

By: Director – Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 January 2009

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF BRADBOURNE (FOUNDATION) SCHOOL FOR GIRLS AND WILDERNESSE (FOUNDATION) SCHOOL FOR BOYS, TO REPLACE WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a Public Consultation, in conjunction with the Governing Bodies, on the closure of the Bradbourne School for Girls and the Wildernesse School for Boys, in order that they may be replaced with a government funded Academy.

Introduction

1. (1) The Bradbourne School for Girls and The Wildernesse School for Boys are both non-selective (Foundation) high schools located in Sevenoaks, approximately one mile apart. They are the only two maintained secondary schools serving the Sevenoaks town area. A location map and site plans for the two schools are attached as Appendices 1 - 3. Both schools are designated for students aged 11 – 18 and joint sixth form arrangements are in place. The Bradbourne School had a roll of 835 students in Years 7 to 13, on Pupil Census Data for 2008, whilst the Wildernesse School had a respective roll of 561. Both schools are currently designated 5 form entry schools with Published Admission Numbers of 150. Whilst Bradbourne is close to capacity, Wildernesse carries significant surplus capacity and its roll has been falling.

(2) The two schools serve student populations of whom the majority live within 2 miles of the schools. A significant minority however, particularly in the case of Bradbourne, come from further afield including North-West Kent and some from out of county. Appendices 4 and 5 comprise student distribution maps. A significant percentage of students come from areas of the town which are marked by relative social disadvantage. Deprivation indices for areas closest to the Wildernesse School are above the average for the Sevenoaks District as a whole.

(3) The socio-economic profile of the current student intake at the two schools, is below national and Kent averages, and well below the profile of the Sevenoaks area that they serve. This is particularly reflected by the numbers of students with Special Educational Needs. The proportion of students with SEN at Bradbourne is 20.9% which is only slightly below the Kent and National averages. However, at Wildernesse, this figure is 43.2% which is almost double the Kent average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 8.4% at Bradbourne and 9.2% at Wildernesse, which is above the Kent average of 7.9%. Numbers of students with English as an additional language have been rising but are slightly below the Kent average with 3.1% (Bradbourne) and 3.4% (Wildernesse) respectively.

(4) In terms of attainment, at Bradbourne, provisional results show that 60.5% of students gained 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C in 2008 with 46.3% when including English and Maths. This reflects a significant improvement over 2007 results (42% and 35% respectively). At Wildernesse provisional results show that 46% of students gained 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C in 2008 with 31.7% when including English and Maths. These results saw the school achieve above the floor level target of 30% (including English and Maths) for the first time in recent years, although it continues to be included in the DCSF's 'National Challenge'. This, in turn, makes the school eligible for inclusion in the DCSF's Academy programme.

(5) In order to ensure that the 2008 improvement is sustained at Wildernesse School, the school has recently entered into a collaborative partnership with Hayesbrook School for Boys, Tonbridge, an 'Outstanding' high school with NCSL accreditation. This agreement runs until the proposed date for the Academy to open.

(6) There are no selective schools in Sevenoaks town area and the primary sector is very strong, with consistent high performance in Key Stage 2 SAT results amongst the best in the county. As a reflection of this, Sevenoaks is the largest exporter of students to other areas in Kent. A majority of students living in Sevenoaks town area travel out of the area with upwards of 40% on a recent study travelling to grammar schools in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells alone. Parental/carer preference results in large numbers of students travelling to alternative non-selective schools (both co-educational and single sex) within Kent. In addition there are in excess of 2FE of Sevenoaks residents currently attending two out of county schools, Oxted in Surrey and Sackville in West Sussex

(7) The opportunity to open an Academy in Sevenoaks provides a 'one off' opportunity to transform life chances for young people of all abilities, many of whom are currently choosing to travel outside of Sevenoaks for their secondary schooling. The vision for an Academy in Sevenoaks is to provide a school of choice which embeds an ethos of high academic standards reflected in high student achievement for the least and the most able students. It would utilise its independence to be innovative and creative, include single sex as well as co-educational teaching, have a stage not age focus to examinations and provide flexible curriculum pathways which offer both vocational and academic options which would meet the needs of all local learners.

(8) An Academy in Sevenoaks would combine specialisms in Languages and the Expressive Arts. English would be foremost within the Languages specialism underpinning a commitment to strong literacy skills to drive school improvement through innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The Academy would recognise that good performance in languages and the arts are transferrable life skills.

Academy Proposal

2. (1) An Academy in Sevenoaks (name to be agreed) would be established following the necessary closure of the Bradbourne and Wildernesse Schools. The Lead Sponsor for The Academy would be Gordon Phillips, Chairman of the Glen Care Group, while co-sponsors would be Sevenoaks School and Kent County Council (KCC).

(2) The Glen Care Group specialises in the treatment, rehabilitation and care of service users with complex needs. Gordon Phillips' experience includes the provision of services to children and adults with mental health needs, those who require secure custody and long term care for those with learning disabilities. Mr Phillips recognises the potential for the Academy programme to radically transform life chances for young people. He has a keen interest in the emotional well-being of young people and in the

provision of intensive literacy support for those who have yet to gain that 'currency for life'.

(3) The involvement of Sevenoaks School would bring considerable benefits to the Academy. As an independent school which is a centre of academic excellence and is recognised both nationally and internationally, the school's input would have a significant impact on standards of teaching and learning within the Academy. Many of the school's successful educational principles and practices would be utilised along with developing the Academy's own unique ethos and learning framework that meets the needs of the broad range of abilities of its learners.

