

By: Grahame Ward, Director – Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 21 May 2009

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE BRADBOURNE [FOUNDATION] SCHOOL FOR GIRLS AND THE WILDERNESSE [FOUNDATION] SCHOOL FOR BOYS, SEVENOAKS, TO REPLACE WITH AN ACADEMY

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

- (1) This report presents the results of a public consultation exercise undertaken regarding the proposed closure of The Bradbourne School and The Wildernesse School, Sevenoaks and their replacement with an Academy on 1 September 2010.
- (2) It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a Public Notice to close the schools, to make way for an Academy.

This paper should be read in conjunction with the report to School Organisation Advisory Board of 8 January 2009.

Introduction

1. (1) The School Organisation Advisory Board, at its meeting on 8 January 2009, supported a recommendation to consult on the proposal to close The Bradbourne and The Wildernesse Schools, in Sevenoaks, in order that they may be replaced with a government funded Academy.

(2) This report sets out the results of the public consultation exercise that took place between 27 March and 15 May 2009.

Background

2. (1) The Bradbourne School for Girls and the Wildernesse School for Boys are both non-selective (Foundation) high schools located in Sevenoaks, approximately one mile apart. Location maps, site plans and student distribution maps are included as appendices 1, 2 and 3.

2. (2)] The proposed closure of the two schools and replacement with a government funded Academy has been the subject of delay due to necessary Ministerial approval, expected in November 2008, not being received until late January 2009: too late to facilitate a September 2009 opening. It is, therefore, now proposed that the two schools

should close on 31 August 2010, with an Academy opening, initially, in current buildings, on 1 September 2010.

Academy Proposal

3. (1) The proposal is that the predecessor schools would close on 31 August 2010, with an Academy opening in their place. It is proposed that the Academy would open in September 2010 in existing buildings but with the main base being on the Bradbourne site, and that it would move into new 'state of the art' buildings, on the Wildernesse site, from September 2012

(2) The Academy would be an 11-18 school for boys and girls of all aptitudes and abilities exploring the provision of single sex teaching in core subjects within a mixed environment. It would admit up to 240 students in each year group, with 350 places available in the sixth form. This means that that the total roll might be 1,550 by 2012. All current students of the two schools would be eligible for automatic transfer to the Academy

(3) The Academy would specialise in Languages (with a focus on communication skills and on English as a first language) and the Expressive Arts. It would be a high performing institution, with a strong community focus that would provide an outstanding education for all students. It would draw upon the considerable experience and expertise of the sponsors and would build on the strengths of the predecessor schools.

(4) Lead Sponsor for the Academy is Gordon Phillips, Chairman of the Glen Care Group. Co-sponsors are Sevenoaks School and Kent County Council (KCC). Details of the respective contributions and roles of the sponsors are included in the previous paper to SOAB.

The Consultation

4. (1) Due to delay in receipt of the necessary Ministerial approval to move to a feasibility stage of this Academy proposal, the public consultation exercise on closure of the two predecessor schools could not commence in line with the SOAB Report of 8 January timeline. The consultation period, in fact, began on 27 March 2009 and ended on 15 May 2009.

(2) A Public Consultation Document, attached as Appendix 4, was widely distributed. 'Hard copies' of the document were provided for all parents/carers, students, staff and governors of The Bradbourne and Wildernesse Schools. In addition, all schools in the West Kent Local Children's Services Partnerships and secondary schools in The West Kent Learning Federation received copies of the document. Copies also went to the Local Member, all West Kent Members, other County Councillors, the Local Member of Parliament, Sevenoaks District Council, the Sevenoaks Local Strategic Partnership, the Learning and Skills Council, the Dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury, the Archdiocese of Southwark, neighbouring Local Authorities, all Sevenoaks District Parish Councils and local libraries.

(3) Approximately 2,000 copies of the Public Consultation Document were circulated and it was also made available on the Kent County Council website, with an opportunity to respond electronically, as well as via the reply form included at the back of the document.

