

By: Ian Craig, Director - Operations

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

Subject: ASHFORD SOUTH (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL AND OAK TREE (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL, ASHFORD - AMALGAMATION

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report seeks the Cabinet Member's agreement to the amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new 2FE Community Primary School and nursery provision on the Oak Tree School site with effect from September 2007

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## **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 Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School into a new Community Primary school on the Oak Tree School site.

## **The Proposal**

2. To amalgamate Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by closing both and opening a new Community primary school on the Oak Tree site, catering for pupils aged 3-11 years, with a 52 place sessional nursery.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

### *Written Responses*

3. At the end of the consultation period, 819 responses were received. This included a Petition from the Ashford South 'Save Our School' Action Group which contained 571 signatures and 137 identical letters. 23 were in favour of the proposal and 796 were against.

## **Views of the Local Member**

4. Mr Derek Smyth, Local Member for Ashford South made the following comment on the proposal;

“...The Kent birth rate was going down, but in Ashford it is different. It is implied that in established areas the birth rate is going down. However, figures show an upward movement and the long-term trend is expected to continue to move upwards, though not dramatically.

If amalgamation goes through, we would have a 5% surplus, which is the aim of the KCC. If there is upward movement in the birth rate, there will be a gradual restriction on school places. I therefore suggest that both schools remain. I pay tribute to the staff of both schools which work very hard on SEN. I welcome inclusion in the public consultation document of positive statements regarding making provision for the specialist SEN facilities discussed at the SOAB meeting in May...”

## **Views of the Governing Bodies**

5. (1) **Oak Tree Primary School** - The Governing Body fully supports the proposal.

(2) **Ashford South Primary School** - The Governing Body would prefer to see Ashford South remaining as a school in its own right. If the proposal is implemented the governors would work with the Authority to ensure the smoothest transition possible for pupils.

## **Views of Ashford 1 Cluster Board**

6. Proposals have been developed in discussion with the headteachers of the schools involved, and amended in light of the Board’s comments. The Cluster Board stated:

“The Cluster is committed to ensuring the pupils and staff of schools affected receive high quality support through the transition to minimise the negative impact of the proposals. In the absence of other possible solutions, we agree in principle to the proposals. Community provision needs mapping and the Orchard provision needs locating in Ashford South during the transition period and a final site to be identified.”

## **Resource Implications**

### *Capital*

7. (1) The building footprint at Ashford South site has been estimated to be worth a minimum of £850K. Access to the site is currently restricted in the context of providing a residential access road. However, South Kent College is responsible for upgrading the current access road to the site. Also, South Kent College’s adjoining site is to be sold to fund the Ashford Learning Campus. If sold as part of a package with South Kent College the value might rise substantially. The enlargement of Oak Tree has been estimated at £1.2M. Additional space of a community room and a nurture group may cost a further £200K.

### *Revenue*

(2) If the two schools were to amalgamate there would be premises savings on the Ashford South site in the region of £74k and savings on small school factors in the

region of £24k. Re-organisation funding of £42,900 would be allocated to the new school. The school would also receive £47k as re-organisation funding for small schools.

## **Views of the School Organisation Advisory Board**

8. At its meeting on 24 July 2006 the majority of the Members of the School Organisation Advisory Board supported the proposal for the amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Community Primary School with two forms of entry (2FE), and nursery provision, on the Oak Tree School site. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 1.

### **Recommendations**

9. The Cabinet Member is requested TO AGREE:

- (a) to the amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Community Primary School with two forms of entry (2FE), and nursery provision, on the Oak Tree School site;
- (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 D Smyth

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*Background Documents:*  
None

Previous Committee Reports:  
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 8 May 2006  
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 24 July 2006

Cab Memb decs J S/rpt on (06/00831) Ashford South & Oak Tree – amalg

*Other Sources of Information:*  
LEA School Organisation Plan  
Kent Primary strategy 2006

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 24 July 2006

Subject: PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF ASHFORD SOUTH (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL AND OAK TREE (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL, ASHFORD - OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION.

Classification: Unrestricted

File Ref:

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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 Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new 2FE Community Primary School on the Oak Tree School site.

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## **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 Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School into a new Community Primary school on the Oak Tree School site.

