

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 11 July 2007

Subject: PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF BOUGHTON-UNDER-BLEAN METHODIST (VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED) PRIMARY SCHOOL AND DUNKIRK VILLAGE (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL – OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Boughton-under-Blean Methodist Primary School and Dunkirk Village School. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice for the closure of Dunkirk Village School.

Introduction

1. (1) Dunkirk Village School is a small rural community school and is federated with Boughton-under-Blean Methodist (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School situated 1.2 miles away. Both schools draw their pupils from the communities of Boughton and Dunkirk and from further afield.

(2) At its meeting on 18 April 2007 the School Organisation Advisory Board supported the proposal to consult on amalgamation of the two schools into a 1 FE primary school on the site of Boughton School (see Appendix 4 for the full report discussed at this meeting). This report sets out the results of the public consultation which was undertaken in May 2007.

(3) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 1 was distributed in accordance with County policy. This document contains background information and roll data to inform the consultation process.

Background

2. (1) Dunkirk Village School has a published admission number of 15 and a net capacity of 105. There are currently 59 pupils on roll giving a surplus capacity of 44%. There is a pre-school provision on site run by a private provider and there is a possibility that this may be resited at Selling CE Primary School.

(2) Boughton-under-Blean has a published admission number of 30 and a net capacity of 207. There are currently 203 pupils on roll which gives a surplus capacity of 1.93%. The school buildings are currently being upgraded and this will significantly improve the facilities. There is a pre-school provision on site run by a private provider.

(3) Amalgamation would remove 105 surplus places from the locality.

(4) Amalgamation would improve the educational experience of the pupils attending Dunkirk Village School.

The Proposal

3. (1) The proposal is to locate pupils from both schools on the Boughton School site from April 2008, and in future to provide a 1 form entry school to serve the local community of Boughton and Dunkirk.

(2) Current pupils attending both schools will be guaranteed a place at the Boughton School site.

Consultation Process

4. (1) The consultation document was distributed to staff, governors and parents at the schools, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, Parish Councils, the Diocesan Authorities, local libraries, the Borough Council and others in accordance with the agreed County policy. The document was also posted on the KCC website.

(2) Approximately 400 copies of the document were circulated, and a separate form was included for written responses.

(3) A public meeting was held at Boughton-under-Blean Methodist Primary School on 22 May 2007. Miss Susan Carey, member of SOAB, chaired the meeting. In attendance were Alison Osborne, Area Education Officer and other KCC officers. 40 people attended.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

5. (1) A total of 12 written responses were received of which 9 were in favour and 3 opposed.

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

Public Meeting Responses

(3) Summaries of points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting are attached as Appendix 3.

Views of the Local Members

6. The local member is Mr Andrew Bowles who supports the proposal.

Views of the Parish Councils

7. (1) The Parish Councils understand and support the educational reasons for this proposal.

(2) Dunkirk Parish Council sought assurances at the public meeting that the Parish Council would be informed of any alternative educational use proposed for the Dunkirk site.

Views of the Local Member of Parliament

8. Mr Hugh Robertson, the local Member of Parliament, "*is happy with the proposal*".

Views of Swale Borough Council

9. There has been no response from Swale Borough Council.

Views of the Methodist Visitor

10. Ms Christine Rogers, the Methodist Visitor responded: -

"I write to assure all concerned that the Methodist Church is pleased to give its unconditional support to the proposal to go forward to amalgamation, believing that this will be in the best interests of the pupils of both schools."

Views of the Governing Body

11. The federated governing body unanimously proposed this amalgamation because they feel there is currently an inequality of educational experience for pupils at the two schools.

Views of the Rural Swale Cluster Board

12. The Rural Swale Cluster Board, in consultation with the Cluster Headteachers, fully supports the proposal.

Views of the Area Education Officer

13. (1) There is evidence that the federation has led to important improvements, but it has not had the effect of encouraging more pupils to choose Dunkirk. The intake expected in Year R (1 child) will mean that next September the total roll at Dunkirk will be 47 at most.

(2) The federation with Boughton School has been of considerable benefit in effecting improvements in the quality of education provided for Dunkirk pupils but the impact of the falling roll means that only two classes will run for September 2007, despite considerable marketing. This will place at least three year groups in each class, and will adversely impact on the school's capacity to continue to improve its standards.

(3) The federation formed between Dunkirk and Boughton had the main aim of raising the quality of education provided for the children at both schools. Although progress has been made there are ongoing concerns about the long-term viability of Dunkirk. In particular, recruitment and retention of high quality staff remains an issue. The reduction to two classes will also hinder progress.

Transport and Environmental Impact including Community

Implications

14. (1) The earlier paper to SOAB, attached as Appendix 4, gave details of impact and implications.
- (2) Highways comment that:
- (a) Boughton Travel Plan was approved in 2005 and will be updated to encompass Dunkirk pupils
- (b) the school could consider possible use of parking at the village hall.

Proposed Timetable

15. If it is decided that a public notice should be issued in respect of the proposal, the following timetable could apply:

Issue public notice	6 September 2007
End of representation period	18 October 2007
Decision by Kent County Council	November 2007
Implementation	April 2008

16. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:
- (a) the amalgamation of Boughton-under-Blean Methodist Primary School and Dunkirk Village School
- (b) if agreed, the issuing of a public notice for the closure of Dunkirk Village School
- (c) subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme being provided on the basis identified in this report.

