

By: Ian Craig, Director - Operations

To: John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Education and School Improvement

Subject: HOTHFIELD (COMMUNITY) VILLAGE SCHOOL, ASHFORD - CLOSURE

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the Cabinet Member's agreement to the issuing of a public notice for the closure of Hothfield (Community) Village School with effect from September 2007.

Introduction

1. The School Organisation Advisory Board at its meeting on 8 May 2006 supported the undertaking of a public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Charing CEP (Voluntary Aided) School and Hothfield Village (Community) School into a new Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School on the Charing site.

The Proposal

2. (1) The original proposal was to amalgamate Charing CE and Hothfield Primary Schools via the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School on the Charing school site.

(2) The proposal was modified to close Hothfield School only (rather than closing both Charing and Hothfield Schools), in response to the consultation which identified that:

- (i) The majority of Hothfield parents said that if an amalgamation took place they would not wish to send their children to Charing and
- (ii) Charing's governing body and parents suggested that the proposal would disrupt Charing School unnecessarily

The Charing School re-development would continue, but with a budget derived from the disposal of land at that school only.

(3) A straight closure would mean that pupils from Hothfield School would need to find alternative school places. The Local Authority would assist parents in this process.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

3. In total, 259 written responses to the proposed amalgamation (letters, e-mails and consultation forms) and a Petition with 503 signatures were received, of which 10 were in favour of the proposal, 751 against and 1 was undecided.

Views of the Local Member

4. Mr Richard King, Local Member for Ashford Rural West, opposes the proposed amalgamation seeing it as a closure of Hothfield School. Hothfield is a community which has a significant pocket of deprivation and the school is an essential social and educational facility.

Views of the Governing Bodies

5. (1) **The Governing Body of Charing CEP School** is not in favour of the proposed amalgamation.

(2) **The Governing Body of Hothfield Village Primary School** is not in favour of the proposed amalgamation.

Views of Ashford Rural Cluster Board

6. Proposals have been developed in discussion with the headteachers of the schools involved. The Cluster Board stated:

“The Board accepted that Hothfield School needed to close, either via direct closure or amalgamation. The route of closure to be agreed by the Local Authority in discussion with the schools. The other proposals were acknowledged”.

Resource Implications

Capital

7. Initial estimates of the Hothfield site suggest a capital receipt within the region of £650K. Legal advice indicates a potential reverter exists on part of the site. We estimate one quarter of the site value might be payable in compensation to the beneficiary of the reverter.

Views of the School Organisation Advisory Board

8. At its meeting on 24 July 2006 four Members of the School Organisation Advisory Board supported the proposal for the closure of Hothfield (Community) Village School and four Members were against the proposal. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 1.

Recommendations

9. The Cabinet Member is requested TO AGREE:
- (a) to the issuing a public notice for the closure of Hothfield (Community) Village School with effect from September 2007;
 - (b) subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme being provided on the basis identified in this report.

David Adams
Area Education Officer
(Ashford/Shepway)
Tel: (01233) 898559

The Local Member is Mr R King

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 8 May 2006
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 24 July 2006

Other Sources of Information:

LEA School Organisation Plan
Kent Primary Strategy 2006

RECORD OF DECISION



DECISION TAKEN BY John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Education and School Improvement

DECISION NO.
06/00829

If decision is likely to disclose exempt information please specify the relevant paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

Subject:
HOTHFIELD (COMMUNITY) VILLAGE SCHOOL - CLOSURE

Decision:
AGREED:

- (a) to the issuing of a public notice for the closure of Hothfield (Community) Village School with effect from September 2007;
- (b) subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme being provided on the basis identified in this report.

Any Interest Declared when the Decision was Taken
None

Reason(s) for decision including alternatives considered

It became apparent that an amalgamation with the Charing School was not appropriate in the absence of collaborative support from both governing bodies. The decision to proceed with the closure of Hothfield despite the modest increase in numbers was made because of real doubts about the ability of the school to remain viable. There are the inevitable problems for a school of this size in affording sufficient qualified teachers, and therefore having to teach children of up to three different age groups in the same class. The effect on the community was considered but it was felt that the most important issue was the long term quality of education for the children.

Background Information:
NONE

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signed

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date

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By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 24 July 2006

Subject: PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF CHARING CHURCH OF ENGLAND (VOLUNTARY AIDED) PRIMARY SCHOOL AND HOTHFIELD (COMMUNITY) VILLAGE SCHOOL, ASHFORD - OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION.

Classification: Unrestricted

File Ref:

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the proposed amalgamation of Charing CEP (Voluntary Aided) School and Hothfield Village (Community) School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and issuing a Public Notice for the establishment of a new Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School on the Charing School site.

Introduction

1. (1) The School Organisation Advisory Board at its meeting on 8 May 2006 supported the undertaking of a public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Charing CEP (Voluntary Aided) School and Hothfield Village (Community) School into a new Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School on the Charing site.

