

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 10 December 2008

Subject: A NEW MAINTAINED SECONDARY SCHOOL TO REPLACE THE HERESON (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL AND ELLINGTON (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL FOR GIRLS - RAMSGATE

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposal received from The Local Learning Trust to establish a new Trust School on the Ellington site and seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the proposal.

Introduction

1. (1) At its meeting on 14 June 2007 the School Organisation Advisory Board supported a proposal to undertake a public consultation on the possible amalgamation of The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls. Subsequently the decision was taken, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to go to public consultation on this issue.

(2) The results of the public consultation (undertaken in November and December 2007) were reported back to the School Organisation Advisory Board at its meeting on 10 January 2008. Following discussion, the School Organisation Advisory Board recommended issuing of a public notice to close both schools and establish a new 4 FE High school on the Ellington site by means of a competition. On 5 February 2008 the Cabinet Member for Operations, Resources and Skills CFE, agreed for the issuing of a public notice on the closure of The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls and the issuing of the competition notice for a new school.

(3) The first competition notice (invitation to bid) was published on 2 May 2008. This notice ran for a period of 4 months and expired on 2 September 2008. The Department for Children, Schools and Families appointed consultants, the Office of Public Management (OPM) to market the competition to potential proposers. A seminar was held on 6 May 2008, arranged by OPM, where the Local Authority outlined its specification for the new school.

(4) One proposal was received in response to the competition. The proposal received from The Local Learning Trust is to establish a new Trust school.

(5) A second competition notice was published on 17 September 2008. Part 1 of the notice summarised the bid received from The Local Learning Trust and explained how people could send in their objections and comments on the proposal to the Area Children's Services Officer. Part 2 of the second competition notice was the linked proposed closure of both The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls, dependent upon a Local Authority decision to establish the new school. Part 2 of the notice explained how people could object or make comments on the proposed closures.

(6) As the Local Authority has not taken part in the competition by submitting a proposal for a community school and does not have an interest in the proposal received from The Local Learning Trust, the Local Authority will be the decision maker. The Local Authority can approve (either conditionally or unconditionally), reject or request a modification to the proposal.

(7) Concurrent with the decision about this proposal for the new school will be the decision on the proposed closures of The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls. The existing schools would only close if this proposal for the new school is agreed.

(8) A decision to close the schools would trigger a 4 week statutory appeal period starting from the date of the letter notifying the statutory bodies of the decision to implement. A copy of the decision letter would also be sent for information to those who made representations to the public notice.

Appeals against a decision to close Hereson and Ellington can only be made by the following statutory bodies:

- The local Church of England or Roman Catholic Diocese
- The Learning and Skills Council

If a statutory appeal is received the decision must be forwarded to the Schools Adjudicator for determination.

(9) If a statutory appeal is not lodged, the Cabinet Member decision can be implemented.

(10) If the proposal for the new school is agreed by the Cabinet Member, the decision would also be conditional upon the Local Learning Trust being formally established as a legal entity and a foundation being established for the new school. Other statutory compliance criteria would need to be met in full.

Background

2. (1) A report to the School Organisation Advisory Board on 14 June 2007 outlined the reasons for bringing forward the proposal to amalgamate Ellington School for Girls and The Hereson School. Both schools admit significantly below their Published Admissions Number (PAN) of 120. The Hereson School has a net capacity of 688 and in September 2008 there were 478 pupils on roll giving a surplus capacity of 30%. Ellington School for Girls has a net capacity of 642 and in September 2008 there were 409 pupils on roll giving a surplus capacity of 36%.

(2) Pupil numbers in the secondary sector in Thanet are set to decline in the next few years as the lower numbers in the primary schools feed through into the secondary sector. Over the medium to long term neither Ellington School for Girls nor The Hereson School would remain viable educationally, organisationally or financially.

(3) Roll projections based on historic patterns of pupils distribution and taking account of demographic factors and local development suggest a long-term need for a 4 FE high school in the Ramsgate locality, which is an annual intake of 120 pupils between Hereson and Ellington.

(4) A new 4 FE school established by amalgamating the two schools would have the critical mass of students, staff and resources to enable it to offer high quality,

flexible and diverse provision, while making cost effective use of resources and securing value for money.