(2) Ashford South Primary School has 223 children on roll (January 2006) against a net capacity of 402, giving it 45% surplus places (although the school is using much of this space for community and family activity). Oak Tree Primary School currently has 182 children on roll against a net capacity of 150.

(3) The two schools share a site and between them offer 602 places (3FE). They have 405 pupils on roll (January 2006 PLASC). The natural catchment areas of these two schools overlap considerably. The majority of children live within a one-mile radius of both schools. 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 Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by closing both and opening a new Community primary school on the Oak Tree site, catering for pupils aged 3-11 years, with a 52 place sessional nursery.

(2) The new school would admit two forms of entry, giving it an admission number of 60 and a capacity of 420. The proposal would take effect from either September 2007 or September 2008.

(3) Oak Tree School is being modernised currently because its classrooms can only accommodate 22 pupils in each. The school can be expanded to accommodate two forms of entry. A single 2FE school would be sufficient for the needs of the community. Ashford South School occupies an old secondary school building. Many of the timber buildings are approaching the end of their useful life. Part of the Ashford South site will be sold to fund the expansion of the Oak Tree buildings, the remainder becoming playing fields for the new school. The Ashford South site will be sold to fund the expansion of the Oak Tree buildings. The proposal removes 1FE of capacity and utilises the modernised Oak Tree building, thereby providing the best education environment for the pupils of this area.

(3) Currently a lot of the surplus accommodation at Ashford South is used for family support, a nurture group, and extended school activity. The neighbouring Willows Children's Centre provides insufficient space for all of these activities. The amalgamated school would be provided with space to engage in this activity.

## **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 Ashford South Primary School on 22 May 2006. The meeting was Chaired by Ms Susan Carey, KCC Member for Elham Valley. Mr Derek Smyth, KCC Member for Ashford South, Mr John Simmonds, Cabinet Member for Education and School Improvement, Dr Ian Craig (Director of Operations), Mr David

Adams (Area Education Officer), Mrs Laura Froude (Local Education Officer) and Mrs Kendra Stanley-Berridge (Education Support Officer) were in attendance.

- (5) There were approximately 105 members of the public in attendance.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

### *Written Responses*

5. (1) At the end of the consultation period, 819 responses were received. This included a Petition from the Ashford South 'Save Our School' Action Group which contained 571 signatures and 137 identical letters. 23 were in favour of the proposal and 796 were against.

(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 of the Local Member**

6. Mr Derek Smyth, Local Member for Ashford South made the following comment on the proposal;

“...The Kent birth rate was going down, but in Ashford it is different. It is implied that in established areas the birth rate is going down. However, figures show an upward movement and the long-term trend is expected to continue to move upwards, though not dramatically.

If amalgamation goes through, we would have a 5% surplus, which is the aim of the KCC. If there is upward movement in the birth rate, there will be a gradual restriction on school places. I therefore suggest that both schools remain. I pay tribute to the staff of both schools which work very hard on SEN. I welcome inclusion in the public consultation document of positive statements regarding making provision for the specialist SEN facilities discussed at the SOAB meeting in May...”

## **Views of Local Member of Parliament**

7. Mr Damian Green MP for Ashford, is opposed to the proposal and gave the following reasons:

‘...my main objection to this proposal is that it is based on projections of future pupil numbers which are extremely dubious. The consultation document states that “there are 267 surplus places within a one mile radius of these schools”. This surplus is forecast to rise to 347 by 2010, a surplus which would be reduced to 200 within the forecast period if all other reorganisations took place.

Taking only the period up to 2010 seems a very short-term approach to such a fundamental change. Although the broad plans for the development of Ashford are known, the details of individual developments will inevitably change significantly over the coming decades, and it is probable that these will include extra housing within the area of these two schools. If this happens, the surplus places will disappear, and there may be a need to build a new school in the area, which would be much more expensive.

There is also the matter of standards. Both schools perform well under challenging circumstances, and Ashford South has seen significant recent improvements. These have been enhanced by the extended activities that take place on the school grounds, and it would be damaging if these extra activities were jeopardised.

I am also concerned that the expertise built up by Ashford South in helping Children with learning difficulties would also be put at risk by a merger...'

### **Views of the Governing Bodies**

8. (1) **Oak Tree Primary School** - The Governing Body fully supports the proposal.

