

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 10 January 2008

Subject: TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL – PROPOSED CHANGE OF AGE RANGE TO REMOVE THE SIXTH FORM FROM THE SCHOOL'S FORMAL DESIGNATION

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report presents the results of a public consultation exercise undertaken on a proposal to regularise the position regarding the suspension of sixth form provision at Tunbridge Wells Community High School, by changing the designated age range from 11 to 19, to 11 to 16 years only.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) The School Organisation Advisory Board, at its meeting on 17 October 2007, supported a proposal to undertake public consultation on changing the designated age range of Tunbridge Wells Community High School, from the current 11-19, to 11-16 years of age.

(2) Members noted that the School Organisation Regulations 1999 define 'the upper age limit' for individual schools as being 'the highest age of pupils for whom education is normally provided at the school'.

(3) Tunbridge Wells Community High School is currently designated as a school for students aged 11-19 years, but the school's Sixth Form was suspended from September 2005 on grounds of viability. School Organisation Regulations do not, however, provide for temporary changes to the age range of a school. This proposal has, therefore, been brought forward to regularise the position and to bring it into line with legislative requirements.

(4) In these circumstances, Members agreed to a more limited public consultation exercise than is normal practice within the county when the outcome of a proposal would normally lead to a change in provision for pupils. In this case, the change would be in formal designation only.

(5) Appendix 1 comprises the consultation letter distributed to all key stakeholders on 2 November 2007. This report summarises the outcome of the consultation process.

## **Background**

2. (1) Tunbridge Wells Community High School is a small non-selective secondary school located to the east of Tunbridge Wells. A location map and a site plan are attached as Appendices 2 and 3.

(2) The roll was 436 (January 2007 pupil census) and is forecast to remain relatively constant over the next few years. It does not have sixth form students currently on roll, and has not done so since the sixth form arrangements were suspended from September 2005. Post 16 students from Tunbridge Wells High have

been successfully transferring to alternative courses, sometimes at other local sixth forms but, mostly, to West Kent College which works in close partnership with the school.

(3) Numbers in the Sixth Form at Tunbridge Wells High had always been quite small and, in latter years, very small. Table 1 below details historic roll figures for main school and Sixth Form numbers from 2000 to 2005.

**Table 1**

<b>Year</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Total 11-16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Total 16+</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2000</b>	85	88	86	107	99	465	29	17	7	<b>53</b>	518
<b>2001</b>	108	92	93	89	107	489	36	15	5	<b>56</b>	545
<b>2002</b>	106	111	94	100	86	497	29	25	4	<b>58</b>	555
<b>2003</b>	97	102	112	88	86	485	20	15	3	<b>38</b>	523
<b>2004</b>	105	91	103	101	81	481	19	10	1	<b>30</b>	511
<b>2005</b>	91	105	94	109	89	488	2	0	0	<b>2</b>	490

(4) The school's post-16 focus, since 1998, had been on vocational courses at 16+, offering a limited range of options, covering Performing Arts, Art and Design, Travel and Tourism and Business Studies.

(5) Over a number of years, as Table 1 demonstrates, the school's post-16 roll gradually fell, reflecting the challenges faced by a high school in an area surrounded by popular and successful selective and church schools, offering a wide range of post-16 options. The addition of single sex secondary school options, in nearby Tonbridge, and of comprehensive schools, less than ten miles away in East Sussex, meant that maintaining a Sixth Form was no longer viable.

(6) By 2003/04 the numbers of students in the Sixth Form had fallen to 30. The only way sixth form provision could continue would have been by using a cross-subsidy using formula funding intended for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4. This was not considered justifiable. In order to secure the school's budget, governors were obliged to suspend the operation of the Sixth Form with effect from September 2005.

(7) The school believes it has benefited from the suspension of the Sixth Form in as much as skilled teachers, who previously taught at 16+, have been re-deployed to Key Stage 3 and 4 classes. This has contributed to an upward trajectory in results at the end of Key Stage 4 and to an outstanding performance as indicated by Contextual Value Added, validated by Ofsted in February 2005 and again in a 'themed inspection' of science provision, in December 2006.

