

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held on Wednesday, 16 May 2007 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Mrs V Dagger (Chairman), Mr W Hayton (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Miss S J Carey, Ms A Harrison (substitute for Mr A R Poole), Mr R A Marsh (substitute for Mr R Burgess), Mr M Northey and Mr M Vye.

OFFICERS: Dr I Craig (Director - Operations), Miss C Lay, Area Education Officer, (Sevenoaks/Tunbridge Wells), Mr C Feltham, Head of Additional Educational Needs and Resources, Mrs A Osborne, Area Education Officer (Canterbury/Swale) and Mr G Mills (Democratic Services).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J D Simmonds , Dr T R Robinson, Mr L B Ridings, Mr R Bristow, Director (Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education) and Canon J L Smith (Rochester Diocesan Board of Education).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2007

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2007 were agreed as a true record.

2. **Broomhill Bank Community Special School – Proposed Re-designation to a School for Communication and Inter-action (Autistic Spectrum and/or Specific Language Disorder) – Outcome of Public Consultation** *(Item 1 – Report by Director (Operations))*

Mr J A Davies, Mr A J King and Mr P W Lake were present for this item as local County Members.

Before the commencement of discussion on this item, correspondence was reported from Mr Greg Clark MP and Mr Alvin Chantler, Chairman of the Board of Governors for Broomhill Bank Community Special School.

(1) This report presented the results of a public consultation exercise undertaken on the proposal to re-designated Broomhill Bank Community Special School to become a co-educational day school, for 5-16 year olds with communication and inter-action needs (Autistic Spectrum and/or Specific Language Disorder).

(2) In introducing this item, Ms Lay said that there had been an exceptional level of responses to the public consultation. In all there had been some 1,805 responses of which nine were in favour and 1,796 were opposed to the proposal. A full summary of the written responses which had been received was set out in Appendix 5 to the report. The objections primarily focussed around four key themes, these being objection to the removal of single sex status; the proposed removal of 16+ provision; the proposed removal of residential provision and the value of Broomhill Bank as a centre of excellence and expertise.

(3) Mr Davies as the local Member, said that Broomhill Bank was an outstanding school and that the number of responses and the number of local people who were at the meeting demonstrated just how much the local community cared about the school and how much they objected to the proposals. Broomhill Bank was an exceptional school and Mr Davies said that he had asked back in February of this year when the matter was originally put forward for consultation, that these proposals should be referred back to officers. That was so that they could discuss with the Schools Governors and the local Cluster Board, a way forward which would be acceptable to both the school and those who benefited from the education provided by this exceptional school. Mr Davies said that many of the points he had originally put forward when this matter was discussed by the Board in February, had since been repeated and emphasised, both during the consultation period and the recent Parliamentary debate. After the extensive consultation which had been undertaken and the weight of views which had been expressed against the proposals he did not think that the local authority could be anything but moved to consider making amendments.

(4) Mr Davies said as the local Member, he had a responsibility to local residents, but also as a County Councillor he had to look at matters in the wider context. He was concerned that if no changes were made to the proposals being considered by the Advisory Board, then that could lead to the demise of the school because it would not fit the pattern required for the re-organisation of special schools within the county. The school may well have to change but it must not be destroyed as that would be a loss to everybody. There were compromises which could be achieved and these could include allowing boys to enter the school and they would undoubtedly benefit from its wealth of experience and expertise. Going co-educational would not be popular with many parents and the school's governors, but with appropriate safeguards to address their understandable concerns then that option could be made acceptable. Also, in their letter of 13 March 2007, the school governors agreed that the school's cohort was no longer purely MLD and therefore perhaps the school could, with its exceptional wealth of teaching experience become a centre of expertise for those with communication and interaction needs.