(2) **Ashford South Primary School** - The Governing Body would prefer to see Ashford South remaining as a school in its own right. If the proposal is implemented the governors would work with the Authority to ensure the smoothest transition possible for pupils.

### **Views of Ashford 1 Cluster Board**

9. Proposals have been developed in discussion with the headteachers of the schools involved, and amended in light of the Board's comments. The Cluster Board stated:

"The Cluster is committed to ensuring the pupils and staff of schools affected receive high quality support through the transition to minimise the negative impact of the proposals. In the absence of other possible solutions, we agree in principle to the proposals. Community provision needs mapping and the Orchard provision needs locating in Ashford South during the transition period and a final site to be identified."

### **Views from Ashford Borough Council**

10. (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, made the following comments which are relevant to this proposal.

(a) The current alternative uses, such as the extended school activity and family support, at Ashford South Primary School should be continued if the amalgamation with Oak Tree Primary School goes ahead.

(b) Clear proposals need to be set out showing the alternatives to pupil transportation and access to the South Ashford/Oak Tree site



(c) 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, Local Ward Member, Mr Alan Allock, does not support the amalgamation proposal and made the following comments:

"...There is marked local concern from residents and other users that the Oaktree Road will be unable to accommodate the extra traffic flowing and parking at the entry to Oaktree school entrance and areas. I can state that the current situation is almost untenable and local ward members have had to take steps to request a reluctant authority to spend money on the provision of various bollards to prevent traffic spillage onto off road areas. This will be significantly increased should amalgamation take place. We have heard of no real solution to this community problem being offered, except maybe for a possible footpath from Jemmett Road, which is not judged sufficient for the proposed two form entry school.

In addition, there are a number of unanswerable questions being put before me by ward constituents carrying concerns that the proposal is, as yet, unable to take proper account of all the many developments in the pipeline for housing, in particular, adjacent to the South site. These questions point clearly against easy acceptance of the amalgamation..."

(3) Ashford Borough Councillor, Local Ward Member, Mr Melvin Elliff does not support the proposal and made the following comment;

"...With Ashford's Future – why close this school?..."

(4) Ashford Borough Councillor, Local Ward, Mr Allen Wells supports the proposal and made the following comment;

"...Despite some reservations which I still have about the amalgamation of these two schools, I do understand the need for some rationalisation, however there are two points which still concern me;

(i) I still feel that the figures which were put before people regarding the future growth within the area, seem only to be based on the one development, Zed Developments at the old power station site, and no mention was made of the Bellway Developments site due to start shortly in Victoria Road, there was also no mention of the development of the old railway works (400 housing units).

(ii) The proposal to bring more traffic to the entrance of Oaktree School is I believe ill conceived, and has taken no account of the current problems endured by the local resident's even by the current numbers of parents who bring and collect their children from school, to increase this number would put a terrible strain, not only on the local road network, but also on the local residents.

If development is to be carried forward, then I urge you and your planners to seriously reconsider the siting of the new school, and look toward the Ashford South School site as a better area for development..."

## **Views of the Area Education Officer**

11. (1) It is entirely understandable that parents who have chosen one or other of the schools for specific reasons, size in particular, would object to changing the nature of the provision their child attends. However, the medium and long term issues need to be considered. Ashford South is 45% empty (January 2006 data). DfES guidance requires the Authority to consider removing surplus accommodation or closing the school. The level of applications for Ashford South for year R places for September 2007 continues this pattern of under subscription. Its buildings will require modernisation.

(2) Community Issues - Two form entry provision is considered adequate to meet the future needs of this Community. It is sensible to utilise the Oak Tree buildings which are currently being modernised, and can be extended, as the base for the new school. This would provide this community with, in essence, a new school building, thereby providing equity with the new communities in Ashford.

(3) The public consultation document committed the Local Authority to making provision in the new school to continue the extended school/nurture group activity currently operating from the existing schools. There is no reason why Ashford Borough Football Club could not continue using the school playing fields in the future. The proposal would not see the wholesale disposal of playing pitches, which are protected by legislation and planning frameworks.

(4) Clearly Ashford South School is an important feature in the lives of its families. Its closure would be a loss to them. However, the proposal does not deprive this area of South Ashford of school provision or of the social structure schools provide to their communities.