(8) In summary, suspension of the school sixth form was necessary and there have been real and significant ways in which the school has made a virtue of that necessity.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) The proposal is to change the designated age range of Tunbridge Wells Community High School, from co-educational provision for students aged 11 to 19 years, to co-educational provision for students aged 11 to 16 years.

(2) This will consolidate the already established partnership for post 16 progression routes with West Kent College and other local sixth forms. A closer working

relationship with nearby West Kent College has been developed, so that all Tunbridge Wells High students have ready access to the vast range of post-16 opportunities at the College. These are jointly promoted by school and by college staff.

(3) Data from Connexions show that a higher than ever percentage of Tunbridge Wells High students are progressing at 16+ into education or employment with training. As collaboration continues to develop between partner institutions in the area, this trend of developing the right pathways for students will continue.

## **Consultation**

4. (1) There is no prescribed consultation process that must be followed in order to secure a change of age status for a school. However, guidance from the DCSF suggests that it is good practice to seek the views of all stakeholders likely to be affected by the proposal.

(2) Accordingly, the school wrote to all appropriate stakeholders on 2 November 2007. Appendix 1 comprises the consultation letter that informs them about this proposal. It was sent to all parents/carers of current students and to the governors and staff of Tunbridge Wells Community High School. Also included in the circulation were the Tunbridge Wells Cluster of Schools, the West Kent Learning Federation and the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council.

(3) Attached to the consultation letter was a Reply Form for respondents to express their views before the closing date of 14 December 2007.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

5. (1) 57 responses were received, of which 52 were in favour, and 5 were against the proposal.

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

(3) In the circumstances, a Public Meeting was not deemed necessary.

## **Views of the Governing Body**

6. The Governing Body of the school, having taken the decision to suspend the Sixth Form arrangements in 2005, is fully supportive of the proposal to formally re-designate the age range of students at the school.

## **Views of the Local Member**

7. Mr Kevin Lynes, the Local Member, fully supports this proposal.

## **Views of the Cluster Board**

8. The Tunbridge Wells Cluster Board fully supports the proposal to regularise the position at the school.

## **Views of the Learning and Skills Council**

9. The Learning and Skills Council for Kent and Medway has been fully involved in developing partnership arrangements to secure progression routes for post-16 students from Tunbridge Wells High, and so fully supports this proposal.

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

10. The Area Education Officer fully supports this proposal.

### **Resource Implications**

#### *Capital*

11. (1) There are no capital resource implications.

#### *Revenue*

(2) As the school currently does not make use of its designation to educate sixth form students there are no revenue implications.

#### *Human*

(3) No staff are currently employed in connection with the school's designation to educate sixth form students. Therefore, no changes to staffing arrangements are envisaged by the proposal.

### **Equality Issues**

12. There are no equality issues particular to this proposal.

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

13. There are no transport, environmental or community implications now arising from this proposal. The school has a Transport Plan in place. Post 16 students from Tunbridge Wells High will continue to transfer to a range of post-16 education, training and employment pathways, as they have been since September 2005.

### **School Improvement Implications**

14. The proposal provides for more effective and efficient progression routes at post 16.

### **Links to the School Organisation Plan**

15. This proposal is consistent with the aims, principles, policies and priorities within the School Organisation Plan, with specific reference to Section 4 and Section 5 (5.1-5.3.1 and 5.3.4) and Section 6 (6.1-6.3, 6.14, 6.20).

### **Proposed Timetable**

16. If it is decided that a Public Notice should be issued in respect of this proposal, the following could apply as follows:

Cabinet Member Decision	February 2008
Issue of Public Notice	February 2008
End of Statutory Objection Period	April 2008
Cabinet Member Decision	June 2008
Adjudication (if necessary)	July/August 2008
Implementation, if agreed	September 2008

### **Recommendation:**

17. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought:
- (a) on the issuing of a public notice to change the designated age range of Tunbridge Wells High School from 11-19, to 11-16 years only.

Chris Lay  
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The Local Member is Mr Kevin Lynes.

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*Background Documents:*

None