(5) Mr Davies also said that Broomhill Bank provided exceptional educational opportunities for young people and it should not be forced to close its doors to pupils at age 16. The school provided outstanding support to these young people and that should continue until they are age 19. As to the residential element, there appeared across the county, less need for such provision, but Mr Davies said he was convinced that the pupils who were resident at Broomhill Bank benefited greatly from the experience and support that provided. The training house in particular, was an essential part of the school's ethos and should be maintained as it provided significant benefits for all those who used it. In conclusion, Mr Davies urged the Advisory Board to take full account of the unquestionable support that the school had and to consider the wealth of evidence that had been put forward by local residents and the school's governors. This should be taken into account and the recommendations amended accordingly.

(6) Mr King said that the consultation demonstrated an overwhelming level of support from the local community for Broomhill Bank Special School. That level of support demonstrated that the council needed to think very carefully and to take fully account of the views expressed by the parents, school governors and local people. Broomhill Bank was a school which was quite special and there was a need to keep the best whilst at the same time finding a way forward which was better than what was being proposed in the report. Mr King urged officers to think again and said that it was rare that a public consultation should engender as much response as this one had.

(7) Mr Lake said that Broomhill Bank was a beacon on excellence and provided a safe and supportive environment to its pupils, many of which at sometime or another in their earlier lives, had been at risk or placed in a vulnerable situation. The school was forward thinking and therefore not afraid of change but the wellbeing of extremely vulnerable girls with learning difficulties and some with child protection histories needed to be taken into consideration. He was therefore glad to see that the local authority was taking these issues very seriously. Mr Lake also spoke about the school taking pupils from outside Kent and said that should be allowed to continue as there were examples of reciprocal arrangements whereby some Kent children went to schools outside the county. As for the boarding element, Mr Lake said that for some children this was a vital ingredient to their long term success. The school's OfSTED report for last year was highly favourable and said that the sixth form helped its students to achieve both academic and personal development and to leave as mature young people. With regard to the MLD designation, Mr Lake said that could be broadened but if change was to take place then that could take some children ie those with Downs Syndrome out of the system. In conclusion, Mr Lake read to the meeting a letter from a parent who said that since their daughter had joined the school she had thrived in its unique and special environment. Therefore, Mr Lake said changes may be made at the school but what was essential was not to destroy something which was helping children come from behind to end up in front.

(8) Mrs Dagger then read to the meeting a letter from Mr Greg Clark MP which further emphasised the points which was made in his earlier letter and was included in Appendix 9 of the report. In the letter's conclusion, Mr Clark urged the Board to advise the Cabinet Member to reject the proposals as they stand and guide him towards retaining the 16+ provision; retaining the residential unit and rejecting the proposed cut in the designated pupil number from 92 to only 56 pupils on site – a number that, if accepted, would signal the beginning of the end of the school.

(9) The Advisory Board then discussed in detail the proposals set out in the report by the Director of Operations. Following lengthy discussion and debate, Mr W Hayton proposed and Mr M Northey seconded that:-

- (i) paragraph 21 (b) of the report be amended so that the age range 5 to 16 be changed to read 5 to 19 year olds.
- (ii) the school role should be 80 pupils on site and 24 on outreach, with the retention of the independent living house.

(10) Mr M Vye proposed and Mrs C Angell seconded that the residential element at Broomhill Bank should be retained.

(11) On being put to the vote the proposal by Mr Vye was lost there being 3 for and 5 against.

(12) On being put to the vote the proposal by Mr Hayton was agreed unanimously.

(13) The recommendation of School Organisation Advisory Board to the Cabinet Member for Education and School Improvement and the Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services was:

- (a) a Public Notice be issued for the re-designation of Broomhill Bank Community Special School to a co-educational day school for 5-19 year olds with Communication and Interaction needs (Autistic Spectrum and/or Specific Language Disorder), with effect from April 2008;
- (b) subject to approval of the proposal, following the close of the period for representations to be made, the resources necessary to implement the proposal being provided on the basis identified in this report and in line with the Implementation Plan; and,
- (c) The total role of Broomhill Bank Community Special School should be 80 pupils on site, with 24 on Outreach with the retention also of the independent living house.

3. Planning Shepway Schools for the Future – Primary Phase – Outcome of Public Consultation

(Item 2 – report by Director – Operations) (Apologies for this part of the meeting were received from Mr Hayton, Mr Vye and Canon Smith).