(4) The Academy would be an 11-18 co-educational school for all abilities. It would have 8 forms of entry and admit up to 240 students into Year 7. The number of post 16 places available would be 350, taking the capacity of the school to 1,550 students. It is proposed that the Academy would open in September 2009 on the Bradbourne site in existing buildings and would move into new state of the art buildings on the Wildernesse site from September 2012.

(5) Collectively, the Sponsors are able to draw upon considerable skills and expertise in the fields of learning, school management and the new learning technologies. Sponsors intend that the Academy would 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 would provide an education which would be attractive to a wide-ability range of local students through its rich and varied curriculum of academic and vocational pathways. With the expertise of its sponsor and co-sponsors the quality of education would be significantly improved and opportunities for students enhanced.

(6) The combined specialisms of Languages and the Expressive Arts are aimed at raising aspiration in order to achieve high standards. The Academy would operate in partnership with local language based and arts industries and practitioners in order to enhance engagement in learning that develops independence, curiosity, self esteem, risk taking and responsibility. Central to the whole curriculum would be a recognition that good basic literacy and numeracy is fundamental to students' future success in life.

(7) The Academy would bring about a culture change and raise the attainment, ambition, thrill of creativity and aspiration for all the young people in its care, building upon strengths in the existing schools and within the context of complementary secondary provision across the West Kent Learning Federation.

Resource Implications

Capital

3. [1] The Academy would be DCSF funded.

[2] On completion of the new Academy buildings on the current Wildernesse site, an alternative CFE use would be explored for the Bradbourne site.

Revenue

(3) The Academy would receive its revenue funding directly from the DCSF each year. It would be funded at a rate equivalent to other Kent specialist schools, plus it would have a proportional share of the central Local Authority costs.

(4) The sponsor Gordon Phillips is committed to making a £1 million contribution to the Academy Endowment Fund.

Human

(5) 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

4. [1] There are no specific equality implications arising from this proposal in terms of impact on ethnic minority opportunity and achievement.

[2] There is, however, a view from the parents/carers of some girls at Bradbourne, who chose single sex education in Sevenoaks for their daughters, that this proposal would remove that choice for them, while leaving it in place for parents/carers in other parts of Kent and for the parents/carers of pupils who pass PESE.

[3] Kent maintains a choice and diversity of provision that is outside of norms for other Local Authorities. There is a commitment to the Academy becoming complementary to that which is already on offer across the West Kent Learning Federation. Within this collaborative of 17 secondary schools and 2 FE Colleges, there are single sex selective and non selective schools in Tonbridge and in Tunbridge Wells.

[3] There is also a commitment, within the Expression of Interest for the Academy in Sevenoaks, to exploring the retention of single sex teaching in core subjects within a co-educational environment, during Feasibility.

[4] In the meantime, research remains inconclusive about the benefits of single sex teaching. There is, however, absolute consensus that, regardless of specific structure and organisation, the most significant impact on standards and school improvement is from the strength of leadership and the quality of teaching and learning.

Transport and Road Safety Implications

5. Securing sustainable methods of travel for students is central to the establishment of an Academy in Sevenoaks. Reducing the number of young people currently travelling out of Sevenoaks in order to retain a more local, wide-ability, cohort is central to the plans to transform secondary education in the town. Students would be encouraged to travel to school through the most sustainable methods possible including ensuring a good uptake of the Kent Freedom Pass (available in Sevenoaks from June 2009).

School Improvement Implications

6. (1) The closure of the current schools to provide for the establishment of an Academy would lead to new 'state of the art' facilities, curriculum innovation, together with the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. It is intended that the investment in facilities, curriculum and funding flexibility that the Academy would

bring, would have a positive impact on current standards of attainment, and for improved life opportunities for the local community.

(2) The Bradbourne School was last inspected in March 2006 when it was judged to be 'Satisfactory' with a number of 'Good' features. A particular strength was deemed to be the personal well-being and development of its students. The follow up Ofsted Monitoring Visit, of March 2007, found overall 'Good' progress in addressing areas for improvement identified the previous year.

[3] The Wildernesse School was last inspected in October 2005 when it was judged to be 'Satisfactory'. It was found to be offering 'Good' care, guidance and support to students but standards and quality of teaching were highlighted as in need of improvement particularly in the sixth form. The follow up Ofsted Monitoring Visit of December 2006 reported 'Satisfactory' progress. Wildernesse is currently included in the DCSF's 'National Challenge'.

Views of the Local Member

7. The Local Member, Nick Chard, strongly supports this proposal.

Views of the Governing Bodies

8. The Governing Bodies of both schools are in support of developing proposals for the establishment of an Academy believing this to be in the interests of all learners in the Sevenoaks town area.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

9. The Area Children's Services Officer considers that this proposal provides an excellent 'once in a life time' opportunity to secure transformational educational facilities for students of all abilities living in Sevenoaks town area. The establishment of a 'school of choice' for Sevenoaks, would provide a hub for community activity and build social cohesion within the town and across its necklace villages.

Proposed Timetable

10. Should Public Consultation be agreed, the following timetable is proposed:

Publication of consultation document	12 January 2009
Public meeting	w.c 19 January 2009
Closing date for responses	23 February 2009
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board	12 March 2009
Cabinet Member Decision	March 2009
Issue of Public Notice (if agreed)	End March/April 2009
End of Statutory Objection Period	Mid May 2009
Decision by Local Authority	w.c. 23 June 2009
Proposed Implementation (if approved)	September 2009

11. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on undertaking a public consultation exercise, in conjunction with the Governing Bodies, on this proposal to close The Bradbourne School for Girls and The Wildernesse School for Boys, in order for them to be replaced with a government funded Academy.

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Background Papers:

None