

By: Director – Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 January 2009

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF LINDEN GROVE (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ASHFORD CHRIST CHURCH CHURCH OF ENGLAND (VOLUNTARY AIDED)MATHS & COMPUTER SPECIALIST COLLEGE AND THEIR REPLACEMENT WITH AN ALL-AGE 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 on the closure of Linden Grove Primary School and Ashford Christ Church CE Maths & Computer Specialist College and their replacement as an all-age government funded academy subject to Ministerial approval.

Introduction

1. (1) Linden Grove (Community) Primary School admits 60 girls and boys into each year group. Its age range is 3-11 years. The school has the capacity to admit 420 pupils aged 4-11 years and has a 26fte place maintained nursery class. As at spring 2008, the school had 377 pupils on roll in Years R to 6. The school has a 22 place provision reserved for pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs and is committed to becoming the partnership primary lead school. The proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals is 32%, which is considerably higher than the local and national average (11.1% and 15.9% respectively). 6% of pupils in 2008 had statements compared to a local average of 1.1% and a national average of 1.5%

(2) Ashford Christ Church (voluntary aided) Church of England Maths & Computer College is a co-educational secondary modern school in South Ashford. Its age range is 11-16 years. In spring 2008, the school had 1,126 students on roll in years 7 to 11. The school has a published admissions number of 240 and a capacity of 1200. Ashford Christ Church does not have a sixth form. Almost 2 out of 5 students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This fact is reflected in the percentage of students with statements of special educational needs - 5.5% (compared to a national average in Spring 2008 of 2.1%). The percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals is above national average at 14% (the national average being 13.1%).

(3) Ashford Christ Church is one of the government's National Challenge Schools as less than 30% of its Y11 students achieved the Government Floor Target in 2007. Furthermore, the ability profile of its intake has been dropping. This, together with the issues of lack of progress raised by Ofsted and HMI, mean that the school is judged to be at high risk of failing to reach the floor target by 2011 - the deadline set within the National Challenge. The adverse

publicity around the Ofsted report and the National Challenge has had a negative impact on community and pupil perceptions of their school, which in turn has impaired the school's rate of progress. Some staff positions have proven difficult to fill, with knock on effects on teaching and learning.

(4) The school has two provisions reserved for pupils with SEN; one a Unit for pupils with Physical Disabilities, the second for pupils with Hearing Impairment. From September 2008, it has Lead School Designation for pupils with Speech and Language, Physical Disability, Hearing Impairment and Cognition difficulties. These Units will be retained in the Academy.

(5) Linden Grove and Christ Church schools are closely located to each other and share an adjoining site (see attached map as Appendix 1). Both schools serve the urban area of Stanhope in South Ashford which is an area of significant deprivation, plus Christ Church also draws pupils from the Kingsnorth area of Ashford. Appendix 2 displays the pupil distribution for both schools.

Academy Proposal

3. (1) The proposal is to open a new all-age Academy in September 2009 in existing buildings and move into its new buildings in the academic year 2011-2012. It would be a school with a religious character (Church of England) for boys and girls of all abilities, aged between 3 and 19 years, located on a single site in the Stanhope area of South Ashford. All pupils from Linden Grove Primary and Christ Church Schools will transfer over to the new Academy. It is proposed that the Academy would cater for:

- 26 pre-school pupils (aged 3-4 years old)
- 420 primary school aged pupils (aged 4-11 years old)
- 1050 secondary school aged pupils (aged 11-16 years old)
- 250 post 16 pupils (aged 16-19 years)
- Pupils with special educational needs supported by the lead school designations (speech and language, Physical Disability, Hearing Impairment and cognition difficulties)

(2) Details of the need for school places (forecasts based on Spring 2008) are contained at Appendix 3.

(3) The new Academy will be led by an Executive Headteacher and one governing body. It is proposed that the Academy will be a single school, but will adopt the principle of having a number of 'schools within schools' which would allow the Academy to be organised into small school environments. It is widely known that students benefit greatly from this learning environment which:

- provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to achieve their full potential
- has high expectations of all its pupils, irrespective of their range of ability
- ensures pupils are highly qualified, skilled and adaptable
- provides a strong ethos of security, care and warmth for one another
- delivers a personalised learning approach
- increases pupils' self esteem and confidence

- develops a partnership between adults and pupils so that they understand, respect and empathise with each others roles and responsibilities
- has a curriculum that engenders a love of learning
- provides stepping stones to and from the community it serves
- offers outstanding tutorial support.

(4) Discussions are taking place with potential sponsors which are the Diocese of Canterbury, Canterbury Christ Church University and Kent County Council. The vision for the Academy is to have a distinctive Christian ethos which will be strengthened by the Sponsors.

(5) It is proposed that the Academy will specialise in Technology. This is to include the Academy in the long term economic development of Ashford.

(6) The provision of a school sixth form is important in helping to raise standards across the school. It can help in the recruitment of high quality staff who will support improvement across the age range. There is significant pressure in places in school sixth forms which this proposal helps to address. It is evident from pupil voice surveys that many pupils wish to stay in Post 16 education in their own schools (44% according to the NFER survey in Ashford 1). With the roll-out of 14-19 diploma lines it is equally important that pupils can progress at a rate appropriate to their needs and should not be forced to change institutions at a particular stage or complete courses at a pace dictated by the structure of the organisation. The academy will work in close collaboration with other providers in the Ashford 1 Partnership through delivery of its post-16 provision.