Mr A D Crowther was present as a Local County Member.

- (1) This report set out the results of the public consultations on detailed proposals for each First School and for St. George's CE Middle School.
- (2) Mrs Osborne said that at present there are 7 first schools on Sheppey and these cater for pupils aged 4-8 years. In addition there is already one all through primary school catering for pupils aged 4-11 years and 3 middle schools catering for pupils aged 9-12 years. In the change to a 2-tier system the middle schools could become part of the primary phase or the secondary phase. There is at present no primary provision on the eastern end of the island (Warden Bay/Leysdown area). Children from these localities must be transported to first schools at least 3 miles away. The nearest first school is Eastchurch CE School.
- (3) During the consultation process approximately 4,560 copies of the documents were circulated and public meetings were held in Sheppey schools as detailed in Appendix 6 of the report. In total, for all the individual school proposals, 107 responses were received, of which 86 were in favour, 20 opposed and 1 undecided. The overarching proposal was to establish all through primary schools located in appropriate centres of population, of the right size to meet their community's needs. Each first school would be subject to some change and it was proposed St. George's CE Middle School would change from middle to primary.
- (4) A key issue was the provision of primary education for the east of the island. A significant proportion of the intake to Eastchurch CE Primary School lived at least 3 miles away. There was support for the provision of a primary school at Warden Bay to meet that need and also support for the alternative of enlargement of Eastchurch CE School. However, enlargement would require acquisition of land from Swale Borough Council currently used as a community cricket ground. That option would also mean continuance of travel for a large number of pupils. Provision of a new school at Warden Bay would require acquisition of land but it would better meet community needs. There was however strong preference from the community for federation of any new school in the Warden

Bay/Leysdown area with Eastchurch CE Primary School to ensure that the high quality of teaching and learning ethos was maintained in any new setting.

(5) Mr Crowther as the local County Member said that the eastern end of Sheppey was one of the most deprived and neglected parts of Kent. Provision of a primary school at Warden Bay or Leysdown had been a suggestion for many years and he fully supported the building of a new school at Warden Bay. Mr Crowther also supported the new school being linked to Eastchurch Primary School but because of the possible workload wondered felt consideration should be given to appointing two head teachers, one to operate in each school. Mr Crowther also said the new school building at Warden Bay should be opened at the same time as the other changes in relation to primary school provision on Sheppey take place.

(6) During discussion Ms Harrison proposed and Mrs Angell seconded that the issuing of a Public Notice should be approved and that primary school provision be developed on the Warden Bay site with that provision being linked to Eastchurch CE Primary School.

(7) Dr Craig said that if a new school at Warden Bay was to be linked to that of Eastchurch then that would raise some issues which would have to be explored with the DfES, such as how places would be allocated. In answer to a question regarding St. George's Church of England Middle School Dr Craig said that the Chief Inspector of Schools had just completed a review of the academy proposals and this was due to be submitted to Lord Adonis at the end of the month. This review would help inform the shape of secondary provision on the Isle of Sheppey and that may in turn affect St. George's. However that situation would need to be looked at and therefore the issuing of any public notice would be delayed until the outcome of the review of the academy proposals was known.

(8) Miss Carey said that although unable to attend the meeting Mr Vye had asked her to say on his behalf that he supported the detailed proposals as presented in the report. Miss Carey also placed on record her appreciation to officers for the way they had progressed and developed these proposals during the course of the consultation period.

(9) The Advisory Board then considered the proposal by Ms Harrison, seconded by Mrs Angell that the issuing of a Public Notice be approved and that primary school provision be developed on the Warden Bay site with that provision being linked to Eastchurch CE Primary School. This was agreed unanimously.

(10) The School Organisation Advisory Board agreed to:-

- the issuing of a public notice to establish the primary phase of education on the Isle of Sheppey;
- primary school provision being developed on the Warden Bay site with that provision being linked to Eastchurch CE Primary School; and
- subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme be provided on the basis identified in the report.