

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform

Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director, Education and Young People's Services

**To: Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee -
8 July 2015**

Subject: Closure of Furness School and Expansion of Broomhill Bank

Electoral Division: Swanley, Mr Robert Brookbank

Summary: This report provides an update to the Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee regarding the closure of Furness School and the expansion of Broomhill Bank Special School on the same site.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the update and the progress achieved in developing provision for the future on the Furness site for pupils with ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) needs.

1. Background

1.1 The consultation and closure of Furness Special School has been managed within the rules and regulations for closing a Special school. Nevertheless, there had been some uncertainty surrounding the future education provision for the students currently attending the school. During the closure consultation, KCC and the Kent Association of Special Schools (KASS) agreed an alternative proposal to maintain continuity of educational provision for the students and their parents/carers and ensure that sufficient ASD provision was maintained in North West Kent. In addition, the County council believes – in accordance with SEND strategy and the Commissioning Plan for Education – in the importance of provision, including Special a school provision, for high functioning ASD students in West Kent.

1.2 Following the expiry of the Public Notice to close Furness School, for the reasons set out in a previous report to this Cabinet Committee, the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform determined that the school should close from 31 August 2015.

1.3 In addition to the decision to proceed with the closure of Furness, the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform also determined that a consultation be undertaken for Broomhill Bank School to expand onto the Furness School site with effect from 1 September 2015.

1.4 Broomhill Bank is a co-educational Foundation Special School, catering specifically for students with communication and interaction difficulties (C&I) who have a Statement of SEN and are likely to benefit from a place in a Special school. Students eligible for places usually have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome or other significant social communication difficulty, such as pervasive developmental disorder, and/or severe receptive or expressive language impairment or disorder. Following an Ofsted inspection in December 2013, Broomhill Bank was judged to be a 'good' school.

2. Progress with the Expansion of Broomhill Bank School

2.1 The statutory process requires that, following a Public Consultation and subsequent consideration by KCC Committee, time must be allocated for a public notice, scrutiny, an appeal period or Secretary of State or School Adjudicator intervention. Although technically just achievable, it was felt that it would be unwise to compress this process.

2.2 A more appropriate way forward has been to invite Broomhill Bank School to expand on the Furness site on a temporary basis and agree to undertake the statutory consultation process sometime after 1 September 2015. Broomhill Bank School have agreed this approach as being the most appropriate way to ensure the continuity of education for the students currently attending Furness School.

Roll Numbers

2.3 Broomhill Bank School has a current maximum designation of 136 students, with an anticipated roll of 115 for September 2015. This would leave 21 student places available, keeping inside the terms of the designation. These places can be commissioned on the site currently occupied by Furness School without any consultation.

2.4 If more places are required at the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year, then Schedule 2 of The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 states that up to 10% additional students can be enrolled without consultation. The result is that under the current designation, Broomhill Bank School can enrol, across two sites, a maximum of 149 students. The same legislation indicates that up to four boarders may be enrolled without consultation.

Broomhill Bank School Expansion

2.5 The school has indicated that it has plans to expand beyond those facilitated by the availability of the Furness School site. The eventual aim is for the school to be designated as offering 210 places for ASD and communication needs with up to 24 places being designated as residential. It would be efficient for the consultation to include any additional designation that the governors wish to see implemented.

Progress

2.6 Good progress has been made in ensuring there will be continuity of provision on the current Furness site in September. Since the end of March 2015, KCC officers have met regularly with Broomhill Bank and representatives from Furness to plan and implement the proposed expansion.

2.7 On 13th May 2015 Leaders from Broomhill Bank, a KASS representative and the Area Education officer met with parents of current Furness pupils to outline the plans for the expansion and to explain how they may be affected. This was extremely well received and parents were subsequently invited to visit Broomhill Bank to see how the school operates.

2.8 During the week commencing 1st June, members of the Broomhill Bank Leadership Team met with Furness staff to explain the plans. All posts, both teaching and non-teaching, have initially only be available for Furness staff to apply for and temporary contracts have been offered in the first instance, until the formal agreement to proceed with permanent expansion is made. Broomhill Bank will ensure all posts are covered for September, but it should be noted that in the first instance it may be necessary to utilise supply or agency staff.

2.9 On Wednesday 24th June, the Governing Body of Broomhill Bank formally agreed to proceed with the expansion. This now means that the statutory consultation to change the designation of the school will definitely commence in September 2015.

3. Timetabling

3.1 While there is no legal requirement for any consultation, as the school roll across both sites does not exceed 149 students and the number of boarding students does not exceed four, the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform has agreed that there will be a consultation and subsequent Public Notice.

As a Trust school, the consultation will be owned by the Governors of Broomhill Bank School. We propose the following timetable in the weeks commencing with these dates:

- 7 Sept 2015 – Begin Public Consultation
- 14 Sept 2015 – Public Meeting
- 5 Oct 2015 – Close consultation
- 12 Oct 2015 – Governors to consider results and determine next action
- 26 Oct 2015 – half term week.
- 2 Nov 2015 – Governors issue public notice
- 30 Nov 2015 – Public Notice expires
- 7 Dec 2015 - Governors to make final determination.
- 1 Jan 2016 – Decision enacted

The school's consultation will be supported by KCC.

4. Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the update and the progress achieved in developing provision for the future on the Furness site for pupils with ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) needs.

5. Contact details

Report Author:
Ian Watts
Area Education Officer – North Kent
Tel number: 03000 414302
ian.watts@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director:
Keith Abbott
Director of Education Planning and Access
03000 416677
keith.abbott@kent.gov.uk