

By: Director – Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 January 2009

Subject: PROPOSAL TO ADD A SIXTH FORM TO THE NORTH
(COMMUNITY) SCHOOL, ASHFORD

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a consultation to add a sixth form to The North (Community) School, Ashford.

Introduction

1. (1) The North (Community) School is a non-selective specialist school for Sport, Information Technology and the Rural Dimension within the Ashford One Partnership. It admits 200 boys and girls into Years 7 to 11 and has a capacity of 1000. Attached as Appendices 1 and 2 are maps showing the location of the school and pupil distribution. As of Spring 2008 there were 851 pupils on roll. Pupils are predominantly drawn from across the urban area of Ashford. The proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals is 11.9%, compared to the local and national average (7.9% and 13.1%). In 2008, 4.9% of pupils had statements compared to a local average of 2% and a national average of 2.1%. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is 8.6%, which is relatively higher than the local average of 3.6%, but less than the national average of 10.5%.

(2) The school has a designated Dyslexia Unit and a Learning Support Unit attached. It will be a lead school for ASD and Dyslexia.

Background

2. (1) The North does not currently offer sixth form provision. However, Hadlow Further Education College delivers a suite of vocational qualifications focusing on the rural dimension from the North School premises.

(2) The proposal for Christ Church Academy includes sixth form provision. If implemented, this would leave The North School as the only 11-16 secondary school in Ashford and Shepway.

The Proposal

3. (1) The proposal is to add sixth form provision to The North School for 185 pupils. Discussions will take place with the Learning and Skills Council regarding funding and to determine the range of qualifications to offer. It is believed that through extending the curriculum and providing a wider range of courses, pupils will enhance their learning experiences and their future employment prospects. It will keep the pupils engaged in learning by introducing progression routes, which do not currently exist within Ashford's 14-19 curriculum. At its core, the proposal is about re-engineering the provision to provide better access for the young people of Ashford.

(2) Under the current PFI rebuild of The North School capacity was increased

slightly to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate 240 pupils per year. The rebuild has been completed in phases. In September 2008 the Published Admissions Number (PAN) was 200, accounting for the incomplete building works. The works have recently been completed.

(3) The proposal is to increase the PAN for pupils aged 11-16 to 215, leaving 125 places for post 16 provision. Added to this will be the 60 places in the planned vocational centre (funded by the school – Hadlow College), giving 185 places in total.

(4) There is currently a paucity of places in school sixth forms in Ashford. Appendix 3 provides details of the forecast for the 11-16 and 16 plus age groups in Ashford. Current deficit in 6th form accommodation is being met by using 11-16 accommodation and mobile classrooms (for example at Towers School).

(5) The North proposes to offer Diploma courses for the 14-19 age range within the following subject areas;

- Environmental and Land Based
- Retail
- Art & Design
- Creative & Media
- Sport

(6) The school would continue to build on its specialist areas (i.e sports) and continue to deliver Land Based studies (due to its farm) in conjunction with Hadlow College. Both of these areas would complement, rather than compete, with existing provision. It is proposed that the above courses would run in close collaboration with other providers in the Ashford 1 Partnership.

(7) It is proposed that the school will offer 'A' Level Geography, which would link into the Environmental and Land Based framework. Arrangements would be made for those pupils to move to other institutions at age 16 (ie neighbouring school sixth forms, the FE sector or work based learning) as appropriate to access courses and qualifications that meet their needs.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

4. (1) There are no capital implications for the LA. The school and Hadlow College will fund the vocational block.

(2) The vocational centre has now received formal planning approval. Building works are to start at the end of November 2008.

Human

(3) The proposal may require the school to increase its staffing.

Views of the pupils

5. (1) The National Foundation for Educational Research carried out a pupil survey across the Ashford 1 Partnership in 2008. The findings indicated that 44% of pupils, within the partnership, would like to continue into a school based sixth form.

Views of the Local Member

6. (1) Elizabeth Tweed the local member for Ashford Central is completely supportive of the proposal and commented that it would be good for Ashford and the young people living in the area.

Views of the Diocese

7. (1) Canterbury Diocese is aware of the proposal, its comments will be sought during the consultation stage.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

8. (1) The Learning and Skills Council are aware of the proposal and have yet to make a comment.

School Improvement Implications

9. (1) The North was last inspected in June 2006 and was judged to be good. The provision of post-16 courses in curriculum areas which currently are unavailable locally is a welcomed development and improves the progression pathways available to young people.

(2) The local FE provider (South Kent College) was inspected by Ofsted in April 2008. It was judged as inadequate for effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management. A strong FE provider is important in Ashford to meet the future training and skills needs of the post-16 learners and adult learners. However, the current students deserve high quality provision too.

(3) The context of education for post-16 learners in Ashford is changing with the introduction of diploma lines, building schools for the future (2015/16), the raising of the age at which students can leave education or training, and the growth of the Town. This proposal broadens curriculum pathways, increases the availability of places and utilises the skills of a "good" institution, without threatening other provision. Currently 454 Ashford students attend Canterbury College and 250 plus go to West Kent College. The local offer needs improving.

(4) While the North School is a good school, it is one of the government's National Challenge Schools as less than 30% of its Y11 students achieved the Government Floor Target in 2007. The Secretary of State at the DCSF recognises the potential of on site 16+ provision in raising the aspirations and motivation of students in lower years. Such provision can stimulate KS4 success in its own right, as well as rates of staying in education, thus reducing the proportion of students ending up in the NEET group. The existence of a sixth form provision would provide good role models to raise the aspirations of KS4 students at the critical time in their GCSE preparation. The scope to teach at 16+ also increases the career development opportunities that the school can offer when recruiting new teachers. This will increase the depth and breadth of fields for new appointments at a time when teacher recruitment - particularly in shortage subjects - has been difficult. Such new staff, teaching across the age range, will help raise standards across the school.

(5) Subject specific capital equipment resourced for the sixth form may be available for use with other year groups when not needed in sixth form lessons. This would be an efficient use of resources and would make an important contribution to raising standards lower down the school.

Equality Issues

10. (1) The proposal will broaden the curriculum opportunities available to the young people of Ashford. Improved access to provision will:

- raise the esteem and aspiration of all pupils, as well as those with special educational needs who struggle with the current provision; and
- encourage young people to continue learning and to remain within the learning environment by offering flexible timetables and pathways, and via personalised learning.

Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications

11. (1) The schools' travel plan will need to be revisited and particular consideration will need to be given to how the desire of some young people to drive to school will be managed.

(2) Discussions will take place with the Borough Council and Kent Highways as part of the planning application for the vocational building.

(3) The headteacher has already put measures in place on the school site to allow for any potential increase in parking requirements. The vocational centre will have a separate entrance with its own parking facilities. In addition, the main school car park has recently been rearranged to make available a further 24 spaces.

Proposed Timetable

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

Issue of consultation document	12 January 2009
Public meeting	w.c. 26 January 2009
Closing date for responses	27 February 2009
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board	12 March 2009
Cabinet Member decision	March 2009
Issue public notice	9 or 23 April 2009
End of public notice period	7 or 21 May 2009
Decision by Local Authority	End of May 2009
Proposed implementation	September 2009

Recommendations

13. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on undertaking a public consultation on the proposal to add a sixth form to The North School, Ashford.

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The local member is Elizabeth Tweed

Background Documents:

1. *DCSF Guidance on 'Expanding a maintained mainstream school or adding a sixth form'*