(5) Kent County Council's requirements for the new school were published in a notice on 2 May 2008, a copy of which is attached as appendix 1, and met the following specification:

- 600 places for Boys and Girls
- Age range 11- 16
- Published Admissions Number of 120
- 4 FE School
- Located at Ellington School for Girls site
- Specialist provision for up to 15 girls and boys with Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD)
- Lead school locally for pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SCLN); specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Extended services to be developed meeting community needs
- To open 1 September 2009

Details of the Proposal Received

2. (1) In response to the first competition notice, one proposal was received from the Local Learning Trust to establish and run the new school. The Trust members will be drawn from the governing bodies of the existing Ellington and Hereson schools, Thanet College, St Lawrence College and The School of Emotional Literacy. A copy of the proposal is attached as appendix 2.

(2) The promoters of the proposal have confirmed that they would deliver a school which conforms to the Local Authority specification. This is supported by their detailed submission. At the time of publication of this report, the Local Learning Trust has not yet been formally established as a legal entity. However, the partners in the prospective Trust are currently pursuing trust status and have assured the Local Authority that the Trust will be in place prior to September 2009.

(3) This paper seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the Local Learning Trust proposal.

The Consultation

3. (1) The second public notice (published on 17 September 2008) summarised the Local Learning Trust's bid.) A brochure summarising the bid and explaining how people could send in their comments and objections was distributed to staff, governors and parents, County Councillors, the local Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local libraries, the District Council and others in accordance with the agreed County policy. The brochure was also posted on the KCC website together with the complete proposal and details of the linked closures of Hereson and Ellington.

(2) Approximately 1400 copies of the brochure were circulated, which included a form for written responses. A copy of the brochure is attached as appendix 3.

(3) A public meeting was held on 23 September 2008 at Ellington School for Girls. The Local Learning Trust outlined their proposal for a new Trust school and the

Area Children's Services Officer explained the decision making process and advised people on how to send in their views on the proposal.

(4) Approximately 35 people attended the meeting of which 15 were parents and the remaining attendees included a local member, governors, teaching staff and a local resident.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

4. (1) A total of 7 written responses were received. 5 of the responses objected to the closure of both schools, rather than to the proposal for the new school, and should therefore be considered as representations for Part 2 of the competition notice.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as appendix 4.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) A summary of points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached as appendix 5.

Views of the Local Members

5. (1) The Local members are Mrs E Green, Mr A Poole, Mr W Hayton and Mr J Fullarton.

(2) Mr Hayton fully supports the amalgamation of the two schools and the bid received from the Local Learning Trust in response to the competition notice. Mr Hayton has been a governor of The Hereson School for 15 years and understands that it is not viable to continue to operate both schools separately. Mr Hayton recognises that both schools offer a good education to the pupils that they serve and he looks forward to the two schools coming together with continued opportunities for single sex teaching.

(3) Mr Poole, having read the Ellington/Hereson school competition bid document, believes that this is now the best way forward for the amalgamated school.

"I am pleased to note that the Trust will be 'maintaining a preponderance of single gender teaching within an overall mixed gender framework'. I have every confidence that The Local Learning Trust will provide a high quality education for all the students".

Views of the Local Member of Parliament

6. Dr S Ladyman, the local Member of Parliament, was invited to comment on the proposal submitted by The Local Learning Trust but has not submitted a formal response.

Views of Thanet District Council

7. Thanet District Council's views on the proposal were sought. The District Council asked their members to respond directly. No responses have been received at the time of going to print.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

8. The proposal seems to be a sensible development in relation to Key Stage 4 provision in the area; and it complements associated BSF-linked developments as well as Thanet College's relocation plans. We note that the proposal does not involve any reorganisation of school sixth form provision; and that Thanet College is a partner in the Trust bid

Views of the Pupils

9. (1) The views of both schools' Student Councils were sought.

(2) Overwhelmingly the boys at The Hereson School were in favour of the proposed move. They were enthusiastic about the new facilities and made comments that showed they were in favour and believed that their education would be enhanced. Some were pleased that the boys and girls would continue to be taught separately. Comments on the social and learning opportunities of attending a mixed school were mainly positive.

(3) Comments from the students at Ellington School for Girls mainly reflected concerns about the impact of having boys at the new school including increased bullying. They were concerned about the lack of facilities for boys. Some were worried about the social impact including fighting over girls or boys. On the other hand, some felt it could help build confidence with both sexes. Some girls would welcome the opportunity to participate in sports activities which were more traditionally played by boys.