(2) Charing CEP School serves the rural community surrounding this village. The school has a PAN of 30 giving 210 places, with a net capacity of 192. It had 103 pupils on roll (January 2006). The school operates a five class structure. Hothfield Village School has a net capacity of 84. Its roll fell from 43 in January 2005 to 33 in January 2006. It now operates two classes and buys in specialists (i.e. French teacher, Sports Coach) to increase the range of opportunities for its pupils. The schools are about three miles from each other. A map is attached in Annex 1, which shows the location of the two schools and the current pupil distribution.

Background Information

2. (1) In Ashford Borough there are 42 infant, junior and primary schools with a combined capacity of 10,545 places. A new school will open in September 2007 to serve the new Singleton development, adding 210 places. There are currently 9532 pupils (January 2006) attending these schools giving a surplus capacity of 9.6% currently and 11.4% with the new school included. By 2010 it is estimated that the surplus will be 10.6%.

(2) As part of the Strategy, Recommendation 27 states that "wherever surplus primary capacity is projected to rise above 7% in any cluster area, proposals should be brought forward to reduce it to 5%. The retention of a 5% surplus in any area (rather than zero) is considered to be 'good practice' to assist parental preferences being met, and to build in a contingency to deal with any unforeseen short-term increase in pupil numbers (for example a regiment moving). The DfES require all authorities to report annually on all schools with an excess of 25% surplus capacity, giving justifications why such schools are not being closed or having their net capacity reduced.

The Proposal

3. (1) To amalgamate Charing CE and Hothfield Primary Schools via the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School on the Charing school site.

(2) Hothfield site is cramped, with access to the common providing its playing field. Capital receipts from both school sites would be used to refurbish/replace buildings on the Charing School site. The proposal will provide five classrooms, rather than the current seven at Charing School. Through amalgamation both Hothfield and Charing communities are contributing to the building of a refurbished school to serve the combined community.

(3) The new school would have 150 pupil places, and a likely admission number of 20. The proposal would take effect from either September 2007 or September 2008.

(3) The proposal ensures that the communities of Hothfield and Charing have access to a vibrant, viable school in future years. It is recognised that the impact on Hothfield residents in particular will be negative unless carefully managed. For example, a mothers and toddlers group operates from the school and alternative premises will need to be found and support from public authorities will be needed to ensure activities like this continue to flourish.

Public Consultation Process

4. (1) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Annex 2, was circulated according to the County Procedures for Review. This included Local Members, District Council, Parish Councils, local libraries, schools within the two Ashford Clusters, Member of Parliament and other interested parties.

(2) Approximately 1,000 copies of the document were circulated.

(3) The document included a separate form on which respondents could express their views.

(4) A public meeting was held at Charing CEP School on 24 May 2006. The meeting was Chaired by Mr Bryan Cope, KCC Member for Dover West. Mr Richard King, KCC Member for Ashford Rural West, Mr David Adams (Area Education Officer), Mrs Helen Anderson (Local Education Officer) and Mrs Kendra Stanley-Berridge (Education Support Officer) were in attendance.

(5) There were 114 members of the public in attendance.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

5. (1) In total, 259 written responses (letters, e-mails and consultation forms) and a Petition with 503 signatures were received, of which 10 were in favour of the proposal, 751 against and 1 was undecided.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Annex 3. Responses to the main points are included in the Area Education Officer's Comments in Section 11.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) A summary of comments, views and responses is attached as Annex 4.

Views from the Canterbury Diocese

6. Mr Rupert Bristow, Director of Education, made the following comment on the proposal (extract taken from letter dated 27 June 2006);

"...While we still believe that this proposal would be the best way forward to ensure a quality and breadth of educational provision for the communities currently served by the two schools, we do recognise the strength of feeling aroused by the consultation which has caused a reassessment of support by Charing school governors.

The amalgamation would certainly assist the process towards a one form of entry voluntary aided school in Charing. However, if an amalgamation is to succeed there has to be a clear commitment on the part of at least one of the schools to be merged and this seems to be lacking at present. In working with governors and the local authority, we will continue to look and strive for the best long term solution with the minimum of disruption for current pupils and staff and to that end amalgamation should remain a possible way forward..."

Views of the Local Member

7. Mr Richard King, Local Member for Ashford Rural West, opposes the proposal, seeing it as a closure of Hothfield School. Hothfield is a community which has a significant pocket of deprivation and the school is an essential social and educational facility.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

8. Mr Damian Green MP for Ashford, is opposed to this proposal and made the following comments (taken from letter dated 19 June 2006);

"...I take as my starting point the paragraph in the consultation document which states that the '*County Council is looking to ensure that over the next 25 years all communities in Ashford are served by high quality, viable schools*'. Clearly the removal of a school from Hothfield would violate this principle.

To make the violation of this excellent principle requires an acceptance of the analysis that Hothfield School is permanently destined to have a very small roll, and therefore a very high cost per child. I understand that the stated figure of 33 on roll is already too low, and that there are expectations that the roll will be significantly higher this September, so analysis in the document is flawed. I note the claim from those connected with the school that deliberate efforts have been made to discourage parents new to the area from sending children to Hothfield. I have no first-hand evidence of this, but if this is true then the current numbers may well be artificially depressed.

