

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 12 June 2008

Subject: THE PROPOSED RELOCATION OF GRANGE PARK SCHOOL,
LEYBOURNE, WEST MALLING TO THE WROTHAM SCHOOL SITE.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on undertaking a Public Consultation concerning a proposal to relocate Grange Park School to a site within the grounds of Wrotham School.

Introduction

1. (1) As part of the review and reorganisation of special schools in Kent, Grange Park School in West Malling was re-designated in 2004 from being a school for 55 pupils with 'Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties' from the ages of 11-19 years, to become a provision for 'Severe Communication Needs associated with a combination of Autism and Severe Learning Difficulties' for boys and girls aged 11-16. The roll remained at 55. Additional places were added to meet the needs of post-16 provision, based at Holmesdale School in Snodland.

(2) Grange Park provides education for a group of young people who require a highly specialised environment (both accommodation and trained staff) as well as access to a mainstream environment for social and learning opportunities. The links that Grange Park School has made with mainstream schools are very successful but the school's current premises are not satisfactory. The cost to the Local Authority if this provision was not available would be considerable, with all pupils likely to need out-county provision, as there are no alternatives within the Kent maintained sector.

Grange Park School

2. (1) The school is currently based in 1970s single-storey buildings of SEAC construction and is located in Leybourne, West Malling. The buildings are considered inadequate for their re-designated purpose. The site is too restricted to accommodate further mobile accommodation. The existing building footprint now contains an outside learning environment, and sports facilities. The needs of these particular pupils require small class sizes and the availability of 'break-out' spaces.

(2) There are currently 68 pupils on roll at Grange Park School (April 2008), of whom 53 attend the 11-16 provision and 15 pupils attend the Post 16 provision at Holmesdale. The pupils who attend Grange Park come from West Kent and parts of Mid Kent. A dot map is attached in Appendix 1.

(3) The site which the school currently occupies is too small to accommodate the facilities which the school requires. Recently, the school's utility services have been seriously affected by the adjacent housing development.

Wrotham School

3. (1) Wrotham School is a Specialist Humanities Secondary School, which is situated between the villages of Borough Green and Wrotham. The school gained specialist status for humanities in September 2005. Wrotham is a Foundation School which holds its land and buildings in Trust. The school has the capacity to admit and educate 726 boys and girls. There were 715 pupils on roll (autumn 2007 PLASC), of which 623 pupils attended the 11-16 provision and 92 pupils attended the 6th form provision.

(2) The proposed relocation of Grange Park School onto the Wrotham School site would not affect the operation of Wrotham School, neither would it occupy too much of the school's site. Grange Park School would be a separate and self-contained school with its own headteacher, governing body and staff. Wrotham School's existing site area is approximately 82,511m². The minimum requirement for a school of its size is 51,440m². Grange Park School would require a site area of approximately 11,825m². There is currently a surplus site area of 31,017m² on the Wrotham site, sufficient space to accommodate Grange Park School in a building with the capacity to accommodate a maximum of 55 pupils.

(3) At the last Ofsted inspection in September 2006, Wrotham School was judged as being 'Good'. More recently, in January 2008, Ofsted carried out a subject inspection of the School's 'Business Education' programme, which was also judged as 'Good'.

(4) Wrotham School is a successful non-selective school, which achieves high results as measured by all the normal indicators. Results have improved steadily over the past few years and that trend is expected to continue. In 2007, 78% of pupils achieved 5 A-C grades at GCSE and 37% including English and maths. Contextualised Value Added (CVA), which is a measure of pupil progress, was high at 1027. Students achieve well in the relatively small sixth form and have the opportunity to broaden their studies as part of a wider Malling Sixth Form Consortium. The latest Ofsted Report in 2006 reported that 'Teaching and learning is good in the school and satisfactory in the sixth form.' Wrotham School specialises in Humanities, which means it has a particular focus on communication. The achievement of pupils with SEN and AEN are particularly good and CVA for these pupils is slightly higher than for the school as a whole.

(5) The Local Authority has been in discussion with the headteacher and governors of Grange Park School during recent years about the school's location. Other site options have been considered during this period, but they have proved to be inappropriate.

(6) Wrotham School was recently identified as a suitable site for the relocation of Grange Park School. Early discussions have taken place with both headteachers and Chair of Governors regarding the possible relocation. The governing body at Wrotham School agrees, in principle, with the proposal. Considerable thought will need to be given to the design and siting of new buildings because Wrotham School's grounds fall within the Green Belt.

