

## Appendix 7

### **PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE BRADBOURNE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS AND THE WILDERNESSE SCHOOL FOR BOYS, SEVENOAKS, TO REPLACE WITH AN ACADEMY**

#### **Update to SOAB Report on representations received since the print deadline.**

#### **Responses to the Public Consultation**

##### *Written Responses*

1. [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 the two schools.

[2] As of the closing date, of 15 May 2009, 216 written responses have been received, of which 61 are in favour, 130 against, and 25 are undecided or did not state a clear view, for or against.

[3] An updated Appendix 5, including comments that have come in immediately after the closing date, will be tabled at the meeting.

#### **Views of Local Member of Parliament**

2. (1) Michael Fallon, MP, has written reporting a large number of responses from constituents. He has also met with staff at both schools and discussed the issues involved with local councillors and others. He was able to attend most of the Public Meeting on 28 April.

[2] He is clear that the Wildernesse School has no prospect of a certain future without substantial redevelopment, and appreciates that, due to its recent improvement, the Bradbourne School now has capacity issues which restrict its further success.

[3] He declares support for the concept of Academies, and notes how they can completely re-invigorate schooling in their communities. In Sevenoaks, he recognises that it will be essential to command the confidence of parents of both schools, and particularly those who have specifically chosen single-sex education. Closing the two schools will, he believes, reduce parental choice when there is no other girls-only school within reasonable distance.

[4] He is hopeful, that if the Academy is now to proceed, that sponsors will address very carefully the need to maintain single-sex teaching where it is appropriate, and not just for the children currently attending.

[5] His one further concern is that the Academy will be a very large school, which will need to be managed in such a way as to enhance pastoral care for its pupils. He notes that younger, less confident children can be easily submerged in schools of the proposed Academy size and he hopes that

senior management will consider seriously how the new school might be developed in smaller units, albeit on a single campus in due course.

### **Views of the Town Council**

3. Sevenoaks Town Council does not consider that the case to merge The Bradbourne and The Wildernesse Schools and to replace them with an Academy has been made sufficiently robustly in its current form and would ask Kent County Council to review the current proposal with a view to meeting more appropriately the needs of all of the Sevenoaks' school pupils in this age group.

### **Views of the Diocesan Authorities**

4. No views have been received.

### **Views of the Learning and Skills Council**

5. No views have been received.

### **Views of the Governing Bodies**

6. [1] 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.

[2] The Chairman of Governors of the Wildernesse School has written to confirm oral feedback, already received, in favour of closing the current two schools and replacing them with an Academy.

[3] He notes that while the majority of governors favour an Academy, there is a minority that believes the school could 'be made a viable stand' and that the Local Authority has not done enough either to maintain the fabric of the existing building or to support the school.

[4] Soundings of Wildernesse parents/carers and pupils indicate that a majority are in favour of an Academy, although those with children reaching critical exam stage are anxious about continuity of education.

[5] A majority of staff is reported to be in favour of an Academy although there are worries and uncertainties around the issues associated with combining the two staff groups.

[6] Governors and staff are hugely frustrated that The Wildernesse has been portrayed in the consultation as a failing school when its headline A-Cs and Value Added results match, or are better, than many of the new academies.

[7] Finally there is concern that should the consultation fail, KCC does not have an alternative strategy for boys education in Sevenoaks and that in an environment of parental choice and subsidised travel, more rather than less pupils will select schools outside of Sevenoaks, resulting in the school's closure.

## **Views of Students**

6. 17 replies have been received from students, 2 of which are in favour, 13 are against and 2 are undecided. The majority of respondents have not made any specific comments, but those who have include comment on, loss of single-sex provision, 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 the success of the Bradbourne being diluted, the popularity of Bradbourne with so many students travelling from far afield.

## **Views of the Partnership Board**

7. (1) The Sevenoaks South Local Children's Services Partnership strongly supports this proposal as it offers a fantastic opportunity to enhance the quality of secondary education in the Sevenoaks area by building on the considerable strengths of the Bradbourne and Wildernesse schools.