The question on quality is also relevant. Historically, Hothfield has been a school with a significant number of children from traveller families, whose education has been particularly challenging. Despite this and other difficulties, standards have improved over the past three years, and no child has been suspended for the past four years.

My next point is about the claim of increased viability of a merged school. This is based on the assumption that Hothfield parents will overwhelmingly send their children to Charing. Nowhere in the consultation document is there any evidence to back this up. There are a number of schools closer to Hothfield than Charing is, and there may be parents who do not wish their children to attend a church school.

My final point is about the huge importance to the wider village community of a primary school. Hothfield School has made significant and successful efforts to become a hub of village life in recent years, and a number of local groups now use it for their activities. It would be disastrous for the village if the school closed. Therefore I oppose this proposal....”

Views of the Governing Bodies

9. (1) **The Governing Body of Charing CEP School** are not in favour of the proposal and made the following comments;

“...we were persuaded that the best interests of the education of the children in Hothfield would be met by a merger with Charing, involving the closure of both sites and the opening of a new school for both villages on the Charing site.

The headteacher, Rosemary Olley, passed on assurance from the headteachers of the Ashford Rural Cluster that the educational needs of the children of Hothfield would be best met by this arrangement. This was a significant factor in the decision making process. Several of us had concerns about the disturbance to the stability at Charing School that this would involve, as it has taken a long time to get the school achieving and progressing well.

A welcome spin-off to the merger was the likely capital funding that would be passed to the new school. Charing has independently been planning redevelopment for a long time, and this extra funding would have provided better facilities at the new school, thus enabling it to meet the needs of the extra pupils better from the outset.

However, after the public meeting, it became clear that parents and staff at Hothfield School do not share these views, and given the strength of feeling, we now feel that the plans for a merger would not be viable. I would therefore like to inform you that we no longer think that a merger would be in the best interests of Charing Church of England Primary School, and would ask that you take these views into consideration when decisions are made..."

(2) **The Governing Body of Hothfield Village Primary School** are not in favour of the proposal and made the following comments (taken from letter dated 30 June 2006);

"...We point out that the scheme is not really an amalgamation; it proposes the total removal of education from the village of Hothfield. It is explained to us that the site has been valued for housing development with the intention that the raised capital be used either for much needed repairs, or complete new buildings, at Charing.

The presumed financial benefits are questionable for the following reasons. An existing reversion clause on the building would probably reduce KCC's income from any sale, it is unlikely that housing development would be approved on Hothfield Common and KCC's estimate is that thereafter the cost of transporting the children to Charing would be £30,000 every year.

The viability of a joint school is doubtful. Both schools are at the heart of their village, but they are miles apart, Hothfield is closer to at least four other primary schools than it is to Charing. Charing is a Church school, whereas Hothfield is not and offers an alternative. There is no evidence that Charing would be the chosen alternative for Hothfield pupils.

...The per pupil cost quoted in the document is no longer valid as pupils numbers have since increased. It is our conviction that, as school's improved reputation spreads to the new urban development only 2 miles away, and with support from the local education office, Hothfield can increase its pupil numbers considerably within the next three years. Hothfield has never been assessed as being in 'special measures' it has not excluded a child temporarily in nearly 5 years, the figures of 10.2% quoted for absences is already down to 6.6%, its buildings are in very good order and it has never exceeded its allocated budget. These figures argue that the school should be allowed to grow, not be closed.

...The quality of education provided at Hothfield must be considered. In May this year, an Ofsted ICT inspection report included these comments, '*the leadership and management of ICT by the headteacher and subject leader is outstanding*' and '*The expertise and subject knowledge of the ICT co-ordinator are excellent and used efficiently*'.

The school's importance to life of the socially deprived village of Hothfield must be taken into account. Beyond its regular curriculum the school operates a breakfast club which is used by up to 50% of pupils, it hosts the village 'Toddler and Parent Club' and also runs adult education classes.

...The strategy as applied to Hothfield Village Primary School is a crude tool for raising money; it ignores the importance of the school to its village and completely disregards how well the school educates its pupils. Whether KCC calls its proposal 'amalgamation' or 'closure', it would be disastrous for both the village and the school itself..."

Views of Ashford Rural Cluster Board

10. Proposals have been developed in discussion with the headteachers of the schools involved. The Cluster Board stated:

"The Board accepted that Hothfield School needed to close, either via direct closure or amalgamation. The route of closure to be agreed by the Local Authority in discussion with the schools. The other proposals were acknowledged".

Views from Ashford Borough Council

11. (1) Ashford Borough Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee has considered the proposals for Ashford Borough as part of a review of education provision. The Committee, and the Executive, did not comment specifically on this proposal but made a number of general comments, the only one relevant to this proposal being:

"Committee would like to express their concern over the prediction of future rolls in the context of the growth of Ashford..."