The Proposal

4. (1) The proposal is to relocate Grange Park School from its existing site in Leybourne, West Malling, into a new 2,000sqm school building on the Wrotham School site in Sevenoaks with a target date of September 2009. The new school would be built to accommodate 55 boys and girls from the ages 11-16 and would be designed to be a 'school for the future', able to meet the requirements of the curriculum now and in the future.

(2) There are three potential locations for the new school on the Wrotham school site. Jacobs Babbie has been commissioned to carry out the feasibility studies on all the three locations. A meeting will be held on 23 May with both headteachers and Chairs of Governors to agree on the preferred option. A site map showing the location of Grange Park School is attached in Appendix 2. A site map for the proposed new location of the school is also attached in Appendix 3.

(3) All pupils and staff would transfer to the new building.

Views of the Local Members

5. (1) The Local Member for Grange Park School, Sarah Hohler, fully supports the proposal. She has been most impressed with the education and support offered by Grange Park special school to its students especially since it has been operating for some time on a challenging site. She is therefore delighted that these plans will provide facilities more suited to the quality of education the school provides. Wrotham School is in need of improvements to many of its buildings and facilities and she is pleased that this proposal goes some way to delivering these improvements as well as securing the future of this important and successful local secondary school

(2) The Local Member for Wrotham School, Valerie Dagger, fully supports the proposal and believes that it offers positive benefits for both schools.

Views of the Cluster Board

6. The Malling Cluster Board notes the proposal to relocate Grange Park School on the site of Wrotham School. It is a move supported by the Headteachers and governing bodies of both schools. The Board welcomes the opportunity which this will present for Grange Park to establish itself in a settled base and welcomes the opportunity which will occur for the exchange of good inclusive practice between the co-located schools. This indication of the Local Authority's support for education in the Cluster will be welcomed by local schools.

Resource Implications

Capital

7. (1) The capital costs of building the new school will be in the region of £4m. It is expected that the funding to facilitate the new build would come from the Special School Review budget. There will not be any costs involved in acquiring land from the Governing Body of Wrotham School. Discussions are taking place about future improvements to the Wrotham School buildings in recognition of the provision of land for Grange Park School.

Human

(2) All staff and pupils would transfer across to the school at its new site and it is not anticipated that job contracts would be affected.

Equality Issues

8. (1) The new provision will ensure that appropriate educational opportunities are available for this group of disabled pupils who live in the west of Kent. Boys and girls are admitted to Grange Park (although the incidence of boys with this need is greater which is reflected in the gender balance within the school).

(2) The proposed new site at Wrotham School would provide students with access to their full educational entitlement in purpose-built facilities.

Transport and Environmental Impact including Community Implications

9. (1) Pupils who attend Grange Park School currently come from West and Mid Kent. The largest number of pupils come from Maidstone and Sittingbourne. It will be necessary for the Local Authority to provide transport for these pupils.

(2) Traffic to Wrotham Village and the school site should not increase greatly as a result of Grange Park being relocated. The existing entrance to Wrotham School will be redesigned to include a drop-off zone for parents of pupils from both schools. This will reduce the impact of traffic congestion on the neighbouring residents. Staggered school hours could also be introduced.

(3) The new school would be required to produce a school travel plan.

School Effectiveness

10. At the last Ofsted inspection in June 2007, Grange Park School was judged as being 'satisfactory'. More flexibility in class organisation would allow the school to demonstrate improved progress following a 'streaming' and 'stage not age' approach to grouping, where disruptions to learning could be minimised by use of break-out rooms. Ability grouping can raise expectations of the most able pupils.

Proposed Timetable

11. If it is decided that a public consultation should be undertaken in respect of the proposal, the following timeline could apply:

Report to SOAB	12 June 2008
Public Consultation commences	20 June 2008
Public Meeting	w/c 7 July 2008
End of public consultation period	1 August 2008
Report back to SOAB	11 September 2008
Cabinet Member Decision	8 October 2008

Scrutiny <i>if required</i>	22 October 2008
Public notice issued	End October/early November 2008
End of Public notice period	December 2008
Determination by Local Authority	December 2008
Adjudication <i>if required</i>	Early 2009
Proposed Implementation	1 September 2009

Recommendations

12. Members are asked to give their views on whether there should be a public consultation on the possible relocation of Grange Park (Special) School from its existing site at Leybourne, West Malling to an identified site at Wrotham School.

Chris Jones
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The Local Members are Mrs Sarah Hohler and Mrs Valerie Dagger

Background documents:

Education & Inspection Act 2006