

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL - RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY

DECISION NO.

MIKE WHITING

12/01977

CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

Unrestricted

Subject: Amalgamation of Walmer Science College (Community School) and Castle Community College (Academy)

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills, I agree to

- (i) the issuing of a Public Notice to close Walmer Science College with effect from 31 August 2013, conditional upon the Secretary of State's agreement to the enlargement of Castle Community College
- (ii) AUTHORISE the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance and the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills to enter into any necessary contracts / agreements on behalf of the County Council
- (iii) AUTHORISE the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

Reason(s) for decision

1.1 On 12 September 2012, Education Cabinet Committee recommended to the Cabinet Member that a consultation take place regarding the proposal from the governing bodies of Walmer Science College and Castle Community College, together with Kent County Council to bring together the schools to form one secondary school which would be an Academy.

1.2 The governing bodies of both schools recognise the need to consider whether the demand for secondary education in the area will, in the future, support two separate schools. The idea of joining the schools to form one larger and more sustainable organisation has been debated for several years. In 2009 the governing bodies wished to amalgamate the schools, but the proposal was put into abeyance because of external factors. The governing bodies and the Local Authority now wish to bring forward the proposal again for the following reasons:

- (i) The total rolls have fallen with very low intakes in Years 7 and 8 at Walmer Science College.
- (ii) The projected number of pupils will not sustain two schools.
- (iii) The financial effect of sharing the available pupils and therefore the funding for them will mean budget deficits, staffing cuts and narrowing of curriculum choice, which would affect both schools.
- (iv) Walmer Science College in particular will face a growing deficit budget which would result in a shortfall of approximately £1m. The action needed to address this will render the school unviable.
- (v) Government capital investment at Castle Community College through the Priority Schools Building programme will enable the rebuild of the school to accommodate 1,300 students; large enough to accommodate the students of both schools, currently and in the future.

1.3 Much better facilities will be offered through the new build resulting from the Priority School Building Programme funding, so that all pupils in time can be educated on one site. For the present both school sites would continue to operate as the new build on the Castle site would not be expected to be completed before 2016.

1.4 To achieve the proposed amalgamation, Walmer Science College would merge with Castle Community College, which would enlarge to take the Walmer students. Because Castle Community College is an Academy, the technical means of achieving this would be to issue a Public Notice which would in effect close Walmer Science College. This proposal is conditional upon the Secretary of State's agreement to the enlargement of Castle Community College

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation

The proposed decision was considered by the Education Cabinet Committee at its meeting held on 21st November 2012. The committee considered the proposal and understood the concerns raised from the members of the public at the public meeting and in the responses to the consultation. The committee when presented with all the factors recommended to the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills that Kent County Council

should issue a Public Notice to close Walmer Science College with effect from 31 August 2013, conditional upon the Secretary of State's agreement to the enlargement of Castle Community College.

However the Committee asked that the Cabinet Member, when making his decision, consider the following actions

- (1) Ensure the current site of Walmer Science College is retained for educational purposes once the proposed lease to Castle Community College expires.
- (2) Encourage the governors of Castle Community School to consider a new name and uniform for the school.
- (3) Encourage a fair recruitment process for both teachers at Walmer Science College (Community School) and Castle Community College (Academy)

In response to Education Cabinet Committees recommendations, the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills assured the Committee the site would be retained for educational purposes and agreed to write to both governing Bodies asking them to consider the actions raised in point 2 and 3 above.

Any alternatives considered:

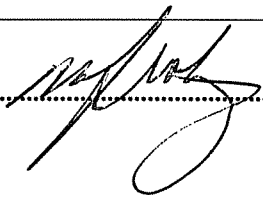
An alternative proposal put forward by the 'Save Walmer Science College Group' to allow the school to continue under a new structure would not remove the current difficulties faced by the school in relation to roll numbers, financial deficit and ability in these circumstances to be able to attract a strong headteacher, strong senior management team and full complement of excellent teaching staff.

Also put forward by the Group was a proposal to retain both school sites and allow a newly merged school to continue to operate over the two sites with the year groups split; one site accommodating the lower year groups and the other site accommodating the upper year groups including the 6th form. The logic of this proposal is fully understood but given the situation with Priority School Building funding for Castle Community College to rebuild the school to its original size (1300 students) this not a long term option. Both sites will be used in the interim until the new build on the Castle Community College site is completed, which is expected to be September 2016. No decision has been made about the future use of the Walmer Science College site at this point. All options will be considered, including the feasibility of educational and community use.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None

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signed



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date

3/12/12