

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 10 January 2008.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mr R B Burgess (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr C J Capon, Mr M J Northey, Mr A R Poole and Mr M J Vye

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M C Dance and Mr C T Wells

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr I Craig (Director Strategy Policy & Performance), Mr M Doole (Area Education Officer Thanet & Dover) and Ms C Lay (Area Education Officer Sevenoaks, Swanley, Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook and Paddock Wood)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2007
(Item. 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2007 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

2. Tunbridge Wells Community High School - Proposed Change at Age Range to Remove the Sixth Form from the School's Formal Designation
(Item. 4)

(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. Tunbridge Wells Community High School was 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 did not, however, provide for temporary changes to the age range of a school. The proposal had, therefore, been brought forward to regularise the position and to bring it into line with legislative requirements.

(2) Members agreed to a more limited public consultation exercise than was 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. Appendix 1 of the report comprised the consultation letter distributed to all key stakeholders on 2 November 2007. The report summarised the outcome of the consultation process.

(3) Tunbridge Wells Community High School was a small non-selective secondary school located to the east of Tunbridge Wells. The roll was 436 (January 2007 pupil census) and was forecast to remain relatively constant over the

next few years. It did not have sixth form students currently on roll, and had not done so since the sixth form arrangements were suspended from September 2005. Post 16 students from Tunbridge Wells High had been successfully transferring to alternative courses.

(4) By 2003/04 the number 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.

(5) The school believed it had benefited from the suspension of the Sixth Form in as much as skilled teachers, who previously taught at 16+, had been re-deployed to Key Stage 3 and 4 classes. This had 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. Suspension of the school sixth form was necessary and there had been real and significant ways in which the school had made a virtue of that necessity.

(6) The proposal would 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 had been developed, so that all Tunbridge Wells High students had ready access to the vast range of post-16 opportunities at the College.

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

(8) There was 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 suggested that it was good practice to seek the views of all stakeholders likely to be affected by the proposal. Accordingly, the school wrote to all appropriate stakeholders on 2 November 2007. 57 responses were received, of which 52 were in favour, and 5 were against the proposal.

(9) The Governing Body of the school, having taken the decision to suspend the Sixth Form arrangements in 2005, was fully supportive of the proposal to formally re-designate the age range of students at the school. The Local Member, Mr K Lynes, and the Tunbridge Wells Cluster Board fully supported the proposal.

(10) The Learning and Skills Council for Kent and Medway had been fully involved in developing partnership arrangements to secure progression routes for post-16 students from Tunbridge Wells High, and so fully supported the proposal; as did the Area Education Officer.

(11) There were no capital resource implications, and as the school currently did not make use of its designation to educate sixth form students there were no revenue implications. No staff were currently employed in connection with the

school's designation to educate sixth form students. Therefore, no changes to staffing arrangements were envisaged by the proposal.

(12) The Advisory Board agreed to 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, in accordance with the timescale set out in the report.

3. The Hereson (Community) School and Ellington (Community) School for Girls - Proposed Amalgamation - Outcome of Public Consultation (Item. 5)

(1) The report set out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls. It sought the views of the Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice to close both schools and establish a new school on the Ellington site.

(2) The Hereson School had a published admission number of 120 and a net capacity of 688. In September 2007 there were 506 pupils on roll giving a surplus capacity of 26%. Ellington School for Girls had a published admission number of 120 and a net capacity of 642. In September 2007 there were 390 pupils on roll giving a surplus capacity of 39%.

(3) Both Ellington and The Hereson were good schools with considerable strengths and strong community links. Merging the two schools would sustain good quality high school provision within Ramsgate over the long term, retaining the strengths of each within a viable 4FE school, providing excellent facilities for all. The new site of Ellington School for Girls suitably adapted, offered the opportunity to realise this goal. It was located closer to the greatest concentration of existing Hereson student's homes than the current site of The Hereson School. The map at Appendix 2 of the report showed the location of the new Ellington site and the existing Hereson site in relation to the home locations of the students currently on roll at The Hereson School.

(4) The amalgamation would create a new 4FE school with a PAN of 120 serving both boys and girls age 11-16. At the point of amalgamation in September 2009, there would be an estimated 692 pupils on the combined roll of both schools. The roll would reduce as the larger year groups at the top end of the school were replaced by smaller year groups coming in at Year 7. It was proposed to phase the amalgamation by adopting a one-year transition period from 2009-10. The new Year 7 together with Years 8, 9 and 10 would move onto the Ellington site in September 2009. The Hereson Year 11 would remain on the existing Hereson site to complete their final GCSE year. With effect from 2010 all pupils would be on the Ellington site. This would mean that the total pupil numbers on the new Ellington site would remain within the physical capacity of the accommodation (c.600).

(5) The proposal included the establishment of what would be a new school and was therefore potentially subject to competition regulations under the Education and Inspection Act 2006. The Local Authority applied to the Secretary of State for an exemption from external competition and permission to publish a proposal to establish a new school, subject to the outcome of the public consultation process.

The Secretary of State had decided not to grant an exemption from the competition regulations in relation to this proposal.

(6) The implication of this decision was that the Local Authority could only publish its own proposal to establish a new school if the proposal was published as part of a competition process. Other proposers now had the opportunity to submit a proposal to run the new school, as part of a competition process run by the Local Authority and on the basis of a specification for the new school which was drawn up by the Local Authority and published as part of the first competition notice, which was referred to in the published timetable for competition as set out in the original public consultation document.

