

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 8 January 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mr R B Burgess (Vice-Chairman), Mr C J Capon, Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Mr M J Vye), Mr A D Crowther, Mr M J Fittock (Substitute for Mrs C Angell), Mr M J Northey and Mr A R Poole

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M C Dance and The Reverend N Genders

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Adams (Area Education Officer Ashford & Shepway) and Mr S Webb (Area Education Officer for Dartford & Gravesham)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

5. Minutes - 10 December 2008

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2008 be agreed as a true record.

6. Fleetdown Infant Fleetdown Junior Schools, Dartford - Proposed Amalgamation

(Item 4 - Report by Director, Operations)

(1) This report sought the views of the Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a public consultation on the amalgamation of Fleetdown Infant School and Fleetdown Junior School (subject to an exemption under Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006).

(2) Following discussion of the proposals, the Advisory Board AGREED that the proposal to amalgamate Fleetdown Infant and Fleetdown Junior Schools, Dartford should proceed to public consultation.

7. Proposed Closure of Tunbridge Wells (Community) High School to replace with a Government Funded Academy

(Item 5 - Report by Director, Operations)

(1) This report presented 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. The report also sought the views of the Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice to close the school.

(2) Mr K G Lynes was present for this item and spoke as the Local County Member. He said he fully supported the proposal and said that one only had to visit

an existing academy and talk to the teachers to discover how good an initiative they were. He spoke about the links between Tunbridge Wells High School and the Skinners School and the successful mentoring scheme which had been established. He said that he hoped that all efforts would be made to ensure that these links continued once the new Academy was in place. He also said he believed the Academy would not only provide a focal point for the Sherwood Park Community but would add to the social cohesion across Tunbridge Wells as a whole.

(3) During the course of discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of points of detail to which officers responded. Following further discussion, the Advisory Board AGREED to the issuing of a public notice to close Tunbridge Wells High School in order for it to be replaced with a Government funded Academy. Mr A R Poole abstained from taking part in the discussion on this proposal as he is also a Member of the Planning Applications Committee.

8. Proposed Closure of Bradbourne (Foundation) School for Girls and Wildernesse (Foundation) School for Boys, to replace with a Government Funded Academy

(Item 6 - Report by Director, Operations)

(1) This report sought the views of the 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, Sevenoaks in order that they may be replaced with a Government funded Academy.

(2) Mr N J Chard was present for this item and spoke as the Local County Member. He is also a Governor at The Bradbourne School. Mr Chard said that he strongly supported this proposal and he paid thanks to the Area Children's Services Officer for Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells for the manner in which she had managed to deal effectively in keeping all concerned informed and advised of these proposals as they had been developed. Mr Chard said that some parents of pupils who attended the Bradbourne School for Girls had expressed the view that they had chosen single sex education for their daughters and that this proposal would remove that choice from them. Therefore this issue needed to be considered carefully and parents who had daughters at the Bradbourne School should be given reassurances that their concerns were understood and would be addressed.

(3) During the course of discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of issues to which officers responded. Members said they particularly wanted to see the concerns of those parents who had daughters at the Bradbourne School looked into and those concerns needed to be carefully considered as part of the public consultation exercise.

(4) Following discussion, the Advisory Board AGREED that a public consultation exercise, in conjunction with the Governing Bodies be undertaken in respect of 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.

9. Proposed Closure of Linden Grove (Community) Primary School and Ashford Christ Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Maths & Computer Specialist College and their Replacement with an all-age Government Funded Academy

(Item 7 - Report by Director, Operations)

(1) This report sought the views of the Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a public consultation on the closure of Linden Grove Primary School and Ashford Christchurch CE Maths and Computer Specialist College and their replacement as an all age Government funded Academy subject to Ministerial Approval.

(2) Mr D Smyth was present for this item and spoke as the Local County Member. He supported the proposal to go out to public consultation as detailed in the report and said because the buildings were in the main constructed during the early part of the 1990's, they needed to be significantly updated. He also said that in the report officers said they believed that standards would rise if the Academy proposals went ahead and therefore would be helpful to have some further detail in the next report which showed the success of academies in other areas. He also said that it would be important to have community representatives appointed to the Trust Board from the existing Governing Bodies. It would be helpful therefore if assurances could be given on that particular aspect when the next report was submitted to the Advisory Board.

(4) During the course of discussion, Members raised a number of issues regarding the detail of the proposal to which officers appropriately responded. Mr Poole questioned the general strategy for having all through schools and said his feeling was that this proposal was not a particularly good idea. Mr Adams said the County Council's policy as set out in the Primary Schools Strategy was all through schools would be developed "where appropriate".

(5) Following further discussion the Advisory Board AGREED that a public consultation be undertaken on the proposal for the closure of Linden Grove Primary School and Ashford Christchurch CE Maths and Computer College and their replacement with an all age Government funded Academy, subject to Ministerial Approval.

10. Proposal to Add a Sixth Form to the North (Community) School, Ashford

(Item 8 - Report by Director, Operations)

(Mr M Northey declared an interest in this item on the basis that his daughter was a pupil at the North School and therefore took no part in the discussion)

(1) This report sought the views of the Advisory Board on the proposal to undertake a consultation to add a sixth form to the North (Community) School, Ashford.

(2) Mrs E Tweed attended for this item and spoke as the Local County Member. She said she fully supported the proposal as it would be a tragedy if this excellent school could not offer a sixth form. She said the school had a designated Dyslexia Unit and a Learning Support Unit and it would be a lead school for both ASD and Dyslexia. In addition, Ashford over the coming years was likely to see an increase in business re-locations and therefore it was important that local schools had the facility

to offer increasing opportunities with the demand for sixth form places within the Ashford area being at least sustained, if not increased.

(3) Following discussion, the Advisory Board AGREED to a public consultation being undertaken on the proposal to add a sixth form to the North School, Ashford.

11. Schools Applying for Foundation/Trust Status

(Item 9 - Report by Director, Operations)

The Advisory Board noted that there had been no new schools which had informed the County Council since the Board's last meeting that they intended to consider applying for Foundation/Trust status.