

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 January 2009

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

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report presents the results of a public consultation exercise undertaken on the proposal to close Tunbridge Wells High School in order that it may be replaced with a government funded Academy. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a Public Notice to close the school.

Introduction

1. [1] The School Organisation Advisory Board, at its meeting on 5 November 2008, supported a recommendation to consult on the proposal to close Tunbridge Wells (Community) High School (TWHS), in order that it may be replaced with a government funded Academy.

[2] This report sets out the results of the public consultation exercise that took place between 10 November 2008 and 19 December 2008.

Background

2. (1) Tunbridge Wells High School is a small, 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 re-designated 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) Tunbridge Wells High 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 percentage of students identified as having Special Educational Needs is very high at 62.9%. The percentage 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 but suggest 66% GCSE A*-C, dropping to 13% when including only English and Maths. The disappointing GCSE A*-C results when including English and Maths, however, 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. Consistent with the vocational vision, 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

3. (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 purpose built premises from 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.

Consultation Process

4. (1) A Public Consultation Document, attached as Appendix 4, was widely distributed. 'Hard copies' of the document were provided to all parents/carers, students, staff and governors of Tunbridge Wells High School. In addition, schools in all the West Kent Local Children's Services Partnerships and secondary schools in the West Kent Learning Federation received copies of the document. Copies also went to the Local Member, all West Kent Members, other County Councillors, the local Member of Parliament, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the Learning and Skills Council, the Dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury, the Archdiocese of Southwark, neighbouring Local Authorities, all Tunbridge Wells District Parish Councils and local libraries. Approximately 1,200 copies of the document were circulated and it was also made available on the Kent County Council website, with an opportunity to respond electronically as well as via the Reply Form included in the Public Consultation Document.

(2) Running concurrently with the consultation to close Tunbridge Wells High School, the DCSF appointed project management consultants, PKF, have been sharing the vision for an Academy with the school's community and wider local stakeholders groups. A website for the Academy has been established at www.proposedtunbridgewellsacademy.org. The first newsletter about the Academy, available on the website, has been very widely circulated in the local community including a hard copy to all TWHS students as well as to prospective future students in Years 5 and 6 in Tunbridge Wells LCSP primary schools.

(3) A Public Meeting was held at Tunbridge Wells High School on 4 December 2008. Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chairman of SOAB and Member for Malling West, chaired the meeting. The panel comprised, Ms Chris Lay, Area Children's Services Officer for Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, and Mr David Adams, Area Children's Services Officer for Ashford and Shepway. In attendance were Mr Kevin Lynes, Local Member, together with representatives from the Academy's sponsors and from PKF, the project management consultants. Also present were the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Governors to Tunbridge Wells High School.

[4] 20 people registered their attendance.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

5. (1) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 5.

(2) As of 12 December 2008, 25 responses have been received, of which 24 are in favour, and 1 is opposed. As the consultation closes a few days after the deadline for reports for this meeting, a final version of this Appendix will be presented at the meeting.

Public Meeting

(3) A summary of the main issues raised and responses given, at the Public Meeting, on 4 December 2008, is attached as Appendix 6.

Views of Local Member

6. (1) The Local Member is Kevin Lynes. He fully supports the proposal and was pleased, at the Public Meeting, to provide a ringing endorsement of what he believes an Academy will provide, not only to the Sherwood Park community, to which he has a particular commitment, but to social cohesion across Tunbridge Wells as a whole.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

7. The views of Greg Clark MP have not yet been received.

Views of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

8. The views of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council are awaited.

Views of the Governing Body

9. (1) The Governing Body of Tunbridge Wells High School is in support of proposals for the establishment of an Academy.

Views of Students

10. (1) The Student Council of Tunbridge Wells High School, recognises that change is always challenging and can cause some apprehension. The prospect of an Academy and the enhanced facilities it could provide is, however, very exciting and the Council expects that it will offer all students an enhanced curriculum.

Views of the Partnership Board

11. (1) The Tunbridge Wells Local Children's Services Partnership Board welcomes this proposal and is fully supportive of all that it sets out to achieve for Tunbridge Wells as a whole.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

12. (1) The views of the Learning and Skills Council are awaited.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

13. [1] The Area Children's Services Officer considers that this proposal provides an excellent 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to secure transformational educational facilities for students of all abilities living in Tunbridge Wells.

Transport, Admissions and Community Impact

14. (1) 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.

Resource Implications

Capital

14. (1) The Academy build will be DCSF funded. 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 it will have a proportional share of central Local Authority costs.

Human

(3) Consultation would take place in accordance with the requirements of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment, Regulations 1981). Costs of new staffing (TUPE applies to current staff) and costs associated with TUPE, including any valid redundancies of staff that cannot transfer or be deployed elsewhere in Kent schools, would be negotiated with the DCSF on a case by case basis, but are usually borne by the DCSF.

Equality Issues

15. (1) There are no specific equality implications arising from this proposal.

School Improvement Implications

16. [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. The investment in facilities and curriculum, together with the funding flexibility that the Academy will bring, will have a positive impact on current standards of attainment and provide improved life opportunities for the local community.

[2] Tunbridge Wells High School has been inspected since the proposal to proceed to Public Consultation was agreed at the SOAB meeting of 5 November 2008. It was judged as being 'Satisfactory' overall.

Proposed Timetable

17. Report to School Organisation Advisory Board	8 January 2009
Cabinet Member decision	Mid January 2009
Issue Public Notice	End January 2009
End of Statutory Objection Period	Mid March 2009
Cabinet Member Decision	End March 2009
Implementation (subject to outcome)	31 August 2009

Recommendation

18. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the issuing of a Public Notice to close Tunbridge Wells High School in order for it to be replaced with a government funded Academy.

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

The Local Member is Mr Kevin Lynes

Background Documents:

Academy Newsletter available on the PKF website www.proposedtunbridgewellsacademy.org

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board – 5 November 2008