(5) Expansion of Ashford – The rationale for reducing provision in a growth town is explained in the School Improvement section below. The forecast pupil rolls take account of the Housing Land, supply data provided by Ashford Borough Council, the Kent Structure Plan and the consultants' report 'Greater Ashford Development Framework'.

(6) Size of the School – I appreciate that some parents would prefer a one form entry school for their child if this choice was available to them. This proposal would reduce this option in this part of Ashford.

(7) Attendance Options – It is not sensible to relocate pupils out of Oak Tree School which is being modernised, to place them in accommodation at Ashford South which will in due course require modernisation.

(8) Traffic Issues and Road Safety - It is recognised that access to the Oak Tree site is a major issue requiring resolution if this proposal is to be implemented and the necessary Planning Consents are to be granted. A number of options for alternative access and parental drop off areas have been identified and discussions with Ashford Borough Council are underway. It is also feasible to bring pedestrian access into the Oak Tree site from the Ashford South side. Resolving this issue is in the interest of all parties and would improve pedestrian safety. A school travel plan showing how the new school proposed to reduce traffic movements around the school would be developed.

(9) Impact on Pupils - If the amalgamation proceeds, the staff and governors of both schools are committed to making the transition for pupils as seamless as possible. The Cluster has committed to supporting the schools, in terms of ensuring staff are provided if required, staff at risk of redundancy are helped to find alternative employment and that staff and pupils are supported through the process.

(10) Bullying - There is no evidence to suggest that two form entry schools experience more bullying than one form entry schools. Both schools currently manage pupil behaviour well and promote positive values and a caring ethos within their schools. There is nothing to suggest these staff, if employed in the new school, would not continue this good work.

(11) The consultation responses give little indication of whether a 2007 or 2008 implementation date should apply if the proposal proceeds. A 2007 implementation date would necessitate a split site school, or temporary accommodation until the new build was complete. However, it would bring stability more quickly for staff, and therefore pupils.

## **Accommodation Issues**

12. (1) Oak Tree School is currently being modernised. This will address its accommodation deficiencies.

(2) Staff, parents and governors have expressed satisfaction with the quality of accommodation at Ashford South. However, from the Local Authority's perspective the school will require substantial investment in the future. Its timber framed, weather boarded, felt roofed accommodation is nearing the end of its useful life.

## **Resource Implications**

### *Capital*

13. (1) The building footprint at Ashford South site has been estimated to be worth a minimum of £850K. Access to the site is currently restricted in the context of providing a residential access road. However, South Kent College is responsible for upgrading the current access road to the site. Also, South Kent College's adjoining site is to be sold to fund the Ashford Learning Campus. If sold as part of a package with South Kent College the value might rise substantially. The enlargement of Oak Tree has been estimated at £1.2M. Additional space of a community room and a nurture group may cost a further £200K.

### *Revenue*

(2) If the two schools were to amalgamate there would be premises savings on the Ashford South site in the region of £74k and savings on small school factors in the region of £24k. Re-organisation funding of £42,900 would be allocated to the new school. The school would also receive £47k as re-organisation funding for small schools.

## *Human*

(3) 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. The Interim Governing Body will also be advised to ring fence posts in the new school for staff from the predecessor school, and to make the selection process as simple as possible. Wherever possible slotting of staff would be advocated.

(4) 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**

14. Both Ashford South and Oak Tree Schools had low percentages of pupils from minority ethnic groups (3.1% and 5.3% respectively – OfSTED 2005). The percentage at Ashford South has recently risen as new pupils have joined the school. The national average is 17.5%. The proposal provides a school for the community of this part of South Ashford of sufficient size to meet current and future needs. The impact on any particular ethnic group is therefore believed to be low.

## **Transport and Environmental Impact including Community Implication**

15. (1) Access to Oak Tree School is via a small road in a housing estate. Alternative vehicular accesses and traffic management systems are being pursued with the Borough Council, as is the provision of a parking area. One or all of these options might involve a land swap with the Borough Council. Pedestrian access from the direction of Ashford South School is also being considered.

(2) Both schools currently provide good services to their pupil and parent communities through a range of education and support activities. These would continue in the new school and would compliment those operating in the nearby Children's Centre.