Site and accommodation Issues

4. (1) Linden Grove Primary school currently occupies one large building of 1970's SEAC construction. The school buildings are in a poor state of repair with some major works needed imminently.

(2) Ashford Christ Church consists of a large three storey building built in the 1960's. A new teaching block and sports hall were added in 2004. Over recent years, the school's pupil admission has grown from four to eight forms of entry. Many of the classrooms in the main building are undersized. The school does not currently have the capacity to provide sixth form education.

(3) The consensus is that both school buildings require a substantial amount of investment. By closing both schools and opening an all-age Academy, in new and refurbished facilities, with a full suite of extended services, would serve the needs of the pupils and community of Stanhope and provide an environment fit for learning in the 21st century.

Resource Issues

Capital

5. (1) A budget has yet to be confirmed by the DCSF for the Academy's development. Discussions are ongoing with DCSF regarding the LA's capital contribution to the rebuilding of the primary school element and the Special Educational Needs Units. Typically a 2 FE primary school with a nursery costs

about £5m. The LA may need to meet this cost from a capital receipt from the site. Equally, if the Ray Allen Children's Centre is replaced as part of this proposal, the LA is likely to be required to meet the capital cost.

Revenue

(2) The Ashford Academy will receive its 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 the central Local Authority budget.

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.

Views of the Local Member

7. (1) Derek Smyth, the local member for Ashford South supports the application for Academy status provided that it can be demonstrated that educational standards can be markedly improved, and provided that both the existing governing bodies are represented on the Trust Board to provide community cohesion.

Views of the Diocese

8. (1) Canterbury Diocese is the sponsor of the proposal. It believes that transforming into an academy is the right step in the continued improvement of education in these schools.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

9. (1) The Learning and Skills Council are fully aware of the proposal. A statement has not yet been received.

School Improvement Implications

10. (1) By closing Linden Grove Primary and Christ Church Schools and setting up a new Academy will allow for new facilities, flexibility of curriculum and recruitment of high quality staff. It is intended that the investment in facilities and curriculum and funding flexibility that the new Academy will bring about the positive impact on standards that is required for the pupils and students of the Stanhope area of South Ashford.

(2) Linden Grove Primary School was placed in Special Measures in November 2006. At a recent HMI visit in January 2008, the school was judged to be making significant improvement and was given a notice to improve.

(3) Christ Church CE School was inspected in January 2008. The school received a Notice to Improve. An HMI visit in September 2008 found that the strategies in place to raise standards were the correct ones, but, disappointingly, that progress had been inadequate.

(4) The academy proposal would provide an opportunity to rebrand the school, recruit and deploy staff more flexibly and release additional funding and resources. The innovative nature of an all through combined secondary and primary academy, in partnership with the diocese, would contribute to a distinctive ethos where all ages could learn and support from each other. Existing peer mentoring work with primary students could be further developed to improve secondary students' engagement and primary students' achievement. The existence of sixth form provision within the proposed academy would also provide good role models to raise the aspirations of KS4 students at the critical time in their GCSE preparation. The Secretary of State recently recognised the importance of post 16 models on school sites. While the school is striving to improve, it remains at risk of missing the floor target in 2011, at which point the likely outcome would be the school being closed and re-opened as an academy. The students at the school today deserve to benefit from the opportunities for raising achievement that an academy would provide.

(5) Canterbury Christ Church University's role as a co-sponsor is extremely important. The University can help with the delivery of high quality staff training, providing curriculum development work, influencing pedagogy based on research and best practice, and afford extension opportunities for students.

(6) The involvement of a high performing school is being negotiated to add further capacity to the sponsor team in supporting the Academy's development.

Equality Issues

11. (1) Traditional Christian values and discipline will govern the general ethos of the new Academy. Through its strong ethos it will promote tolerance, respect, personal responsibility, recognition of the contribution that each individual makes, fairness and justice, empathy, co-operation and consideration for other people. The Christian ethos of the Academy will permeate the whole of the curriculum and Academy life.

Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications

12. (1) Early discussions will take place with Ashford Borough Council and Kent Highways. They will be fully consulted as part of the design and development phase of the new Academy and it is also expected that a travel plan will be produced prior to the opening of the Academy.

Proposed Timetable

13. Should public consultation be agreed, the following timetable is proposed:

Publication of consultation document

23 February 2009

Public meeting	w.c. 16 March 2009
Closing date for responses	3 April 2009
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board	23 April 2009
Cabinet Member decision	April 2009
Issue public notice	4 June 2009
End of public notice period	16 July 2009
Decision by Local Authority	By Mid September 2009
Proposed implementation	September 2010

Recommendations

14. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on a public consultation being undertaken on the proposal for the closure of Linden Grove Primary School and Ashford Christ Church CE Maths & Computer College and their replacement as an all-age government funded academy subject to Ministerial approval.

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Background Documents: None