(2) Ashford Borough Councillor, Mr Neil Wallace (Downs West) is not in favour of the proposal and made the following comments (extracts taken from e-mail sent on 29.06.06);

"...My first observation is that the raw historical numbers support the conclusions of the proposal.

My second observation is that the school is well sited to provide flexibility within primary education provision with the context of the development of Ashford to the north of the town. Currently there are three areas of designated or potentially designated housing growth immediately accessible to Hothfield; namely Repton Park, Templar Barracks, and the housing zone of the proposed park and ride and Junction 9. There will also potentially be housing development immediately to the East of Junction 9.

The key aspect to the projected education provision of this area is the provision of a two form entry school on the Templar Barracks site. This is clearly predicted to the development of the site, and presumably also the timing of the development of the site. In recent months the progress of Repton Park, the neighbouring development site, has been noticeably slow; anecdotally I understand that this is because they are unable to sell the properties.

My concern is the scenario in which pockets of development progress across all sites, but at a rate and in a manner in which decision taking on the two form entry Templar School is delayed or complicated. It is in this scenario that the temporary continuance of Hothfield School may provide a significant dividend..."

We should also not lose site of the macro-environment situation in which there appears to be a significant deterioration in public finances. From history we know that it is the capital projects that fall victim first.

My third observation is that Hothfield is a village of significant economic deprivation. It does not appear on any government radar because the statistics are compiled by the Borough Ward. In this case, the Ward also includes Westwell and Challock, two affluent villages. As a village, I suspect that it would rank as one of the most deprived wards in the Borough...

...Clearly I am urging caution on SOAB and KCC in its decision taking, and I would ask you to carefully consider the rationale of the closure on the Hothfield site..."

Views from Hothfield Parish Council

12. Hothfield Parish Council is not in favour of the proposal and made the following comments (taken from letter dated 22 June 2006);

"...Hothfield School was founded by courtesy of Sir Henry Tufton in 1874 and has served the community every since. It has been and continues to be a focal point for the village. Although the current roll is low, the standards are extremely high. An example of which is last month's OfSTED report on the provision of ICT. The school through its various activities provides a socially cohesive function within the village, i.e. breakfast club, parent and toddler group.

Hothfield is a deprived village and the adverse impact upon the morale of the villagers, if the school is closed, will be enormous. The Members of Hothfield Parish Council urge you to consider whether the money raised by the closure of Hothfield school will outweigh the damaging consequences to the social fabric of Hothfield Village..."

Views from Charing Parish Council

13. Charing Parish Council does not support the proposal and made the following comments (taken from letter dated 23 June 2006);

"...If KCC is willing to bus pupils from Hothfield to Charing why not bus pupils from places like Orchard Heights to Hothfield?"

Charing is to grow, but there seems to be little or no provision of extra primary school places for future growth in the proposals put to the public meeting.

Charing Parish Council believes that villages that have schools that are below sustainable numbers ought to be offered truly affordable housing. Villages ought to be offered the chance to take these young families.

Whilst it cannot be the responsibility of the Education committee to support and sustain the villages in Kent – it is the responsibility of us all to find a solution – where there is one to the current problem. Throughout the Country it has been

shown that in the past the closure of the village school has been the start of a general decline in the quality of life for all.

Only when KCC, Ashford Borough Council, and Parish Councils get together will things improve and rural schools be saved. Solving the problem by closing a school is only causing another problem..."

Views of the Area Education Officer

14. (1) There is clear opposition to the proposal from the Hothfield community. This is understandable as the school premises in the village would close. However, the question must be "is the position of Hothfield School tenable?"

(2) During the consultation process much was made of the fact that Ashford was expanding and Hothfield School's roll could grow as families seek a rural school. However, the Orchard Heights development (which is two and a half miles away) is complete, yet the school's roll has fallen during the construction period of this development. The Templar Barrack's development will commence, but a school site is contained within it. Similarly a school site exists in Goat Leas, the other Ashford Town development closest to Hothfield.

(3) Hothfield School is 60% empty (January 2006) or 50% empty according to Governors claims regarding its current roll. The school receives 80% more funding per pupil than the average Kent school. Analysis shows 49 children of primary school age live within one mile of Hothfield School and attend one of 14 Maintained primary schools in Kent (we do not have figures for those attending independent schools). 26 of the 411 pupils living within two miles of the school (6%) attend Hothfield School. The remainder attend one of 38 Maintained primary schools. This data and the responses regarding the proximity of the school to Ashford would also suggest that Hothfield is not a rurally isolated community which requires the maintenance of a 'necessarily small school'.

(4) There has been little response to the proposal from Charing parents. We cannot second guess why this is. However, it is welcomed that the Charing governors expressed the view that amalgamation was the right option to ensure that both communities would continue to have access to a local rural school in future years. However, the view that amalgamation can only work if supported by both communities is valid, as is the view that a forced amalgamation is likely to destabilise Charing School with little guarantee that the new school will be larger (i.e. the Hothfield community may not enrol their children).

