a vast marquee, sideshows and entertainments for the troops and Bicester residents. It was very well supported and a huge success. It was clear that the soldiers, who had served mainly in Iraq and Afghanistan, greatly appreciated the event.



Here is a link to the Oxford Mail report of the event: <http://archive.oxfordmail.net/2008/2/3/221648.html>



5 February: LGA Resources Panel

Membership: Cons - Keith R Mitchell (Chairman); Gordon Keymer (Tandridge); Nick Skellett (Surrey); David Caunt (Dudley)
Lab - Sharon Taylor (Stevenage) (Vice Chairman); Mike Eddy (Kent); Tony Martin (Lancashire)
Lib Dem - Keith Whitmore (Lib Dem, Manchester);
Ind - Alderman Ian Luder (City of London)

Responsibilities: The Resources Panel is
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