

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 12 June 2008

Subject: PORTAL HOUSE (SPECIAL) SCHOOL PROPOSED RELOCATION  
– OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to relocate Portal House School. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice to relocate the school to purpose built accommodation on the site of the former Newington Infant School in Ramsgate.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) As part of the review and reorganisation of special schools in Kent, Portal House School in Dover was re-designated from a 9-13 residential school catering for 45 children with emotional and behavioural difficulties to an 11-16 school making day provision for 60 pupils with Behaviour, Emotional and Social Developments Needs. The existing site is too small and therefore unsuitable for the new designation.

(2) At its meeting on 10 January 2008 the School Organisation Advisory Board supported the proposal to consult on relocating Portal House to Thanet. This report sets out the results of the public consultation which was undertaken in March, April and May 2008 (attached as Appendix 1).

(3) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 2 was distributed in accordance with County policy. This document contains background information and roll data to inform the consultation process.

## **Background and Accommodation Issues**

2. (1) The school is currently located on a compact site in the village of St Margaret's-at-Cliffe near Dover, very close to St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School. Portal House School has enjoyed a harmonious and constructive relationship with the neighbouring primary school over many years. However, the existing accommodation at Portal House is unsuitable for its secondary age designation and the increase in the overall size of the school from 45 to 60 students.

(2) Funding is available through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme to provide new purpose built accommodation. However, the existing site is unsuitable for development and a new site must be secured.

(3) A number of alternative sites within the Dover district and one in Thanet were explored as possibilities for relocation but these all proved to be unsuitable for a variety of reasons, including difficulties associated with location, access, geographical issues, acquisition of land and potential planning difficulties.

(4) The site of the former Newington Infant School became vacant when the Infant and Junior schools merged with effect from 1 September 2007 and were consolidated on the former Newington Junior School site from that time.

(5) The former Newington Infant School site provides the potential for development as a suitable site for Portal House. Development would require a major new build on the footprint of the existing school building.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) The proposal is to relocate Portal House School from its existing site at St Margaret's-at-Cliffe near Dover to the site of the former Newington Infant School, on the Newington Estate in Thanet. A site map showing the proposed new location of Portal House and its potential proximity to Newington Primary School is attached as Appendix 3.

(2) Potentially, staff at Portal House would transfer to the new location. There would be no compulsory redundancies. However, given the distance between the existing site and the proposed new location, some staff may feel unwilling or unable to relocate. In those circumstances, in determining whether an employee is entitled to a redundancy payment, the determining factor would be whether or not an individual has unreasonably refused an offer of suitable employment. Each case would be considered on its merits against agreed criteria established in consultation with the Schools Personnel Service (SPS).

## **The Consultation**

4. (1) The consultation document was distributed to staff, governors and parents at the schools, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Parish Council, the Diocesan Authorities, local libraries, the District Councils and others in accordance with the agreed County policy. The document was also posted on the KCC website.

(2) Approximately 700 copies of the document were circulated, which included a form for written responses.

(3) A public meeting was held at Portal House School on 31 March 2008. Mr John Simmonds, elected Member of KCC, chaired the meeting. In attendance were Dr Ian Craig, Director – Operations, Martyn Doole, Area Education Officer and other KCC officers. 19 people attended. A second public meeting was held at Newington Primary School on 3 April 2008. Mr Michael Northey, member of SOAB, chaired the meeting. In attendance were Dr Ian Craig, Director – Operations, Martyn Doole, Area Education Officer and other KCC officers. 52 people attended.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

### *Written Responses*

5. (1) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 4.

### *Public Meeting Responses*

(2) Summaries of points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting are attached as Appendix 5.

## **Views of the Local Members**

6. (1) The local members are Mr A Poole and Mrs E Green. Mr Poole commented as follows:

“There are still some local concerns regarding the relocation of Portal House Special School to the former Newington Infant School site in Ramsgate. The Newington area has many problems associated with social deprivation and is currently receiving extra support to assist with the regeneration of the area. My main concern with the Newington location is that the school is designated to cover Canterbury, Dover and Thanet; a more central location should have been chosen to reduce travelling times for the children. I am also concerned that King Ethelbert’s in Westgate was the first proposed location and this was blocked by Thanet District Council as unsuitable.”

(2) Mrs Green attended both public meetings and expressed her concern about the prospect of children being bussed to Newington from far away. It is her view that the school should be relocated to a central position such as Canterbury. She has concerns that Goldwyn Special School may not have the capacity to take those children living in Ashford and Shepway who previously would have attended Portal House.