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The Local Member is Mr Andrew Bowles

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 18 April 2007

PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF BOUGHTON-UNDER-BLEAN (VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED) PRIMARY SCHOOL AND DUNKIRK VILLAGE SCHOOL

Summary of written responses

Consultation documents distributed: 400

Responses received:

	Support	Against	Undecided	Total
Parents/Carers of pupils at Dunkirk School	1	2	0	3
Parents/Carers of pupils at Boughton School	3	1	0	4
Members of staff at Dunkirk School	0	0	0	0
Members of staff at Boughton School	0	0	0	0
Federation governors	5	0	0	5
Interested party	0	0	0	0
Total	9	3	0	12

In support of the proposal

- The proposal will secure a good primary education for the children in the area with up to date accommodation.
- The Boughton site will become a focus for the community.
- The broader social and emotional development of pupils at Dunkirk is at risk because of the small numbers in the cohorts.
- A two class school for children aged 4-11 cannot meet their educational needs and is not conducive to maximising their potential.
- Although the staff at Dunkirk School do a great job our children need consistency and stability and the amalgamation cannot come soon enough.
- This would be the most logical solution.

Against the proposal

- Concern about temporary accommodation for the larger year groups.
- Concern regarding class sizes following amalgamation including reduced recreational facilities and lack of sufficient teaching expertise.
- Concern about pupils with SEN in larger classes and a larger school.
- Concern that the amalgamation will result in parents not having the choice of a small school in the locality.

PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF BOUGHTON-UNDER-BLEAN (VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED) PRIMARY SCHOOL AND DUNKIRK VILLAGE SCHOOL

Summary of the Public Meeting held on 22nd May 2007 at Boughton School

Approximately 40 people attended the public meeting including parents, governors and other interested parties.

Headteacher

- Fully supports the proposal
- Positive development
- Raise standards
- Federation has been very successful and positive
- Class organisation will reduce class sizes
- Exciting building project
- Parish Councils are firmly behind this proposal
- Equality for all
- Will benefit the community as a whole
- Although things have improved at Dunkirk, pupils do get a poorer deal
- Proposal will bring in extra revenue and resources

Chair of the Federation

- All the governors support the proposal
- The large classes will be split
- Governors are very excited about the new build

Questions and comments from parents on class sizes

The addition of the Dunkirk pupils will increase the numbers in some year groups and the class sizes will not match a 1FE school.

If the classes are split to make smaller classes will the school admit further pupils to make these classes larger?

Until the official amalgamation date of April 2008 the intake number would not be 30.

I am concerned that my child in Year 2 will be going into a class of 33 in September 2007.

Transition into Year 3 can be difficult for some pupils.

What will be the cut off point for admitting more pupils?

One of my children will be in a class of 19 and the other in a class of 33 and I am concerned that they will have different standards of education because of this.

- We have carefully considered the number of pupils in this area. In Dunkirk there are very few local children. A significant number of pupils who attend Boughton School do not live locally.
- A maximum of 30 pupils is the national legal requirement for an infant class.
- There is no intention to increase the roll in any class.
- If Dunkirk children join Boughton it will mean going over PAN but that does not mean that other parents can get places for their children at this school.
- Children will be taught in smaller classes during the transition to a 1 FE school which will take 7 years to complete.

- There is no correlation between the number of pupils in a class and the quality of learning.
- Year 3 may have 33 pupils but the school is still waiting for a clear indication from Dunkirk as to how many pupils will be transferring and so the class may be smaller. If the class size is 33 the school will put in additional adult help but would not admit further pupils.

Questions and comments from parents on process

My concern relates to the timing and process. Following federation my daughter's teacher has spent a significant amount of time at Dunkirk and I am concerned about the hidden unforeseen consequences of this proposal to amalgamate the two schools. I have received a letter today saying that from September all children in the Federation will be taught on the Boughton site.

What are we being asked to choose between or is this going to happen anyway?

- The federation could continue as it is now with Dunkirk School only having 2 classes. It is the view of the staff, governors and Local Authority that this would not be a good educational experience for the children of Dunkirk.
- The governors feel it is an unequal experience for children in the Federation and have brought forward this proposal to stop further decline.
- It was an operational decision to relocate the Dunkirk pupils on to the Boughton site from September for strong educational reasons.
- Amalgamation could not occur in law until April 08.
- The other possibility could have been a proposal to close Dunkirk school. The pupils at Dunkirk would have had to transfer to schools with available places, and not necessarily in their local community.

Questions and comments from Dunkirk Parish Council about the Dunkirk site

People in Dunkirk have an attachment to the school and it provides an amenity for local people.

What will happen to the site, because there are covenants on parts of the building?

Do you have any proposals for educational use?

We do not want a derelict site.

Will you consult the local community before deciding what use will be made of the buildings?

- Kent County Council will look at educational proposals that could be brought forward.
- It would not be appropriate to bring forward a proposal at this stage before any decision is made on the proposal to amalgamate Dunkirk and Boughton schools.
- It is not proposed to sell the site for residential development.
- The parents of Dunkirk will become part of Boughton School community and links will continue.
- The Parish Council will be informed of any decision on alternative educational use.