(7) The views of the local members Mrs E Green, Mr A Poole, Mr W Hayton and Mr J Fullarton were set out in the report, together with those of the Local MP; Governing Bodies; pupils; Thanet 2 Cluster Board; and Area Education Officer.

(8) Adaptations to the new buildings would be needed to cater for a mixed intake and a feasibility study was being undertaken. The initial assessment was that approximately £200K would be needed to support adaptations to the site from 2009 so that it could cater for boys and girls. Further technical work was necessary to firm up the figure.

(9) As part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, a submission was being made to secure significant additional funding which would be used to further enhance the excellent facilities already available on the Ellington site. Allocation of this funding was subject to ongoing discussion and negotiation and approval by Partnership for Schools and the DCSF.

(10) Following discussion the Advisory Board supported the amalgamation of The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls, and, if agreed, supported the issuing of a competition notice to initiate a competition to establish a new 4FE high school on the site of Ellington School for Girls.

4. The Proposed Relocation of Portal House School, Dover to the Site of the former Newington Infant School, Thanet *(Item. 6)*

(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 report proposed the relocation of Portal House Special school to the site of the former Newington Infants School in Thanet with effect from 1 September 2009.

(2) The school was 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. The existing accommodation at Portal House was unsuitable for its secondary age designation and the increase in the overall size of the school from 45 – 60 students. Funding was available through the Building Schools for the

Future (BSF) programme to provide new purpose built accommodation. However, the existing site was 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. The former Newington Infants School site provided the potential for development as a suitable site for Portal House. Development would require major new build on the footprint of the existing school building. It would also be necessary to use a small portion of the adjacent playing field site which currently belonged to Clarendon House.

(4) The Newington site had a number of significant advantages which commended its suitability for the relocation of Portal House:-

- It was available and already owned by KCC.
- It was sufficient in terms of space and provided a pleasing environment for students. The site could accommodate state of the art new buildings, as envisaged under the BSF scheme.
- A significant number of pupils (14) came from the Thanet area and approximately half of these came from Ramsgate. Travelling distances would therefore be reduced and parental contact with the school potentially eased by closer proximity to home.
- Use of the Newington site would allow Portal House to benefit from participation in Wave 4 of the BSF programme generating major capital investment by 2009.

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

(6) Views of the local Members, Mrs E Green and Mr A Poole were set out in the report.

(7) Relocation to the Newington site 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.

(8) The largest number of students currently at Portal House School, came from Thanet. Given the residential profile of existing students, the overall impact of relocation was likely to be that travelling times would be reduced. Even with Portal House full at 60 pupils, the overall number of pupils was small and many lived in the locality. It was not anticipated that the relocation would generate significant problems with traffic or congestion locally. Certainly, the situation in St Margaret's-at-Cliffe would be improved significantly, given the narrow road and difficult access to the existing school site.

(9) The Board supported the proposal that there should be a public consultation on the possible relocation of Portal House School from its existing site at St

Margaret's-at-Cliffe to the former Newington Infants School in Thanet, in accordance with the timetable set out in the report.

5. New School Competitions

(Item. 7)

(1) At its meeting on 14 November 2007, the Board considered a proposed procedure for opening new schools via a competition process. Members' comments had been incorporated into the revised procedure that was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

(2) The Board noted the revised process and thanked Mr D Adams, Area Education Officer – Ashford and Shepway for circulating to Members.

6. Schools Applying for Foundation/Trust Status

(Item. 8)

(1) A paper was presented to the Advisory Board on 17 October 2007 informing Members of the Government's encouragement of all schools to consider Foundation/Trust status, and of the 'fast track' procedures to achieve it. The procedures required a governing body to consult 'interested parties' (including the LA) over a minimum of a four week period, before determining themselves. Unless there were very good reasons not to do so, the change of status would be approved.

(2) At SOAB it was agreed that, as the consultation period would not normally allow the LA time to prepare paperwork for SOAB to comment:-

- (a) unless there were very good reasons to the contrary the presumption would be that the LA would not oppose any governing body wishing to move to Foundation or Trust status;
- (b) the Director (Operations) would consult with the Cabinet Member and local Member(s) before responding to a consultation on Foundation or Trust status; and
- (c) responses would be reported to the next available SOAB.

(3) The LA was informed on 15 November 2007 that Broomhill Bank Special School, Tunbridge Wells, had assumed Foundation status, with effect from 13 November 2007. Cabinet Members and the local Member, Mr J Davies, had been informed.

(4) There were now 58 Foundation schools in Kent (13 Primary, 44 Secondary and 1 Special) and 91 Aided schools (78 Primary and 13 Secondary) – a total of 149, and in addition, 7 Academies = 156. For the sake of simplicity, Aided schools should be considered as having the same status as Foundation/Trust schools.

(5) The LA was informed on 19 December 2007 that Borden Grammar School, Sittingbourne had begun a consultation on Foundation status, running from 14 January 2008 to 10 February 2008. The Cabinet Member, Mr Dance, and the local Members Mrs B Simpson and Mr R Truelove had been informed (19 December) with a view that it should not be opposed.

(6) The Board noted the report.