

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 11 July 2007.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mr W A Hayton (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr R B Burgess, Ms S J Carey, Mr M J Northey, Mr R Truelove (Substitute for Mr A R Poole) and Mr M J Vye

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M C Dance and Mr R Bristow

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr I Craig (Director Strategy Policy & Performance), Mrs A Osborne (Area Education Officer Canterbury & Swale) and Miss Charlotte Ricci (Democratic Services).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 June 2007
(Item. 4)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2007 were agreed as a true record.

2. Election of Vice Chairman
(Item. 3)

(1) Mrs Dagger thanked Mr Hayton on behalf of the whole Board for his hard work and dedication in his role as Vice-Chairman.

(2) Mr Hayton stated that he had very much enjoyed the role, and would like to nominate Mr Robert Burgess to become the next Vice-Chairman of the Board. Miss Carey seconded this nomination and so Mr Burgess was duly elected Vice-Chairman of the School Organisation Advisory Board.

3. Proposed Amalgamation of Boughton-Under-Blean Methodist (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School and Dunkirk Village Primary School - Outcome of Public Consultation
(Item. 5 - Report by Director (Operations))

(1) This report set out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Boughton-under-Blean Methodist (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School and Dunkirk Village School. It sought the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a Public Notice for the Closure of Dunkirk Village School.

(2) Mrs Osborne introduced the item, outlining this background to the report, explaining that these two schools had previously been federated in 2006, which had provided significant support to Dunkirk Village School, to improve standards.

However, since the Federation numbers at Dunkirk Village School have not increased, it was proposed that the children from the Dunkirk School are assimilated into the Boughton-under-Blean School. She added that the entire education community supported the proposal, and that written responses to the consultation had been disappointingly low, but did suggest that few people were opposed to the proposed amalgamation.

(3) Mr Hayton stated that the low number of written responses received were not surprising as had been seen with other consultations, people rarely write in to show support, and so the three responses received in opposition to the proposal was negligible.

(4) Mr Bristow felt that the proposal made very good sense. He asked for clarification that the amalgamated school would be a Methodist Voluntary Controlled School, which Mrs Osborne gave stating that the children currently at Dunkirk Village Primary would merely be assimilated into the Boughton-under-Blean Primary, so the Methodist and Voluntary Controlled status would remain. Mrs Osborne also added that the name of the school was likely to be changed to reflect the amalgamation of the two schools, but that this was entirely up to the school itself.

(5) Miss Carey, who had chaired the public meeting, said she was impressed at the good turnout. A few parents at the meeting had stated that the transitional period was a concern, but all were agreed that as long as this amalgamation continued to be managed as it currently was, this should not prove too disruptive to the children, and they could see the overall benefit this would have. Miss Carey stated that the Methodist visitor had given their unconditional support to the proposed amalgamation, and therefore she urged the School Organisation Advisory Board to do the same.

(6) Mr Burgess stated that he felt it was very positive that the Governing Body at the Boughton-under-Blean Primary School would remain in place as it would ensure stability during the period of change that an amalgamation brings about. He asked how long the mobile classrooms planned for the Boughton site would likely to remain to which Mrs Osborne responded that the mobiles would provide temporary accommodation only, and would only two or three in number. The exact details would not be known until the confirmation of pupil numbers became available. Mr Burgess supported the proposed amalgamation.

(7) Mrs Angell posed several questions which Mrs Osborne and Dr Craig answered. She asked how the transitional arrangements would be managed, to which Mrs Osborne responded that already there was regular movement of children from the Dunkirk site to the Boughton site, as this is aimed at redressing the lack of parity of provision and facilities between the two sites. The transitional arrangements were therefore well under way and a model of good practice. In response to a question regarding travel plans, Dr Craig stated that many parents currently took their children to school at Dunkirk Village Primary and at the Boughton-under-Blean Primary School by car, and were likely to continue to do so. He added that, if anything, this school should decrease slightly should the amalgamation go ahead.

(8) The School Organisation Advisory Board unanimously agreed to:-

- (a) the amalgamation of Boughton-under-Blean Methodist (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School and Dunkirk Village School;
- (b) if agreed, the issuing of a public notice for the closure of Dunkirk Village School; and
- (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 the report.