(4) A public meeting was held at the neutral venue of Sevenoaks Primary School, on 28 April 2009. Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chairman of SOAB and Member for Malling West, chaired the meeting. The panel comprised Ms Chris Lay, Area Children's Services Officer, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells, and Mr David Adams, Principal Officer, Operations/Area Children's Services Officer, Ashford and Shepway. In attendance was Mr Nick Chard, Local Member, together with representatives from the sponsors and from Appleyards, the Project management consultants for the Academy.

(5) 185 people registered their attendance but in excess of 200 were present.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

5. (1) This proposal has been the subject of lively debate locally generating a number of articles in the press. As expected the proposal has prompted a notable response, particularly from parents/carers of students of the two schools.

(2) As of 6 May 2009, 95 written responses had been received, of which 29 were in favour, 55 opposed and 11 were undecided or did not state a view. Appendix 5 summarises the points raised.

(3) As the closing date for responses is after the print deadline for SOAB, an updated version of Appendix 5 will be circulated at the meeting.

Public Meeting Responses

(5) A summary of the main issues raised and the responses given at the public meeting, held on 28 April 2009, at Sevenoaks Primary School, is attached as Appendix 6.

Views of Local Member

6. The Local Member, Nick Chard strongly supports the necessary closure of The Bradbourne and The Wildernesse Schools in order for Sevenoaks, as a whole, to benefit from all that a purpose built Academy can bring to the town and surrounding area. He views this Academy proposal as a 'one off' opportunity to establish a high quality school of choice for young people of all aptitudes and abilities in Sevenoaks, to provide a resource for the community and to encourage social cohesion across the town. He understands the concerns of some parents around the issues of single sex and co-educational education and is confident that these concerns will be addressed during the range of consultation meetings, with stakeholders, to come.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

7. The views of Michael Fallon MP have not yet been received but are expected before the close of this consultation and will be reported at the meeting.

Views of Sevenoaks District Council

8. Sevenoaks District Council has indicated that it will not be providing a formal view on this proposal.

Views of the Town Council

9. Sevenoaks Town Council will be discussing this matter at its meeting on 11 May 2009 and the Town Council's view will be reported at the SOAB meeting.

Views of the Diocesan Authorities

10. No views have yet been received from the Diocesan Authorities.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

11. The views of the Learning and Skills Council have not yet been received.

Views of the Governing Bodies

12. Detailed views have yet to be received but both Governing Bodies submitted letters of support 'in principle' for the establishment of an Academy when the Expression of Interest was submitted for Ministerial approval.

Views of the Students

13. As at 6 May 2009, four replies have been received from students of the Bradbourne School all of which are against the proposal. Amongst the issues they raise are: loss of single sex education, potential for disruption and poor behaviour in a co-educational school, good access to the Bradbourne site in contrast to traffic problems at the Wildernesse site, the recent 'Good' Ofsted judgement and success of the Bradbourne being diluted and the popularity of the school with many students travelling from far afield.

Views of the Partnership Board

14. Sevenoaks South Local Children's Services Partnership will be discussing this matter at their next Board Meeting on 12 May 2009 and partners views will be reported at the SOAB meeting.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

15. (1) The Area Children's Services Officer is excited by the potential for this proposal to transform what is currently available at secondary level in the area and for it to establish an excellent school of choice for the young people of Sevenoaks, in Sevenoaks.

(2) Her views will be expanded following the close of public consultation on 15 May and circulated ahead of the meeting.

Proposed Timetable

16. Should the Cabinet Member following SOAB's recommendation agree this proposal, the following timetable is envisaged: -

12 June 2009	Public Notice issued
24 July 2009	End of Statutory Notice period
End August 2009	Final Decision made (subject to any referral to Adjudication)
31 August 2010	The Bradbourne and Wildernesse Schools close
1 September 2010	The Academy opens

Recommendation

17. The School Organisation Advisory Board is requested to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Operations, Skills and Resources that a Public Notice be issued to close the Bradbourne School (Foundation) for Girls and Wildernesse School (Foundation) for Boys on 31 August 2010 in order that they be replaced with a government funded Academy, to open on 1 September 2010.

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The Local Member is Mr Nick Chard

Background Documents:
None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board - 8 January 2009