

By:	Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member, Education, Learning and Skills
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To:	Education Cabinet Committee – 21 November 2012
Subject	Decision No.12/01977-Amalgamation of Walmer Science College (Community School) and Castle Community College (Academy)
Classification:	Unrestricted

Summary:	This report sets out the results of the public consultation on a proposal from the governing bodies of Walmer Science College and Castle Community College, together with Kent County Council, to bring together the two secondary schools to form one school for the Walmer/Deal community, which will be an Academy.
Recommendations:	That a recommendation is made to Cabinet to issue a public notice for the closure of Walmer Science College (Community) from September 2013 conditional upon the agreement of the Secretary of State to enlarge Castle Community College (Academy).

This paper should be read in conjunction with the report to Education Cabinet Committee on 12 September 2012. The report is available via the following link: <http://kent590w3:9070/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=746&MId=4880&Ver=4>

1. Introduction and Proposal

1.1 On 12 September 2012, Education Cabinet Committee recommended to the Cabinet Member that a consultation take place regarding the proposal from the governing bodies of Walmer Science College and Castle Community College, together with Kent County Council to bring together the schools to form one secondary school which would be an Academy.

1.2 The governing bodies of both schools recognise the need to consider whether the demand for secondary education in the area will, in the future, support two separate schools. The idea of joining the schools to form one larger and more sustainable organisation has been debated for several years. In 2009 the governing bodies wished to amalgamate the schools, but the proposal was put into abeyance because of external factors. The governing bodies and the Local Authority now wish to bring forward the proposal again for the following reasons:

- (i) The total rolls have fallen with very low intakes in Years 7 and 8 at Walmer Science College.
- (ii) The projected number of pupils will not sustain two schools.
- (iii) The financial effect of sharing the available pupils and therefore the funding for them will mean budget deficits, staffing cuts and narrowing of curriculum choice, which would affect both schools.

- (iv) Walmer Science College in particular will face a growing deficit budget which would result in a shortfall of approximately £1m. The action needed to address this will render the school unviable.
- (v) Government capital investment at Castle Community College through the Priority Schools Building programme will enable the rebuild of the school to accommodate 1,300 students; large enough to accommodate the students of both schools, currently and in the future.

1.3 Much better facilities will be offered through the new build resulting from the Priority School Building Programme funding, so that all pupils in time can be educated on one site. For the present both school sites would continue to operate as the new build on the Castle site would not be expected to be completed before 2016.

1.4 To achieve the proposed amalgamation, Walmer Science College would merge with Castle Community College, which would enlarge to take the Walmer students. Because Castle Community College is an Academy, the technical means of achieving this would be to issue a Public Notice which would in effect close Walmer Science College. This proposal is conditional upon the Secretary of State's agreement to the enlargement of Castle Community College

1.5 This report sets out the results of the public consultation, which took place between 4 October and 15 November 2012.

2. The Public Consultation

2.1 Approximately 2,500 hard copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. The consultation document was distributed to parents/carers, staff and governors of both schools, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local library, Dover District Council, and others, in accordance with the agreed County policy. The document was also posted on the KCC website and the link to the website widely circulated. (www.kent.gov.uk/WalmerandCastle). There was the opportunity to send in written responses using the response form, email and online.

2.2 Two public meetings were held during the consultation period, Wednesday 17 October at Walmer Science College and Thursday 18 October at Castle Community College. Both meetings were well attended by parents, governors, staff and interested parties, with approximately 160 people at the Walmer meeting and 150 at the Castle meeting. Attendance included the Member of Parliament for the area, the Local Members, and District Councillors.

2. Outcomes of the Public Consultation

Written Responses – to be tabled at the meeting

3.1 The public consultation closes on Thursday 15 November. By 7 November, 458 responses had been received; 50 in favour of the proposal, 399 against and 9 undecided. The final numbers will be tabled at the meeting on 21 November.

3.2 A summary of written responses received by 7 November is attached as Appendix 1. An updated version of Appendix 1 will be tabled at the meeting on 21 November.