4. Ethelbert Road Infant School - Proposed Change to an All - Through Primary School

(Item. 6 - Report by Director (Operations))

(1) This report sought the views of the School Organisation Board on the proposal to undertake a public consultation on changing Ethelbert Road Infant School to an all-through Primary school.

(2) Mrs Osborne introduced this item, providing a short presentation to the Advisory Board. She said that currently, Ethelbert Road Infant School had no junior school associated with it and over the last few years that had become a major problem resulting in parents having to make applications to a range of primary schools that are already full. It had been the case that children have been removed from the final year of schooling at Ethelbert Road in the middle of the year in order to take advantage of any places opening up elsewhere. This had resulted in the children remaining behind being disadvantaged, as were those who were faced with a to move school aged just six or seven years old.

(3) Mrs Osborne said that the proposal was to turn the three class infant school into a four class all-through primary school, with two year groups in each class and 15 children to a class. The alternative would be to close the school, a move both KCC and the School were eager to avoid.

(4) Mr Vye had some concerns with the proposal as it did not fit with KCC policies, but agreed that in some circumstances small schools are necessary, but that in other circumstances they can negatively impact upon children. He did however understand the need for a small school in Faversham, in order to maintain enough places in the town centre.

(5) Dr Craig agreed that this was an abnormal case, and did sit outside the policies set out within the primary strategy. However, for this school and this locality, this was the best option available, and supported the continuity either during or after their final year at Ethelbert Infants School are scattered to eight different primary schools. Dr Craig felt that this proposal would increase the popularity of the school as a junior school capacity would encourage more parents to send their children to the school.

(6) Mr Hayton was in agreement to consult on this proposal. He added that he felt strongly that something needed to be done in order to resolve the situation parents currently face in trying to secure their children places at other primary schools in the area. Mr Hayton stated the consultation could gather some of the views of parents, which he would be very interested in hearing.

7) Miss Carey said she felt that the right thing to do would be to close the school, due to the fact that currently children at the school are being so adversely affected, and transition to Junior Schools in the area was difficult and it was unreasonable to expect children to cope with such upheaval. Miss Carey said therefore she felt it was right to undertake the proposed consultation..

(8) Mrs Osborne said that were Ethelbert Road School to close there would not be enough places in the centre of Faversham, as 105 places were needed in the town, and were mostly occupied by those who do not have transport to reach schools in the area. Mrs Osborne highlighted this point by stating that of the 320 school places in the area, 317 were expected to be filled as current forecasts so Ethelbert Road School was a necessary provider of school places in Faversham.

(9) Mr Burgess said that he had no definitive view on the proposal, but felt that the consultation was vital in order to fully ascertain the right way to move forward regarding the future of the school. Mr Burgess asked when the proposal would come into effect, to which Mrs Osborne said that it would come into effect in September 2008, if the proposal was accepted.

(10) Mr Truelove felt that the report presented a convincing case, and he supported the proposal to go out to consultation. He asked why no children from the school currently opt to go to Bysingwood School, to which Mrs Osborne said whilst the school provided a great standard of teaching and a good learning atmosphere, public perceptions of the school were not good. However that situation was improving year on year, as word got out about the good standard of educational provision available.

(11) Mr Bristow said that he felt it was right to go out to consultation and felt that over time, the proposal would reinforce the status of Ethelbert Road School., Also if the school was expanded to four classes that may help to release the existing pressure to provide Ethelbert Road students with places going into year two.

(12) Mrs Angell voiced concerns over the timing of the proposal and felt that the overall picture of schooling in Faversham needed detailed consideration. Mrs Angell asked about travel plans for the school, which were answered by Mrs Osborne.

(13) Mr Hayton said he supported the proposal to go out to consultation. Furthermore, the change over from an infants to an all-through primary school would maintain the ethos and closeness that the school had worked hard to create, and he supported such a move.

(14) The School Organisation Advisory Board unanimously agreed on the proposal to undertake a public consultation on the change to an all-through primary school of Ethelbert Road Infant School with effect from September 2008.