(5) It has been suggested that the proposal will increase class sizes. This may be true. However, class sizes change frequently. Hothfield School reduced from three to two classes; this increased class sizes. The roll has, seemingly, increased since the reduction to two classes, which has further increased class sizes. The reduced roll at Charing School suggests the school will, at some point, have to reduce the number of classes, and thereby increase class sizes. The size of infant classes is restricted to 30 by legislation. The proposed admission number of 20 enables this legislation to be complied with.

(6) It is acknowledged that Hothfield village is a mixed community with many residents enjoying economic affluence and while others experience economic

disadvantage. There is a need for social support in this community. It is understood that the post office and village hall also have uncertainty futures. The pub has closed, and the Church is struggling. For this reason I have agreed with officers of Ashford Borough Council to support a regeneration project for the village, regardless of the decision regarding the school's future.

(7) It is welcomed that parents of pupils at Hothfield are satisfied with the standards at the school. The school has improved in a number of respects over the past three years. Contextual value added rose from the bottom quartile to just above national average last year, despite no child achieving level 4 in their English SATs. The school has been below floor targets in English and Maths for the past three years, but 2006 results (unvalidated) indicate this situation has changed with particularly good achievement in Maths and Science. However, the school is currently categorised as a school 'causing concern' to the Local Authority, based on the previous years SATs results, falling roll, lack of pupil tracking and issues regarding the quality of teaching and learning. With support from the Local Authority progress has been made on these issues

(8) Reference is made to the Hothfield School managing within budget. This is true, due to the school's creative use of the budget, 80% additional funding per pupil, and additional funding from the Hothfield Education Foundation.

(9) It seems that three options could be considered:

- (a) Continue with the amalgamation proposal.
- (b) Close Hothfield School only.
- (c) Drop the proposal.

(10) If the proposal was modified to close Hothfield School only (rather than closing both Charing and Hothfield Schools), the Hothfield site could be retained for community use/Children's Centre or disposed of. The Charing School re-development would continue, but with a budget derived from the disposal of land at that school only.

(11) A straight closure would mean that pupils from Hothfield School would need to find alternative school places. The Local Authority would assist parents in this process. In view of the fact that there is some indication that Hothfield parents would not seek places at Charing School for their children, it would not seem sensible to alter the County Transport policy to name Charing School as the nearest appropriate school.

Accommodation Issues

15. (1) Hothfield School occupies a restricted site which has three classrooms. The site is not large enough to expand to a four class school, therefore the school is unlikely to be able to meet the minimum size suggested by the Primary Strategy. The building is in a fair condition.

(2) Charing School comprises a Victorian section with poor quality attached timber framed accommodation. Trustees propose to dispose of this accommodation to fund the re-development and expansion of the 1970's block to create a modernised school.

Resource Implications

Capital

16. (1) Initial estimates of the Hothfield site suggest a capital receipt within the region of £650K. Legal advice indicates a potential reverter exists on part of the site. We estimate one quarter of the site value might be payable in compensation to the beneficiary of the reverter. The Charing School site is owned by Trustees who have identified an area for disposal. The estimated cost of the rebuild/refurbished 5 class school is in the region of £2.5m. This would be achievable with both capital receipts, and further savings may be possible. In deprivation terms the Hothfield and Charing area falls in the bottom 31% to 50%. The community will need access to Children's Centre Services, but due to the small number of children involved, a dedicated centre could not be justified. One option is to incorporate some space in the design using the capital receipts to enable outreach from a Children's Centre in Ashford. This needs to be considered in the feasibility design.

(2) If the amalgamation proceeds Charing School will need to be named as the nearest appropriate school for pupils from Hothfield. Travel assistance will need to be provided (cost estimated at £155 per day) as the school is 3 miles from the village (£30K pa - based on 33 pupils travelling).

Revenue

(3) If the two schools were to amalgamate there would be premises savings on the Hothfield site in the region of £18k and savings on small school factors in the region of £70k. Re-organisation funding of £24,700 would be allocated to the new school. The school would also receive £140,690k as re-organisation funding for small schools. The average pupil cost at Hothfield School is currently £5,015, and at Charing School £3,315. The estimated average pupil cost for the new school will be £3,115.

Human

(4) In order to appoint the best possible applicants to school leadership posts, the Interim Governing Body would be advised to advertise the new headteacher and deputy headteacher posts nationally, and this may result in redundancy of one or all of the current incumbents.

(2) It is unlikely that all existing staff will be required. However, it is anticipated some staff will move on to new opportunities before the schools amalgamate. This would reduce the risk of needing to make redundancies. If it is necessary to involve a redundancy situation volunteers would be sought first, and then decisions would be made via selection for appointment. The LEA is responsible for any redundancy costs, which will be met from the existing Children, Families and Education budget provision.

Equality Issues

17. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups in Hothfield and Charing Schools are 18.9% and 20.2%. There is nothing to suggest that any particular group is disproportionately affected by this proposal.