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

7. Dr Steven Ladyman attended one of the public meetings and stated his opposition to the proposal on the basis that Newington is a community in transition, and that bringing in children from outside would potentially impede local regeneration.

## **Views of Thanet and Dover District Councils**

8. The Leader of Thanet District Council and other Thanet councillors attended one of the public meetings and stated their opposition to the proposal. It is their view that the placement of a Special school in an area such a Newington which already has many problems would be a retrograde step. Perception is negative and Newington does not need this now. Thanet as a District already has the highest number of pupils from outside Kent. Implementation of the proposal would add to the problems of the locality.

## **Views of the Governing Body**

9. The Chairman of the governing body spoke at the public meeting stating that governors were “right behind the proposal”.

## **Views of the Thanet 2 Cluster Board**

10. Members of the Thanet 2 Cluster Board unanimously support the proposal stating that the school would be a valuable asset to Thanet.

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

11. (1) There have been very few written responses to the consultation, the majority of these being in favour of the proposal.

(2) The change in designation for Portal House means that its present accommodation is no longer suitable and cannot meet the changing needs of the pupils. Rebuilding on the present site is not a practical proposition. The school therefore needs new purpose-built facilities at an alternative location. The site of the former Newington Infant School is available, and through BSF, there is an opportunity to provide excellent accommodation to meet the needs of the pupils.

(3) The Thanet District remains the preferred relocation area taking account of the residential profile of the pupils and the opportunity to access BSF funding.

(4) To date it has not been possible to find a suitable alternative location which is available and fit for purpose. It is essential that there is no significant delay in the projected timescale for relocation, in order to avoid detriment to the education of pupils at Portal house and to enable funding to be secured through BSF to finance the new buildings.

## **Transport Admissions and Community Impact**

12. (1) The future pupil population will be made up of students coming from Dover, Thanet and Canterbury rather than the wider area which is reflected in the current pupil profile. The needs of secondary age children with Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development (BESD) living in Ashford, Shepway, Maidstone or Swale will be met by Goldwyn School in Ashford. Of the three districts which will be covered by Portal House (Dover, Thanet and Canterbury), Thanet has historically contributed the largest group of students. Relocation to Thanet is therefore compatible with the desire and intention to reduce travelling times and make provision available as close as possible to students homes.

(2) Portal House is an excellent school which would make a valuable contribution to the local learning community working in constructive partnership with other school and agencies to meet student's needs.

(3) The admissions criteria for entry to the school would be unaltered.

## **Resource Implications**

13. *Capital*

(1) Major investment of c. £7.7m is planned to provide state of the art facilities through the BSF programme. The site is already owned by KCC and there would be no costs in relation to site acquisition.

*Human*

(2) The human resource implications are referred to in 3 (2). In addition, staff who did transfer to the new site would be eligible for assistance with travelling expenses through the Appendix E scheme of allowances.

## **Equality Issues**

14. The existing site and accommodation inhibits delivery of an appropriate curriculum offer over the long term. The new site would allow for all students to have access to their full educational entitlement in purpose-built facilities.

## **School Improvement Implications**

15. Relocation would provide the opportunity to develop superb facilities within a vibrant educational community combined with a reduction in travelling distances for many students, the move would have a beneficial impact on standards by allowing students to be educated and supported in a first class learning environment with strong community connections.

## **Proposed Timetable**

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

Issue public notice	June 2008
End of representation period	July 2008
Decision by Kent County Council	July 2008
Adjudication (if required)	September 2008
Building work would commence following final approval	
Implementation	February 2010

## **Recommendation**

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

- (a) issuing a public notice to relocate Portal House from its existing site to the proposed site at Newington.
- (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.

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(Thanet & Dover)  
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The Local Members are Mr A Poole and Mrs E Green

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### *Background Documents:*

None

### *Previous Committee Reports:*

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 10 January 2008

## **Appendix 4**

### **PROPOSED CHANGE OF PORTAL HOUSE SCHOOL TO AN ALL-THROUGH PRIMARY SCHOOL**

#### **Summary of written responses**

Consultation documents distributed: 700

Responses received: 17

	Support	Against	Undecided	Total
Parents/Carers of pupils at Portal House School	3	0	0	3
Members of staff at Portal House School	0	2	0	2
Governors of Portal House	2	0	0	0
Members of staff at other schools	0	0	0	0
Interested party	8	2	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>

#### In support of the proposal

- Use of the former Newington Infant School as another school would be preferable to either building further houses in the estate or leaving the site as it currently exists.
- Special Needs children have the right to a good education as other children in mainstream schools.
- A school located in Newington would be able to help more local children.
- With many of those pupils who now attend Portal House coming from Thanet, it makes sense to locate the school in Thanet.
- The proposed new school looks great and will have excellent facilities for the children.
- Portal House has taken in many children with problems and helped them.
- The construction of a new school on the site will cause minimum disruption to the surrounding neighbourhood. A well designed and pleasant new building will improve the site. Traffic will be less than with the previous infant school.
- This is a wonderful opportunity for Thanet.