## **School Improvement Implications**

16. (1) The Authority believes that two form entry schools are the optimum size for primary schools. These provide good value for money, ensure that the maximum resource is focused towards pupil's education, rather than infrastructure. The structure enables joint planning which reduces teacher workload and raises standards, but remains small enough to ensure pupils are known and valued.

(2) The existence of significant surplus capacity in Ashford Borough impacts adversely on all schools. Uncertainty regarding pupil numbers from year to year hinders school planning and makes schools vulnerable to significant changes in budget. Two form entry schools, rather than smaller schools, are better placed financially to manage these financial fluctuations.

(3) Schools in South Ashford have experienced the 'boom and bust' of pupil numbers as Ashford Town has grown, resulting in rising rolls then falling rolls as new school provision has been created. The growth of the Town over the next 25 years means this situation would continue unless capacity is adjusted to match local demand. Achieving the correct supply of places to meet local demand will reduce the fluctuation in pupil numbers some schools endure, thereby providing stability which can help raise standards.

### **Primary Strategy Recommendations**

17. This proposal is consistent with recommendations 18, 19, 27, 28, 31 and 32 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

### **Proposed Timetable**

18. 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 September 2008

19. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:
- (a) the amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School by issuing a public notice for the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Community Primary School with two forms of entry (2FE), and nursery provision, on the Oak Tree School site
  - (b) whether a September 2007 or September 2008 implementation date should be adopted if the proposal proceeds
  - (c) 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 D Smyth

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*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 2006



## Annex 3

### Proposed Amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School

#### Summary of Written Responses

Consultation documents distributed 1,000  
**Responses received 819**

Numbers in favour of a September 2007 implementation **13**  
 Numbers in favour of a September 2008 implementation **8**

	<b>Support</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Child at the school:</b>				
Ashford South Primary		3	0	<b>3</b>
Oak Tree Primary				
<b>Parents of children at the schools:</b>				
Ashford South Primary		49	0	<b>49</b>
Oak Tree Primary	2	16	0	<b>18</b>
<b>Members of staff at the schools:</b>				
Ashford South Primary	0	7	0	<b>7</b>
Oak Tree Primary	11	0	0	<b>11</b>
<b>Governor of the schools:</b>				
Ashford South Primary	1	2	0	<b>3</b>
Oak Tree Primary	4	0	0	<b>4</b>
▪ <b>Parent of a pupil at another school</b>	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
▪ <b>Member of staff at another school</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
▪ <b>Governors from other schools</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
▪ <b>Other interested party</b>	5	10	0	<b>15</b>
<b>Petition</b> - From Ashford South 'Save our School Action Group' (comprised of letters & signatures)	0	708	0	<b>708</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>819</b>

#### **Traffic Issues and Road Safety**

- The amalgamation should only go ahead if better access; a proper drop-off point for parents and more car parking can be provided for staff and visitors on the Oak Tree site.
- The access issues at Oak Tree school need to be a priority, but they are not insurmountable.
- The council flats at the entrance to Oak Tree are largely inhabited by elderly residents who would not cope well with the extra noise and movements that would occur.
- As a resident of Oak Tree Road I have concern about cars juggling for spaces, blocking the road and children having to dodge the cars. This proposal is unfair disruption for the children and safety. Quality of life should come before 'land value'.
- The proposal should not go ahead as Oak Tree Primary is in a very small and congested area – accessibility is a real issue (3)
- The Oak Tree buildings have already reached their capacity. This part of Ashford is already overdeveloped and cramped for its residents.



### **Impact on the Community**

- The merger would benefit the community greatly and would be the best thing for the education of all the children.
- As a governor at Oak Tree primary, I believe that the merger is the best thing for my child and the children at both schools and the community of South Ashford as a whole.
- Ashford South School has an excellent playground and is very safe for children, especially those with special needs and behaviour problems.
- Ashford Borough Football Club is the biggest club in Ashford. It has taken ten years to find a home for the club and again it is a community club, if the school site were to be sold there would be no playing fields left for the football club to play on – where would it go?
- By closing Ashford South you would be cutting the heart out of its community.
- Ashford South provides a caring and enthusiastic teaching and support staff and a great learning environment.
- Ashford South provides unique service to the local community which is achieved through its provision of playing field facilities, its special needs provision and nursery care.
- Our community needs both of these schools, think of the children's education, not the money!
- The school has great potential and offers a brilliant nurture support group, and a fabulous Nursery – this must not be lost (2)
- The emotional and behavioural support provided by Ashford South needs to stay at the Ashford South site.
- Ashford South Primary is a major part of our community and all the programmes in place, for example, the after school club are making a huge impact.