Transport and Environmental Impact including Community Implications

18. The proposal will not impact on families already travelling to Charing School. Pupils in Hothfield will be provided with travel assistance to Charing School if the transport policy is amended accordingly and dedicated school transport is likely to be provided. Pupils attending Hothfield who live nearer to Ashford town currently travel to the school by car. Their transport pattern will change according to whether or not their parents decide to enrol them at the proposed school or elsewhere, and these pupils are unlikely to receive travel assistance to the new school.

School Improvement Implications

19. (1) The challenges to delivering high quality education in a two class structure as Hothfield School is endeavouring to do are great. Equally the capacity of the school to drive forward an improvement agenda is limited. For example it has improved reading levels over the past three years but writing levels remained poor throughout this period.

(2) Charing School is an improving school, but the reducing pupil numbers will impact on the school's budget and it is unlikely the current five class organisation could be sustained.

(3) An amalgamated school would, assuming pupils from both predecessor schools attended, be broadly full and therefore financially secure. Such financial security enhances standards as the school can plan its staffing and resourcing needs more effectively.

(4) The larger staff group enables the workload to be shared more effectively, utilise a wider range of skills, expertise and backgrounds which provide for a wider range of experiences for pupils. It means that staff are better able to support each other in subject areas where some are more knowledgeable than others, and there is wider network to support colleagues at times of challenge.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

20. This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31 and 32 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Proposed Timetable

21. If it is decided that a public notice should be issued in respect of the proposal, the following timetable could apply:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Report to Cabinet/Cabinet Member decision | August 2006 |
| Public Notice issued | 1 September 2006 |
| End of Public Notice period | 13 October 2006 |
| Report to Kent School | 21 November 2006 |
| Organisation Committee (if required) | |
| Implementation | September 2007 or |

22. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:

- (a) the amalgamation of Charing CEP (Voluntary Aided) Primary School and Hothfield Village (Community) School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School with 150 places on the Charing school site

OR

- (b) the closure only of Hothfield Village (Community) School;
- (c) whether a September 2007 or September 2008 implementation date should be adopted if the proposal proceeds
- (d) subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme being provided on the basis identified in this report.

David Adams
Area Education Officer
Ashford and Shepway
Tel: (01233) 898559

The Local Member is Mr R King

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board on 8 May 2006

Other Sources of Information:

LEA School Organisation Plan

Kent Primary Strategy

Annex 3

Proposed Amalgamation of Charing CE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School and Hothfield (Community) Village Primary School

Summary of Written Responses

| | |
|--|------------|
| Consultation documents distributed | 1,000 |
| Responses received | 762 |
| Numbers in favour of a September 2007 implementation | 7 |
| Numbers in favour of a September 2008 implementation | 1 |

| | Support | Against | Undecided | Total |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Child at the schools: | | | | |
| Charing CEP School | | | | |
| Hothfield Village Primary School | | 1 | | 1 |
| Parents of children at the schools: | | | | |
| Charing CEP School | 2 | 13 | | 15 |
| Hothfield Village Primary School | | 42 | | 42 |
| Members of staff at the schools: | | | | |
| Charing CEP School | | 2 | | 2 |
| Hothfield Village Primary School | 1 | 8 | | 9 |
| Governor of the schools: | | | | |
| Charing CEP School | | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Hothfield Village Primary School | | 2 | | 2 |
| ▪ Parent of a pupil at another school | | 22 | | 22 |
| • Member of staff at another school | 2 | 8 | | 10 |
| • Governors from other schools | | 7 | | 7 |
| • Other interested party | 5 | 140 | | 145 |
| ▪ PETITION (from Hothfield 'Save our school' Action Group) | | 503 | | 503 |
| TOTALS | 10 | 751 | 1 | 762 |

Impact on the Village of Hothfield

- The amalgamation will provide good and secure education for both communities for the foreseeable future (1)
- Please value rural communities (7)
- Closure of Hothfield will mean the loss of a high achieving local school in a village with a wide social mix (6)
- The community needs the school – do not close Hothfield school it will kill the village. It is an integral part of the village - it is their only social gathering place and adult education take place in the buildings (64)
- Traditionally, many generations and families have attended Hothfield. Many are third generation (12)
- *You cannot live in history – you can only learn from it!* - Basic values are being forgotten which is not good for future generations (1)
- Loss of playing field (2)
- Hothfield parents should have the choice not to send their children to a Church of England School (2)
- Hothfield village has a large council estate, and anti-social problems. The closure of the school will only makes things worse (1)

- Removal of the school reduced the attractiveness of the village to families in the future (4)

Future Viability of Schools - Charing vs Hothfield

- Is there any guarantee that Charing will not face closure in two years?
- It makes sound financial sense and eminently sensible given the circumstances to amalgamate the two schools (1)