#### Against the proposal

- The placing of the school in the Newington estate sends out the wrong message.
- There are enough children with difficulties on the estate. The proposal will add to the problems already in Newington.
- Concerned that families in the Dover area might be disadvantaged if the proposal is implemented.
- The proximity of pupils to the proposed new location will encourage truancy.
- Staff who live in St Margaret's will not wish to travel to Newington.

**PROPOSED RELOCATION OF PORTAL HOUSE SCHOOL TO THANET****Summary of the Public Meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 at Portal House School**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Response</b>
<u>Member of Staff</u> Why can't the Newington site be sold to produce money to buy a more central site to enable staff to stay?	If BSF funding is used, 50% of any capital receipt from the sale of a KCC site would have to be given back to BSF. Can only rebuild a new school on the footprint of an old school.
<u>Member of Staff</u> Currently the majority of pupils attending Portal House live in Thanet, but what will happen if that changes?	The new school would be serving three districts in the future – Thanet, Dover and Canterbury. Historically the majority of the intake comes from the Thanet area. There is no evidence to suggest that this will change.
<b>Comments</b>	<b>Response</b>
<u>Headteacher</u> Relocation to Thanet was not our first choice but it is seen as a good opportunity	
<u>Member of Staff</u> If the school moves out of the district it will lose up to 75% of the staff. This would be a shame because the school is outstanding because of the staff.	The Local Authority does not disagree about the quality of staff. There will be a separate staff meeting and advice and guidance will be available. There will not be compulsory redundancy and staff will be supported to meet their aspirations.
<u>Chair of Governors</u> I support the move and although it is unfortunate that the site is 20 miles away from this school the pupils will suffer if we do not move.	It would not be possible to rebuild the school on this site. Newington is the most appropriate site and the area where most of the pupils live. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The site is already owned by KCC.</li> <li>- Will fit in with the BSF programme for Thanet.</li> </ul>
<u>Governor</u> At one time Aylesham was the popular option for the new school.	The physical feasibility survey showed problems with the soil that would have escalated the cost making it not a viable option.

**Summary of the Public Meeting held on 3rd April 2008 at Newington Community Primary School and Nursery**

Site and property issues	
Question	Response
<u>Thanet District Councillor</u> How many sites were considered and why were they not taken up? Are any other sites currently under consideration?	Other sites were considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aylesham – there was a geological problem.</li> <li>• Current site – no additional land available so unable to meet the specifications for the new school.</li> <li>• Whitfield area – no site available.</li> <li>• King Ethelbert – Advised by leader of Thanet District Council that planning permission would not be granted.</li> <li>• Newington became available and was considered by KCC to be the best option.</li> <li>• Architects include trees on the plans but they will not necessarily be there.</li> <li>• It is normal for schools to have burglar alarms and cctv security cameras.</li> <li>• Unable to comment on property values although some can be higher when located next to a school because it operates between 9-4 and not during the school holidays.</li> <li>• The existing fencing would remain unless broken.</li> </ul>
<u>Local Residents</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My property borders the site. The site plan shows trees, how tall will the trees be?</li> <li>• Will there be 24 hour security with floodlighting?</li> <li>• How likely is it that our properties will devalue if a Special School is located here?</li> <li>• Will the current fencing be replaced?</li> </ul>	We would welcome the local community into the new school to use the sports facilities, etc. We would not want to compete with the current community centre amenities.
<u>Thanet District Councillor</u> How will the new school be used by the community? We already have a community centre in Newington.	This site became available and as the majority of the pupils come from Thanet it was considered to be the best option. Canterbury is very congested and we are not aware of any available sites. The majority of the children will come from Thanet and relocation to Newington would therefore reduce travelling.
<u>Local Resident</u> Why have you not looked in Canterbury for a site?	
<u>Local Resident</u> Will you be taking some of the playing field next to the site?	Although it was initially thought that some of the playing field would need to be used, this has not proved to be necessary.
<u>Local Member</u> Was the meeting about Portal House that took place at this school last month part of the planning process? Has this already gone to the planning committee and is therefore a foregone conclusion?	The other meeting was part of the BSF process for planning the new school. A planning application has been submitted, subject to the outcome of this consultation.
Comments	Response
<u>Leader of Thanet District Council</u>	

