

By: Director – Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 05 November 2008

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS (COMMUNITY) HIGH SCHOOL TO REPLACE WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a Public Consultation on the closure of Tunbridge Wells High School, in order that it may be replaced with a government funded Academy.

Introduction

1. (1) Tunbridge Wells Community High School is a small, co-educational, non selective, secondary school located to the east of Tunbridge Wells town. A location map and a site plan are attached as Appendices 1 and 2. The school's age range was revised from 11-19 to 11-16 in September 2008, following a formal process. Most students currently access post 16 provision at West Kent College (which is a co-sponsor to this Academy proposal). The school had a roll of 404 students in Years 7 to 11, on PLASC 2008.

(2) The school serves an urban community within Tunbridge Wells town and very few students are drawn from further than 3 miles of the school (Appendix 3 comprises a student distribution map). Students come from an area which is marked by unexpected levels of social disadvantage within the Royal Borough, with the majority living on the Sherwood Park estate, the most deprived ward in the Borough, recognised as one of the 20% most deprived wards in Kent and Medway.

(3) The socio-economic profile of the current student intake, at Tunbridge Wells High School, is well below national and Kent averages. The proportion of students identified as having Special Educational Needs is very high at 62.9%. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 24.3%, which is considerably above the National average of 13.6% and Kent average of 7.9%. In 2007 9.4% of students had English as an additional language and nearly 20% of the school roll is admitted at varying times throughout the school year.

(4) In terms of attainment, 43% of students gained 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C in 2007. This had risen from 24% in 2003. The percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C, including English and Maths, had risen from 10% in 2003, to 22% in 2007. This led to the school being included in the DCSF 'National Challenge', earlier this year, despite its Contextual Value Added being consistently so high as to place Tunbridge Wells High School in the top 6% of schools nationally for four successive years. 2008 GCSE results are, as yet, provisional. The disappointing GCSE A*-C results, including English and Maths, also make the school eligible for inclusion in the Academy programme.

(5) This provides a 'one off' opportunity to transform life chances for young people in Tunbridge Wells, many of whom are currently choosing to travel outside of Tunbridge Wells for their secondary schooling. The vision for The Tunbridge Wells Academy is to create an exceptional school which embeds an ethos of high academic standards reflected in good student attainment, increased levels of post-16 participation, together with a highly innovative, vocationally based, curriculum that utilises the expertise of all sponsors. There will be an unremitting focus on tackling low levels of prior attainment and on raising standards to ensure that young people are equipped with the skills and knowledge to access higher level learning.

(6) The Tunbridge Wells Academy will specialise in Science and Engineering with a strong priority being given to the Academy's profile in Technology and Mathematics. The Academy will also be a centre of excellence for the development of business skills and enterprise. There will be a focus on the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for children and young people within the context of Children's Trust arrangements in Kent.

Academy Proposal

2. (1) The Tunbridge Wells Academy will be established following the necessary closure of Tunbridge Wells High School. The lead sponsor for The Tunbridge Wells Academy will be the Skinners Voluntary Aided Grammar School, while co-sponsors will be West Kent College and Kent County Council (KCC).

(2) The Tunbridge Wells Academy will be an 11-18 co-educational school for all abilities. It will have 6 forms of entry and admit up to 180 students into Year 7. The number of post 16 places available will be 250, taking the roll to a possible 1,150 by 2015. It is proposed that the Tunbridge Wells Academy will open in September 2009, in existing buildings and move into new buildings in September 2012.

(3) Sponsors intend that the Academy will be a place in which all learners have a sense of identity, worth, aspiration and belonging, so that they can develop to the extent of their capabilities and achieve the 5 ECM outcomes for children and young people. The Academy will adopt and adapt the key transferable features that constitute a stable, supportive home life and a healthy, successful working life. The Academy should resemble a village rather than a school.

[4] Collectively, the Sponsors are able to draw upon considerable skills and expertise in the fields of learning, school and college management and the new learning technologies. The Academy will bring about a culture change and raise the attainment, ambition, thrill of creativity and aspiration for all the young people in its care, building on everything that makes Tunbridge Wells High School a high achieving school.

Resource Implications

Capital

3. (1) Following a recent change in regulations the LA is no longer expected to make a £1m donation to the Academy's Endowment Fund. Should any part of the current Tunbridge Wells High school site be disposed of, however, the DCSF would expect a contribution to the capital costs of the Academy and this would be negotiated at a corporate level within the context of Kent's BSF programme.

Revenue

(2) The Academy will receive its revenue funding directly from the DCSF each year. It will be funded at a rate equivalent to other Kent specialist schools, plus an appropriate share of the central LA costs.

Human

(3) Consultation will take place in accordance with the requirements of TUPE. Costs of new staffing (TUPE applies to current staff) and costs associated with TUPE, including any valid redundancies of staff which cannot transfer or be deployed elsewhere in Kent schools, would be negotiated with the DCSF on a case by case basis.

Equality Issues

4. There are no specific equality implications arising from this proposal

Transport and Road Safety Implications

5. Securing sustainable methods of travel for students is central to the establishment of an Academy in Tunbridge Wells. With the increase in the numbers of students on site envisaged, it will be crucial to ensure that an appropriate school travel plan is in place upon the opening of the Academy. Students will be encouraged to travel to school through the most sustainable methods possible including encouraging a good uptake of the Kent Freedom Pass.

School Improvement Implications

6. (1) The closure of the current school to provide for the establishment of an Academy will lead to new 'state of the art' facilities, curriculum innovation, together with the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. It is intended that the investment in facilities, curriculum and funding flexibility that the Academy will bring, would have a positive impact on current standards of attainment, and for improved life opportunities for the local community.

(2) Tunbridge Wells High School was last inspected in February 2005 when it was found that 'Tunbridge Wells High School is a good school. The school has a strong caring ethos and pupils are proud of it and feel valued and supported.....Overall, pupils achieve well, in relation to their standards on arrival at the school'.

View of Local Member

7. The Local Member, Mr Kevin Lynes, supports this proposal.

Views of the Governing Body

8. The Governing Body of Tunbridge Wells High School is in support of proposals for the establishment of an Academy.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

9. The Area Children's Services Officer considers that this proposal provides an excellent 'once in a life time' opportunity to secure transformational educational facilities for students of all abilities living in Tunbridge Wells.

Proposed Timetable

10. Should Public Consultation be agreed, the following timetable is proposed:

School Organisation Advisory Board	05 November 2008
Publication of consultation document	10 November 2008
Public Meeting	w.c. 24 November or 1 December 2008
Closing date for responses	19 December 2008
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board	8 January 2009
Cabinet Member decision	Mid January 2009
Issue Public Notice	End January 2009
End of Public Notice period	Mid March 2009
Implementation (subject to outcome)	31 August 2009

11. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on this proposal for a Public Consultation to be undertaken, in conjunction with the Governing Body, on the proposal for the closure of Tunbridge Wells High School in order for it to be replaced with a government funded academy.

Chris Lay
Area Children's Services Officer
Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells
Tel: (01732) 525107

Background Papers:

Report to SOAB of 10 January 2008: TUNBRIDGE WELLS HIGH SCHOOL-PROPOSED CHANGE OF AGE RANGE TO REMOVE THE SIXTH FORM FROM THE SCHOOL'S FORMAL DESIGNATION