### **Expansion of Ashford**

- With 'Ashford's Future', and all the houses being built in Ashford it makes no sense to close such a large school as Ashford South (3)
- As seen in the Adscene newspaper dated 19<sup>th</sup> May, there is planning permission for 250 homes to be built at Victoria Road, surely at least another 50 to 100 children will be coming into the area? (4)

### **Standards and Impact on Children's Education**

- Ashford South is a brilliant school with great teachers, any change will upset the children, they will suffer, especially those taking important tests in 2007/08 (7)
- Ashford South has developed a special expertise with children with special needs – this must be guaranteed in the new school (2)
- The period of change during the merger could affect children's education at critical stages such as the Kent Test.
- This amalgamation would be to the detriment of the children at Ashford South primary who have taken a long time building trust between them and the teachers.
- A child's needs and education outweigh the need for housing development. This proposal will ruin the lives of so many vulnerable children if it goes ahead. (4)
- If the merger goes ahead, KCC must ensure the stability and continuity of education for the children during the period of change. The transition must be handled with consideration and sensitivity by giving stability to the staff (2).

### **DDA Requirements/Accessibility Issues**

- It will be better for pupils to be in a virtually new school with all the benefits of a modern building, and compliant with the latest disability access requirements, which the Ashford South school building does not currently have.
- A reason given for choosing to close Ashford South is that it has two floors and is not 'disabled friendly'. The school has three disabled children who do not find it difficult to get about. The school has adapted to meet their needs, such as moving their classrooms downstairs.

### **Size of New School**

- Ashford South Primary school is already large enough to take children from Oak Tree primary school. (3)
- Do not want the Oak Tree School to double in size as a parent I would be worried about bullying (3)
- Oak Tree Primary offers a safe, caring environment and some children may not be able to cope in a larger school.
- If the two schools merge as a parent I am concerned about the increase in special needs children on the school register
- Better education is available in smaller schools which is why as a parent I chose a small school for my child's education (3)

### **Building Issues**

- Building the Nursery was a significant waste of public money.
- The Oak Tree playing field is notorious for flooding and would not be suitable for building on without putting Oak Tree residents at risk.
- South Kent College is occupying the Jemmett Road premises for at least a further three years.
- People feel that the decision has already been made regarding the merger as the building work at Oak Tree has already started.
- Support proposal, but building programme is a concern (2)

### **Different Ethos of the Schools**

- The two schools have very opposing outlooks on the way they treat their pupils and do not feel that they will sit well together.
- Rivalry between the children will be difficult for the teachers to overcome if all the children are placed in one school.

### **Financial Gain**

- The amalgamation proposal is sensible as it is a more efficient use of the tax-payer's resources.
- There is no other motive to this merger, apart from financial gain for KCC (3)
- Money is coming before the children and their education.

### **Alternative Options**

- How can you justify knocking Ashford South down and its brand new nursery? Surely it would be more cost effective to retain Ashford South as it is the larger school to accommodate the pupils from Oak Tree School.
- If all the schools in the south of Ashford stayed within their intake numbers, then both schools would be needed.
- Why not bring Oak Tree School to Ashford South? It is a far better site !
- Why wasn't Victoria Road primary school considered as an alternative option?