(2) The LCSP is particularly keen to ensure that the needs of the local community through enhanced community facilities and extended school services are central to the development of the Academy. Whilst independent of Local Authority control, partners would wish to ensure that the Academy would work closely with its neighbouring schools, partner primaries and multi-agency service providers such as those currently delivering important community services from both of the current school sites.

## **Views of the Area Children's Services Officer**

8. [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] She recognises that a proposal of this magnitude, with inevitable uncertainty at this stage of the process, will generate anxiety and concern. The stakeholder phase of the consultation process, to be led by Appleyards, DSSF appointed independent consultants, and forward focused on what the Academy must be like to capture local imagination, gain confidence and satisfy a range of interests and concerns, will do much to ameliorate current unrest.

[3] In the meantime, respondents to the written consultation and the views of those speaking at the Public Meeting, concentrate on four main issues:

- i) Loss of single-sex education and, with that a reduction in parental/carer choice*
- ii) Confusion about the process and frustration about insufficient authoritative information regarding what the Academy would be like and how it would function*
- iii) Failure to understand why the proposal has to link the two schools together and why single school solutions have not been proposed*

*iv) Site related issues and concerns, underpinned by suspicion about what may already be planned for the Bradbourne site, post opening of the new build on the Wildernessee site; and how traffic management issues might be addressed on the Wildernessee site, post Academy opening there.*

4. To address these in sequence:

*i) Loss of single-sex education and, with that a reduction in parental/carer choice*

[1] Kent has, and would continue to have a choice, range and diversity of schools that is outside of norms for most Local Authorities. While reducing a degree of choice for some currently choosing Sevenoaks single-sex schools, this proposal would increase choice for those currently choosing to send their children considerable distances, often over county boundaries, to co-educational provision.

[2] Each Academy is unique, shaped in consultation with key stakeholders, and able to add to the choice and diversity available locally. Careful regard would be given to continuing the best of single-sex teaching where it is judged to have most impact, but within a co-educational setting that would provide a further range of learning opportunities for young people, so combining the best of 'both worlds'.

[3] Transition arrangements would ensure that students placed at either of the current two schools, prior to the Academy proposal becoming known (i.e. current Y8 and above), would complete their main-school education in their current single sex cohorts, based in their existing school accommodation. Following Y11, they would, anyway, progress into a co-educational 6<sup>th</sup> Form.

*ii) Confusion about the process and frustration about insufficient authoritative information regarding what the Academy would be like and how it would function*

[1] The Public Consultation Document (Appendix 4) attempts to clarify the two separate but closely related strands of consultation whereby KCC must lead on the necessary closure of the predecessor schools but has no remit to consult about opening an Academy because academies are independent of Local Authority 'control'. This is understandably difficult for the public to unpick.

[2] Detailed consultation about the proposed Academy's ethos, aims, culture, curriculum and organisation will begin very shortly, led by independent consultants, Appleyards, appointed by the DCSF and accountable to sponsors.

*iii) Failure to understand why the proposal has to link the two schools together and why single school solutions have not been proposed*

[1] Any proposal that concentrated on just one of these two schools, even if it was feasible, would disadvantage the other. If the Expression of Interest had proposed an Academy with regard to Wildernessee only, and if that could have been deemed viable, and if sponsors could have

been found, and approved by Ministers, to back it, Bradbourne would have been left the poor relation in terms of learning environment. Bradbourne, in its own right, is not eligible for Academy status.

[2] An 8FE structure is optimum, as the Kent Secondary Strategy confirms, for a secondary school, providing a critical mass of both human and material resource that can be deployed to maximum effect. Within that overall structure, options for single-sex teaching within a co-educational setting could be explored and 'schools within the school' models can be developed, drawing on Co-sponsor Sevenoaks School experience of house/home systems.

*iv) Site related issues and concerns, underpinned by suspicion about what may already be planned for the Bradbourne site, post opening of the new build on the Wildernesse site; and how traffic management issues might be addressed on the Wildernesse site, post Academy opening there.*

[1] Options for the Bradbourne site, once the new Academy were to be located on the current Wildernesse site would be explored in due course. Any plans that might emerge would be subject to full public consultation and scrutiny, as this with this Academy proposal.

[2] Traffic management issues relating to the Wildernesse site would form a critical part of the process towards gaining planning permission and, again, would be subject to full public consultation processes.