Standards

- Hothfield and Charing schools are unique with a very caring environment for learning and the quality of teaching is good/excellent with small class sizes - keep the schools as they are (10)
- It is wrong, morally and ethically to close a school which is performing excellently since John Ford took over as Headteacher and recently nine children have joined Hothfield School (6)
- The number of pupils at Hothfield passing the Kent Test have increased (2)
- Recent improvements and now a higher standard of education and behaviour at Hothfield school therefore shows a short-sightedness in the proposed closure (3)
- 'Every Child Matters', states that 'schools have a responsibility for every child in their area', by closing Hothfield you will be taking all responsibility away from us.
- In the last three years, no children have been permanently or temporarily excluded from Hothfield, no children are on the special needs audit for poor behaviour and there have been no incidents of racial or other violence - at least give us another three years!
- The proposed incorporation of Hothfield into Charing would increase class sizes.
- Studying in a small rural school sets the foundation for future academic success (2)

Expansion of Ashford

- With Ashford expanding, the spare places at Hothfield will be necessary (6)
- Hothfield should become the primary school for North West Ashford (including Orchard Heights and the proposed new housing at the park and ride)
- Stop building new schools and fill the places at existing schools (1)

Potential Hostility

- Parents of children at Hothfield are not prepared to send them to Charing (3)
- Parents at Charing concerned that the pupils of both schools would not mix well and hostility from the Hothfield parents (2)

DDA Requirements/Accessibility Issues

- A virtually new school will have all the benefits of a modern building and should be compliant with the latest disability access to all of the school (1)
- Hothfield school buildings are in good condition with disability access for wheelchair users (3)

Provision of Special Educational Needs

- Hothfield caters for Special Education Needs - will this continue in the new school? (1)
- Amalgamation would reduce access to SEN support

Transporting Pupils to the New School

- The cost of transporting children to and from Charing daily will surely exceed any short-term savings (5)
- Concern that free transport will not be provided for after school clubs (2)
- Concern about the safety of the younger children travelling at least 3 miles away - what happens if they need to return home early due to sickness (14)
- Why not bring children to Hothfield from areas where there is a shortfall thus saving capital expenditure on new facilities especially at Charing (1)
- The two schools should not amalgamate they should stay open to reduce traffic during school time.
- Against primary aged children travelling to school on a bus - will consider home tutoring for child if the proposal goes ahead. (2)

**Proposed Amalgamation of Charing CEP (Voluntary Aided) School and
Hothfield Village (Community) Primary School**

**Summary of the public meeting held on
Wednesday 24 May 2006 at Charing CEP School**

| Issue or Comment | Response |
|---|---|
| Viability | |
| <p>This proposal seems to be about finance. How is it financially viable? Why are we not looking to fill empty places from the Orchard Heights development? Parents will travel to good schools from Town.</p> | <p>We are looking to ensure that we have the right balance of provision to meet needs. The Park Farm estate, for example, filled up some of the surplus places in South Ashford. When the new school in the estate opened pupils moved back out of schools in South Ashford. Numbers have been growing & contracting for sometime. This situation would continue for the next 30 years unless action is taken to better balance supply and demand. Such fluctuating rolls are unhelpful to schools and pupils' education.</p> |
| Housing | |
| <p>Where is the choice for Orchard Heights? I don't understand where the children would go.</p> | <p>Orchard Heights is complete. The pupils from this development are in schools. They have not been the salvation for both schools. Hothfield has been on the surplus place return for the past four years. We have used the Orchard Heights development as the explanation for not acting to reduce the surplus capacity of Hothfield School previously. However, the school's role in Jan 2005 was 43 in Jan 2006 the role was 33. You could leave the school as it is and hope the roles rise, However, both schools are suffering from falling roles.</p> |
| <p>Who are you selling the site to? What will the site be? If it is housing, where will it go?</p> | <p>The expectation is for housing. A suggestion is that the existing school building will be redeveloped similar to the Westwell school.</p> |
| <p><i>Comment from Ashford Borough Councillor:</i></p> <p>There are opportunities here, offering a diversity in education, in a rural location or in Ashford. As a village, it is a community and needs a school. It is an excellent site and school. Hothfield is not in a good position, however, education is about the future and not history, drawing conclusions from figures alone should not be done. The figures in the Public Consultation Document, appendix 1, clearly show the popularity of village schools on the doorstep of Ashford. The school is not just an establishment. It is the centre of the community. The councillor requested that the Indices used are Hothfield (village specific) and not Downs West.</p> | <p>I suspect the figures are for Downs West and not village specific. I will establish which they are and get back to you.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Looking at the statistics for Hothfield, 16% of residents are over 75. The average age of death is 74. When houses become available they will revert to the younger generation. If the amalgamation takes place, KCC will deny the choice in education and I urge them to consider carefully before reaching a decision.</p> | |
| <p>Size of New School</p> | |
| <p>How big will the new school be? Do not want 30 plus in a class. We have had class sizes of 32 before at Charing, and it is too big.</p> | <p>We are not looking for class sizes above 30 in the new school. Legislation states that in KS1 you can have class sizes of more than 30. In KS2 there is no limit. The limit is usually decided by the School's Governing Body and Headteacher.</p> |
| <p>Community</p> | |
| <p>By taking Hothfield School away you are killing a community and village life. I Believe very strongly that my child had the best education I could have hoped for, in a small school. If you close the school people would move away & older people would move into the village and leave no place for the younger people.</p> <p>What price do you put on a village?</p> | <p>There are seven families living in the village attending and supporting Hothfield Primary. There are community issues and we need to hear them.</p> |
| <p><i>Mr Richard King, Local County Councillor:</i></p> <p>(represents Charing & Hothfield) I have been waiting to hear a positive response to the proposal. My view is that the merger is not a good idea and I am totally opposed to the closure of Hothfield. It is the heart of the village & community. Members of KCC have to look at the wider public view and not that of David Adams. The potential is there in Hothfield. Ashford will double in size in the next twenty years. Hothfield school is the nearest school to Ashford. There are no members of KCC here and they should be, to listen, to hear it from the heart. I will do everything I can to stop the closure.</p> <p>Not many people are happy. If parents and pupils are not happy about the closure of both schools, how do you expect them to get along at the new school? It is about people, not money. It is not going to work.</p> | |
| <p>There are 12 families from the village with children in the School and it has been here since the 1800's. Why move us now?</p> | <p>The class returns for 2006 indicated that there are 7 families at Hothfield. This data is subject to change and I would not challenge your figure of 12 families.</p> |

