

By: Grahame Ward, Director – Operations

To: Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Operations, Resources and Skills, CFE

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: 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.

Introduction

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. Results of this consultation were reported back to the board on 21 May 2009, this report is set out as appendix 1 and available at the following link:
<http://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=2485&Ver=4>

Academy Proposal

2. (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.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

3. 222 responses have been received, of which 65 are in favour, 25 are unsure, and 132 are opposed.

Views of Local Member

4. 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

5. (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.

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 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 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 School Organisation Advisory Board

8. At its meeting on 21 May 2009 the Members of the School Organisation Advisory Board were divided in their opinion on the proposal to close the Bradbourne [Foundation] School For Girls and The Wildernesse [Foundation] School For Boys, Sevenoaks, and replace them with an Academy; two Members voted for the proposal, three voted against and one abstained.

Recommendation

9. The views of the Cabinet Member are sought on the issuing of a public notice to close the Bradbourne [Foundation] School for Girls and the Wildernesse [Foundation] School for Boys, Sevenoaks, to replace with an Academy.

Chris Lay (Ms)
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The Local Member is Mr Nick Chard

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board - 8 January 2009

School Organisation Advisory Board – 21 May 2009