Views of the Thanet Partnership Board

10. The two Thanet Partnership Boards were supportive of the proposal, recognising the local community focus, the commitment to preserving strong elements of single-sex provision and the commitment to building on the strengths of the two existing schools.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

11. (1) The proposal conforms to the Local Authority specification. The partners in the Local Learning Trust include governors from both of the existing schools, both of which have a very strong tradition of inclusion, nurture and support for all their students. In addition, St Lawrence College brings with it a track record of high attainment and excellent educational achievement. Thanet College and The School of Emotional Literacy each have considerable strengths which will significantly enhance the educational offer at the new school. The proposal addresses very directly the importance of collaboration and community which are fundamental to the success of the new school. I strongly support the proposal.

(2) SOAB Members are asked to comment on the proposal and to consider whether it fully meets the Local Authority specification for the new school, before making a recommendation to the Cabinet Member. To assist SOAB and the Cabinet Member in the decision making process selection criteria have been developed. Although the criteria were originally intended for the selection process if more than one proposal was received, Members may consider the criteria a useful reference in this particular context. The criteria are attached in appendix 6.

(3) When reaching his decision, the Cabinet Member is required to have regard to the statutory guidance published by the DCSF, a copy of which is available from the DCSF website www.dcsf.gov.uk/school.org.

Transport and Environmental Impact including Community Implications

12. (1) The amalgamated school will continue to serve the population of Ramsgate and the surrounding area. The Pysons Road site is approximately 1.3 miles from The Hereson site and 1.5 miles from the former Ellington site.

(2) The overall number of pupils who will eventually be located on the new Pysons Road site will be no more than was originally envisaged for Ellington School for Girls, which is 4FE, approximately 600 pupils.

(3) Consultations with the Highways and Transport Integration Unit suggest that there would be minimal implications for non-public service transport. Over the transition period it may be necessary to consider the rescheduling of existing bus services to accommodate the phased migration away from The Hereson School to the Pysons Road site. Given the close proximity and modest number of pupils it is anticipated that these arrangements would be both manageable and unproblematic.

Resource Implications

13. (1) In the SOAB paper of 14 June 2007 it was reported that adaptations to the new buildings would be needed to cater for a mixed intake and that a feasibility study was being undertaken. The initial assessment is that approximately £200K would be needed to support adaptations to the site from 2009 so that it can cater for boys and girls. This work would be completed prior to September 2009.

(2) As part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, a submission is 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 is subject to ongoing discussion and negotiation and approval by Partnership for Schools and the DCSF.

Equality issues

14. (1) The new buildings currently occupied by Ellington School for Girls were designed to optimise physical access to the site and its facilities. All students, both boys and girls, will benefit from the accessible design of the new school.

(2) The proposal itself includes a strong commitment to inclusion and specifically addresses, very strongly, the issue of maintaining substantial opportunities for single-sex teaching and learning. The proposed arrangements will enrich diversity and choice at a local level.

(3) The proposed new school would seek the role of "Cluster Lead School" for SLCN (Speech, Language and Communication Disorder), SpLD (Specific Learning Disorder) and ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorders).

School Improvement Implications

15. (1) The proposal has a clear focus on raising standards. Consolidation of the two existing schools onto one site will secure the long term viability of the new school and ensure the critical mass of students and staff to provide flexibility in terms of school organisation and the curriculum offer.

(2) The external partners have the capacity to contribute significantly to raising attainment and achievement. The proposal contains constructive ideas for the development of an additional specialism offering the potential for enhanced engagement and student achievement.

Proposed Timetable

16. Subject to the proposal being approved, the following timetable will apply

Cabinet Member Decision to implement the proposed closures of The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls conditional upon the establishment of a new school.	by 29 December 2008
Cabinet Member Decision to implement the proposal conditional upon the Local Learning Trust being formally established	by 29 December 2008
Implementation	1 September 2009

17. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the proposal received from The Local Learning Trust for a new Trust School to replace The Hereson School and Ellington School for Girls to be established on the Ellington site from September 2009.

Martyn Doole
Area Children's Services Officer
(Thanet & Dover)
Tel: (01227) 284407

The Local Members are Mrs E Green, Mr A Poole, Mr W Hayton and Mr J Fullarton.

Background Documents:
None

Previous Committee Reports:
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 14 June 2007
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 10 January 2008