- 3.3 Mr Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for ELS was presented with a petition when he met with the Dover Mercury newspaper on 31 October. The petition was signed by 640 people opposing the proposal, approximately 400 of whom indicated that they lived in the Deal/Walmer locality.

Public Meeting Responses

- 3.3 A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meetings is attached as Appendix 2.

4. Views

4.1 Views of the Local Members

The Local Members for Deal and Walmer are Mr Kit Smith and Mrs Julie Rook. Both Members attended the public meetings and their views are as follows:

Mr Kit Smith

- Mr Smith is a Member of the Education Cabinet Committee and does not wish to form a judgement until he has seen or heard all the evidence.

Mr Smith will decide with the other Members of the Education Cabinet Committee at the meeting on 21 November, on the recommendation to be made to Mr Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for ESL, on the basis of all the information gathered.

Mrs Julie Rook

I want to take an unemotional and logical view of the issue in hand and whilst I totally understand the views of current pupils and their parents, I am looking to the future and want the best education for the children of Deal. After assessing all the information I have concluded that secondary education will need to be provided in one centralised and highly resources rebuilt school rather than delivered in two smaller separate ones.

I would like to add a few caveats however:

1. That the school remaining open is given a new name and a new uniform chosen in consultation with pupils and parents and that this new uniform be provided at no cost to current parents.
2. That the school remaining open allows all employees the opportunity to compete for positions.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Education assures us that Walmer Science College will be retained as an educational facility along with Barnes Close Cricket Club.
4. That an independent study is undertaken to inform us of the impact of future population growth to ensure any bulge can be catered for smoothly and pragmatically.
5. That a traffic impact assessment is undertaken without delay and a traffic management plan developed and implemented.
6. That all pupils, particularly those with special needs and those undertaking summative Key Stage examinations receive extra pastoral support and educational continuity.

4.2 Views of the Governing Bodies

Walmer Science College

The Governing Body of Walmer Science College is overwhelmingly in favour of the merger of the two schools. A year ago it came to realise that falls in the school's roll meant that unless action was taken the school faced a deficit in its budget in three years' time of over £750m. Despite action being taken to reduce staffing, another small intake into Year 7 this year means that projections for the next three years indicate an increased deficit. This would necessitate further substantial reduction in staff numbers.

At the same time, governors realised that those falls in roll meant that it will be difficult to offer a full range of subjects to the current Year 9, which has fewer than 120 students, when they reach Key Stage 4, and that it will be impossible to do so for the current Year 8, which has fewer than 60 students, when they reach Key Stage 4 in two years' time.

In seeking to address the problems governors took the decision to look again at joining with Castle Community college. Both schools are significantly under the average size for secondary schools and that has an impact on the provision they can make for their pupils. There has been concern for a number of years that students in Deal are at a disadvantage compared with those in Sandwich and Dover, where larger schools can offer more and better facilities and greater choice and variety in the curriculum particularly at Key Stage 4.

The fact that Castle Community College has secured funding for a totally new building means that this is a heaven sent opportunity to join these schools, which need each other to offer Deal students the excellence of provision they deserve, on one site with a range of facilities and curriculum provision to stand comparison any secondary school in Kent.

In summary there were two imperatives guiding Walmer Governors in their decision to vote to bring together Walmer Science College and Castle Community College.

1. Very serious concern that this school may soon be in a position where it can no longer provide an adequate level of provision for all its pupils.
2. Even more importantly, governors were convinced that a single school on a single site will offer the students of Deal a range of provision and opportunity that neither Walmer Science College or Castle Community College can possibly ever offer on their own.

Castle Community College

We the Governing Body of Castle Community College fully support the proposal to bring together Castle Community College and Walmer Science College for the following reasons;

- In 2007 we worked together to form a joint 6th form which opened in 2009. This 6th form has gone from strength to strength. In 2012 we offer 34 subjects and an increase of 14% in exams results this year.
- We see this proposal as a natural move from the joint 6th form. Having one medium size School in the Deal Area would afford the following;
 - It would secure education for our pupils for the foreseeable future.
 - It would offer a broad and balanced curriculum. That will prepare our young people for the workplace.
 - Most pupils would be in walking distance of the new school.

- The Walmer site would be ideal for a 6th form College, it would also offer head room for the future.