| Buildings | |
|--|---|
| <p>Why not reduce class sizes rather than closing schools? With regards to the reversion clause, what are your views on the sale of the site?</p> <p>Have you thought if the site belongs to the council or an estate owner?</p> | <p>In financial terms it is generally accepted that a school needs twenty seven pupils per class to be financially viable and have the funding for resources. There is a reverter on the site, which dates back to 1847. The reverter relates to a quarter of the site and includes the Victorian building and some of the land.</p> |
| Transport | |
| <p>Why do you propose a bus service from Hothfield Primary now? Bring children from Ashford to both schools? There are 14 places available at Pluckley. What do we do when the children scatter to these places?</p> | <p>Transportation legislation states, children eight or under are entitled to transport assistance if nearest the school is more than two miles from their home. This distance increased to 3 miles for over eights. The transport policy would need to be amended to state Charing as the nearest school to Hothfield if the amalgamation occurs. The Local Authority would not transport children from Ashford to Hothfield as they have places available within the Town.</p> |
| <p>I would not trust my grandchildren on a bus. Where are you saving money by having a new school and a bus service? There is not enough staff.</p> <p>I am amazed that you expect the children to stand at a bus stop and allow them to wait in the rain. Waiting for a bus every two hours If a child got Sick, how would they get home?</p> | <p>I am not sure there is an issue with teachers and staff. There will be capital investment in the new school. The Kent Primary Strategy states that with a role of less than 100, you can not run a 4 class structure. Both schools are therefore vulnerable and there is a risk the communities would lose both schools. What we want is the best possible future for the school, to meet your children's needs and ensure the communities retain a rural school. It would cost £30,000 for 33 children to be transported to Charing from Hothfield. Currently, it costs over £5000 per pupil, to be educated at Hothfield. One Headteachers salary would pay for the transport.</p> <p>Apologised for not making it clear that the bus service would be a private service and not a public transport bus.</p> |
| Standards | |
| <p><i>Comment from Mr John Ford, Headteacher at Hothfield Village Primary School:</i></p> <p>The Kent Primary Strategy is threatening every small school in Kent. I care deeply about small schools and I see what they do for a community. I am fallible and maybe that's why the children like me so much. Mr Ford then went on to draw from the Kent Primary Strategy & an Ofsted report. Highlighting that the KPS states 'small schools can not deliver' and Ofsted states 'small schools are equally capable of providing effective education.' The KPS indicates that 'small schools are very expensive.' Ofsted reads, 'small schools have</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>unavoidable costs, but they spend it wisely' An Ofsted HMI visited Hothfield 23/05/06, His words in describing Hothfield School were 'great, cracking and outstanding' We can do it, just as Charing can, we offer two options and I think that this proposal may deny that.</p> | |
|---|--|

| Other Issues | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Director of Education for Canterbury Diocese</i></p> <p>I am here principally, to listen to comments. Small schools are delivering the goods in many different ways. The process must take account of the community impact. I am concerned about all the issues of community impact and this should be clearly documented. I urge everyone to fill in the Public Consultation Document, it is as important as coming to this meeting. Whether we like Kent Primary Strategy or not, it is one solution to meet the problem. Kent Primary Strategy is a fact of life for Kent and it effects the decision making of surplus places. There is not a dissimilarity of ethos that both schools. I hope there is a common bond. There is a transport problem. The Proposal could bring together all that is good for both communities.</p> | |
| <p>When parents telephone 'Admissions' why are they not told of Hothfield School? We don't exist.</p> <p>Hothfield Family Liason Officer: The Education Department is neglectful of Hothfield. With reference to the above Comment, a parent found Hothfield Primary School by chance, driving around the villages looking for a school. They were not informed of Hothfield School.</p> | |