**Proposed Amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School and  
Oak Tree (Community) Primary School**

**Summary of the public meeting held on Monday 22 May 2006 at  
Ashford South Primary School**

Issue or Comment	Response
<b>Traffic Implications</b>	
If the proposal goes ahead what consideration will be given to residents in Oak Tree Road?	The issue of access will need to be thought about very carefully to minimize the impact on local residents. KCC would need to work closely with local residents and make plans that are workable. Work on access may not be completed if proposal is implemented in September 2007, but could be completed if implementation in September 2008.
<b>Buildings</b>	
Ashford South is already 2FE, what is the acreage of the Oak Tree site? Has a feasibility study been carried out?	Detail of the site's acreage was not to hand. The total of Ashford South and Oak Tree sites combined would provide more space than needed for a 2FE school.  Most would agree that the Ashford South building (not the school) is not fit for 21 <sup>st</sup> century teaching and curriculum purposes. Ian Craig said to build a new 2FE school at Ashford South would cost considerably more than expanding the Oak Tree site. There is no funding for this option.
Is it correct that £1m will be spent on the Ashford South nursery?	Ashford South and Oak Tree operate similar services. £1m inaccurate. New nursery would open with new school.
Plans exist for Oak Tree School to become 2FE. Are you saying the capital for this is not available?	The current building work at Oak tree is to modernise the school buildings. There is no capital available. The only way the school could become 2FE would be if the proposal goes ahead.
Clarification was requested on the status of the Orchard School.	The Orchard School primary satellite was originally to be located on the Ashford South site. The plans met difficulties and are now on hold. Discussions are currently underway with Orchard School about finding a new site for the provision.
Why knock down the Ashford South building?	KCC would not be able to build new schools to meet the needs of some communities because it has to show there is a shortage of places.  The Government says that if school places are available within 2 miles, KCC cannot open new school provision. Therefore children would be expected to come into south Ashford to find school places. This proposal would give this community a new school. Other new

	schools elsewhere in Ashford would then meet the needs of their own communities.
What are the plans for school's playing field - will it be sold-off?	There are statutory requirements pertaining to the sale of school playing fields. He considers it very unlikely that planning permission would be granted to build on a significant area of green space such as the whole of the school playing field.
<b>Standards</b>	
In the OfSTED reports for both schools are represented as sound value for money.	'Value' in terms of OfSTED reports referred to the money a school has, its budget and compares against progress of pupils. This is different from this debate which is around maintenance costs.
<b>Staffing</b>	
What would be effects on redundancy and job loss?	The process of closing a school is bound by strict legal terms. In essence, the school would not exist and staff will be at risk of redundancy. KCC would be advising the Interim Governing Body to ring-fence posts for staff of predecessor schools.
<b>Other Issues</b>	
How many Nepalese children are expected to come to live in Ashford?	Army Battalions were not expecting to house any Gurkha Battalion families in Ashford. However, civilian families may choose to move into the area. This is of course not easy to predict.
Why has Oak Tree school been allowed to exceed its published admission number?	Oak Tree Primary school had not been allowed to exceed its published admissions number.
Parents will want stability for their children throughout the process how will this be managed?	If the proposal were to go ahead KCC was confident that school staff would do all they could to ensure that any anxiety would not be passed onto children. Ashford Cluster Schools also committed to support schools affected by change.
290 additional school age children have been forecast every year for next 10 years (Health Authority data – provided by KCC).	KCC uses national data collected through the Office of National Statistics for pupil projections. Ashford is growing, but in older, more established communities the birth rate has declined. Ashford's new communities will need new schools. The DfES, Audit Commission and Office of National Statistics are convinced that birth rate will never climb back to figures of the past.

**RECORD OF DECISION**



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

**DECISION NO.**  
**06/00831**

*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:**  
**ASHFORD SOUTH (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL AND OAK TREE (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL - AMALGAMATION**

**Decision:**  
AGREED:

- (a) to the issuing of a public notice for the amalgamation of Ashford South (Community) Primary School, and Oak Tree (Community) Primary School, by the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new 2FE community primary school and nursery provision on the Oak Tree School site 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**  
There will still be more than adequate educational provision for the area, based on information from the local authority of future growth projections. The schools are adjacent, separated only by playing fields. Ashford South is in need of major expenditure and an amalgamated facility is regarded as the best option. We need to sort out access facilities for Oak Tree and the extent of new build required to give us a fit for purpose two Form Entry school. The maintenance of community facilities will be incorporated in the new build.

**Background Information:**  
None

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signed

.....  
date

**FOR COUNCIL SECRETARIAT USE ONLY**

Decision Referred to Cabinet Scrutiny			
YES		NO	

Cabinet Scrutiny Decision to Refer Back for Reconsideration			
YES		NO	

Reconsideration Record Sheet Issued			
YES		NO	

Reconsideration of Decision Published	