4.3 Views of Mr Philip Bunn, Executive Principal, Castle Community College and Walmer Science College

The Public Consultation Meetings enabled staff, students and governors from both schools, and members of the public from the local and wider community to hear the rationale behind the joint proposal, which aims to provide access to a high quality education for all students in the Deal/Walmer area for years to come. The meetings also provided a detailed explanation of the financial, school roll, and academic standards situation facing Walmer Science College – details which the general public would not ordinarily be aware of.

Clearly, feelings run high when a school closure is being discussed – hopefully the community has a better understanding of why the governors of both schools, in conjunction with KCC, are working together on this proposal and trying not to stigmatise Walmer Science College with ‘closure’.

- The student numbers projected for the area shows no appreciable need for growth in secondary school places, and the number of students in the area will not sustain two secondary schools. That is clear.
- On 25th October 2012, the DfE/EFA confirmed that Castle Community College will receive a brand new school to house 1300 students with a projected opening date of September 2016.
- Castle Community College roll is expanding, and Walmer Science College roll is contracting, which means that action is urgently needed – without it, Walmer Science College is facing a painful death if the current situation is not addressed.
- No one has suggested any alternative proposals to address the situation – the same arguments for a single school for Deal/Walmer that were discussed 3 years ago have not gone away.

The financial position of Walmer Science College shows a clear and significant deficit which has to be addressed with some urgency. The status quo is not an option:

- Walmer Science College faces significant staff reductions/redundancies to address the large budget deficit (c £1million by 2014/15). The scale of these staff reductions is likely to make the school unviable.
- The Walmer Science College school roll continues to fall; a situation that doesn't look likely to improve in the future. Parent attendance at the Walmer Science College Open Mornings/Evenings was very low. On 23rd October 2012, 16 families attended the Open Evening and 5 families attended the Open Morning. There are a number of reasons for this low attendance (including the impact of the Public Consultation and threat of closure being made public), but it seems highly unlikely that the recruitment of students to Year 7 in September 2013 will show any appreciable increase on the past 2 years.

Staff at both schools have a clear understanding of the rationale for the proposal, but understandably, have very different views about the proposal. Staff at Castle Community College are much more positive about the proposal, Walmer Science

College staff are very concerned about their jobs and feel that they are being 'taken over'.

It is very clear that if the proposal for the merger is to go ahead, planning for the transition/ integration of the students/staff into the enlarged Castle Community College needs careful early planning, which should involve all members of the two school communities in order to address/overcome any of their concerns and make the merger a success.

In conclusion, there are many concerns about the merger from the various parties - this is understandable. But it is my belief that none of the concerns expressed by any parties are insurmountable, and that the opportunities afforded to the students, both current and future, far outweigh any of the reasons stated for the status quo to continue.

4.4 Views of the Students – provided by the Executive Principal

Walmer Science College

Students at Walmer Science College have been able to express their views in a number of ways:

- Following assemblies led by the Head of School Julia Scannell, form tutors have held discussions with students, who have all had the opportunity to submit written responses to the consultation.
- In addition, representatives from each Key Stage have met with Chair of Governors, Robin Curtis, Head of School, Julia Scannell, and Executive Principal, Philip Bunn. The School Council has also discussed the merger proposal. Students have been given the opportunity to seek explanations for the proposal, ask questions about it, and express their views and opinions.

These meetings were very useful in helping students to gain a better understanding of the issues, and clarify the myths, misconceptions and rumours that have been circulating in the locality and press about the consultation e.g. the press reporting that Walmer Science College staff had not been allowed to speak in the Public Consultation Meetings (not true).

Understandably, Walmer Science College students have strong views against the proposal. None of the students want their school to close. There is a strong '*anti*' feeling against and a degree of hostility towards the proposal.

Older students have a better understanding of the impact of falling rolls on the school's finances and, ultimately, the viability of the school. They are also able to understand the restrictions that these place on the curriculum and subject choices at KS4 and the curriculum. The Key Stage 4/Sixth Form students can see the rationale behind the proposal, but still don't want closure to happen. These students expressed a strong view that if the proposal to merge goes ahead, they feel that they should have a major input into the transition arrangements.