<p>Newington is currently being redeveloped and is becoming a good area. A Special School, through perception, is not what Newington needs.</p> <p>Thanet District Council will negotiate with Kent County Council to prevent Portal House being relocated to Newington.</p> <p><b>Local MP</b></p> <p>This site has been chosen because KCC owns the site and Thanet is in the first phase of BSF.</p> <p><b>Local Resident</b></p> <p>The roads will not be able to cope with the additional traffic.</p>	<p>There will be a large car park on the site for staff and visitors. The children will come in taxis that will come onto the site to drop the children off. There will only be 60 pupils.</p>
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Pupil issues	
Questions	Response
<p><b>Thanet District Councillor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school currently has 30 pupils but it is proposed that if the school is rebuilt here it will have 60 pupils. Where will these pupils come from? If numbers fell would you bring in pupils from other areas?</li> <li>Are you proposing to close Westwood?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no intention to bring in pupils from a wider area and there is appropriate provision for pupils in their own localities.</li> <li>The school is popular and there would not be a problem with filling it.</li> <li>Westwood alternative curriculum unit is a provision for children at risk of exclusion. There is no intention of closing it and the provision is different to Portal House.</li> <li>The majority of pupils will come from Thanet. It would be sensible to locate the school in Thanet to reduce the amount of travelling</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local Resident</b></p> <p>If Portal House relocates to Newington what is the likelihood of it having accommodation for residential pupils?</p>	<p>Portal House did previously offer places for pupils to board but the Special School Review took that away and there are no plans to include this in the future.</p>
<p><b>Leader of Thanet District Council</b></p> <p>Many Local Authorities use Thanet as a dumping ground. How many of the Thanet pupils were born in Thanet or are they in care and come from outside of the area?</p>	<p>There are 6 LACs on the roll of Portal House. None of them come from out of county. Two of the 14 pupils who come from Thanet are LAC.</p>
Comments	Response
Thanet District Councillor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will put in place what older children</li> </ul>

<p>Portal House client base will bring in young men and women who will be strong willed.</p> <p><u>Local MP</u></p> <p>If Portal House relocated to Newington it would not be the school that it is now. Currently it is for children aged 9-13 but in the future will be for children aged 11-16. Children of that age will expect to travel by themselves and engage in after school activities.</p> <p>Thanet is a community with difficulties and these should not be added to by importing children into this area.</p> <p><u>Local Resident</u></p> <p>Your Ofsted report may be excellent but you cannot guarantee it will stay excellent in Newington. Children at age 16 change and you cannot guarantee that they will behave well.</p> <p><u>Local Resident</u></p> <p>I think this school should go ahead in Newington. The area needs this school for the current children and future generations.</p>	<p>need. They do not have more difficulties only different.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portal House's Ofsted report was outstanding and the behaviour of the students was judged as outstanding.</li> </ul>
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Consultation Process	
Question	Response
<p><u>Local Resident</u></p> <p>Why were residents not consulted? Were the parents of the Canterbury pupils attending Portal House consulted about moving to Thanet?</p>	<p>This is the consultation and we are asking for your views. This is the second of two public meetings and parents of children attending Portal House have been invited to attend both meetings.</p> <p>We are listening to you now before moving to the next stage. The press is here and we are open to receive your comments.</p>
<p><u>Thanet District Councillor</u></p> <p>Why were there no informal discussions preceding this consultation? There is a level of hostility from Thanet District Council and residents because there is a presumption that this is going to be the site because designs have already been produced.</p>	<p>This consultation is more than the statutory requirement. In addition to our normal circulation of public consultation documents we did hand deliver to residents bordering the site. The design work for the new school has been done for the BSF process and could be located on a suitable site anywhere.</p>
Comments	Response
Leader of Thanet District Council	Copies of the public consultation document

<p>It is dreadful that Thanet District Council did not know about this consultation.</p> <p><u><b>Thanet District Councillor and Chairman of Governors of Newington School</b></u></p> <p>I have not been informed of this proposal officially. There must be a hidden agenda.</p>	<p>were sent to Thanet District Council for circulation.</p> <p>The Area Education Officer met with Councillor Harrison prior to this consultation and discussed the proposal with him.</p>
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