The younger students find the financial/school roll issues more difficult to comprehend, and are very defensive about their school. The meetings with the Chair of Governors, Head of School and Executive Principal, have helped them to have a better understanding of the proposal, and given them the opportunity to express their views,

but these students are still opposed to it (possibly because they are more affected by the proposals than the older students)

Castle Community College

Students at Castle Community College have been able to express their views in a number of ways:

- Following assemblies led by the Principal, Philip Bunn, form tutors and members of the ALT have held discussions with students, who have all had the opportunity to submit written responses to the consultation.
- Students have been given the opportunity to seek explanations for the proposal, ask questions about it, and express their views and opinions both individually and through the School Council.

Castle Community College students expressed their concerns about the proposal. They are less '*anti*' or negative about the proposal (probably since it is not their school that is threatened with closure). However, it would not be accurate to say that they are all in favour of it.

Not many students have submitted written responses. The views expressed by students have focussed more on their concerns about the merger process and how their concerns about merging the two student bodies can be overcome. The younger students (Years 7 and 8) are more anxious about the proposal than the older students.

Sixth Form/Year 11 students talk about the positive effect that the joint sixth form has had, and hope that the integration process of the two schools could follow similar lines to the way that the joint sixth form was set up.

As with the Walmer Science College student discussions, the opportunity to dispel several myths and misconceptions has been helpful – Castle Community College students now have a better understanding of the issues.

Castle Community College students have expressed a strong view that they want to play as full a part in the transition/integration process as possible, and it is clear from the students at both schools, that if the proposal is to go ahead, then the students need to be as fully involved in the planning process as possible.

4.5 Views of Highways

Views have not been sought at this point from Highways. If the proposal goes ahead, the Academy will plan how both sites will be used and produce a revised Travel Plan accordingly. The rebuild of Castle Community College will go ahead whatever the outcome of the consultation and it is expected that the project, which will be managed by the DfE, will start in 2014. At that time Highways will be involved and the access to the school and the impact on the local area will be considered and consulted on.

4.5 Views of the Area Education Officer

The needs of young people to be able to access high quality secondary education in Deal are paramount. The current situation is untenable and will result in both existing schools being challenged in future to make good enough provision, due to financial

pressures resulting from the numbers of available pupils. The requirement for action now is inescapable and the opportunity offered through this proposal will enable high quality secondary provision to be secured for the pupils of Walmer and Deal.

The combined secondary rolls of the two schools, (currently 1080 Years 7-11) will constitute one medium-sized secondary school able to sustain the necessary future curriculum breadth. Walmer Science College will very quickly become unviable as a stand alone school, given the current small pupil intake numbers (51 in 2011 and 58 in 2012, with a PAN of 143). It is unlikely from the evidence available that the Year 7 intake in 2013 or in the future years will change this pattern.

The birth rate in the District rose after 2002 and is now falling again. At present there is 9.8% surplus capacity in the Deal primary schools. This is expected to reduce but some capacity will remain. The impact on numbers in secondary education has been taken into account in the pupil forecasts. The total number of secondary pupils is not projected to rise significantly in the coming years, taking into account proposed housing development.

5. Equality Impact Assessment

5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and can be found at:
http://consultations.kent.gov.uk/gf2.ti/f/317282/7615077.1/PDF/-/EIA%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20Report%20WSC_CCC%20August12.pdf

6. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the responses to the consultation, consider the proposal to merge Castle Community College and Walmer Science College to form one Academy from September 2013 and to recommend to Cabinet member for Education, Learning and Skills the issuing of a Public Notice to close Walmer Science College with effect from 31 August 2013, conditional upon the Secretary of State's agreement to the enlargement of Castle Community College.

7. Background Documents (and links to them)

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board: 8 October 2009
<http://kent590w3:9070/documents/s7809/Item%206%20-%20The%20Future%20of%20High%20School%20Provision%20in%20Deal.pdf>

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board: 7 January 2010
<http://kent590w3:9070/documents/s9168/Item%204%20-%20Walmer%20and%20Castle%20Amalgamation.pdf>

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