

By: Rosalind Turner, Managing Director, Children Families and Education

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 October 2009

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ARCHERS COURT MATHS AND COMPUTING COLLEGE AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a Public Consultation on the closure of Archers Court Maths and Computing College in order that it may be replaced with a government funded Academy.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) Archers Court Maths and Computing College is an 11 – 18 mixed non – selective school with 809 students on roll at 11 – 16 and a sixth form of 171. The School serves the needs of students living within Dover Town as well as some of the surrounding villages. In addition the school has a specialist unit, Aspen 2 which caters for students with Profound, Severe and Complex needs. A dot map showing the home location of students is attached as Appendix 1.

(2) In 2008, the percentage of pupils at Archers Court gaining 5 A\* - C grades or equivalent was 47.5% reflecting a continuing improvement in performance since 2005. Nevertheless in 2008 the numbers of students achieving 5 A\* - C including English and Mathematics was 21.9%, placing the school in the National Challenge category. Where a school is performing below 30% 5 A\* - C and is unlikely to achieve that level of attainment by 2011, the Local Authority is required to consider a structural solution which will enable the school to secure and sustain the necessary long term improvement. Establishing an academy to replace the existing school represents potentially a structural solution within the criteria set out by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

## **Background**

2. (1) Archers Court Maths & Computing College, is a good school with significant strengths. However, there is recognition that attainment levels will only be significantly improved and sustained if a structural solution is implemented. The DCSF identifies the following as possible structural solutions.

Closure

Amalgamation

Federation with a high performing school

Replacement by a trust school or a National Challenge Trust School

Replacement by an Academy

(2) Closure and dispersal of students elsewhere is not an option. There is insufficient capacity in other schools to accommodate the students who would be displaced and the strengths of the existing school would be lost.

(3) Given the size, location and profile of other local schools amalgamation is not an option.

(4) Federation with a high performing school is a theoretical option however this would fail to secure the formal engagement and leadership of Canterbury Christ Church University, nor would it provide the flexibilities which come with academy status.

(5) The establishment of a Trust school or National Challenge Trust school would potentially be an option, assuming that an external partner could be found to play a leading role in the Trust. However, in itself this would not address the infrastructure issues or provide some of the potential advantages associated with academy status.

(6) The establishment of an academy would provide a radical solution which would enable the school maximum flexibility in organising and tailoring its curriculum offer according to local needs and circumstances. It would also deliver a substantial new build, providing first class learning facilities for all students. This option is strongly supported by the existing leadership and governing body of the school.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) An Academy in Dover would be established following the necessary closure of Archers Court. An Expression of Interest was lodged with the DCSF, who in July 2009 agreed that the proposal move to the feasibility stage. Appleyards have been appointed as project managers and will oversee a separate consultation process on the establishment of the new academy, which will take place in the autumn potentially in parallel with the Local Authority consultation on school closure. The Local Authority retains responsibility for consultation on the linked closure of the existing school.

(2) The proposal is to create a co-education, five form entry Academy in Dover catering for 750 11-16 year old students and 200 16-19 year old students. The Academy will replace the Archers Court Maths & Computing College and the name of the Academy will be decided during feasibility. It is proposed that the Aspen 2 Unit will remain part of the school and transfer to the Academy. The Academy will be sponsored by Canterbury Christ Church University as lead sponsor, with Kent County Council, Dover Grammar School for Boys and Dover Grammar School for Girls as co-sponsors. Canterbury Christ Church University is a highly respected Higher Education provider with a wealth of ideas and experience to contribute including considerable strength in the area of staff and student development. Dover Grammar School for Boys is a specialist Business & Enterprise School. Dover Grammar School for Girls is a Humanities College. Both schools have an excellent record in developing high quality education provision and a detailed knowledge of the local communities in Dover. Collectively, the Sponsors and partners are able to draw on extensive skills and expertise in the fields of education, research, business and organisational leadership.

(3) It is proposed that the Academy will open in September 2010 in existing buildings with a target occupation of new buildings in September 2013. The Sponsors' ambition for the Academy is for it to be a learning community at the heart of Dover, bringing together education and children's services, which places students and their families at the centre of everything that the Academy does. The Academy would be

focussed on the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for children and young people, within the context of the Children's Trust arrangements in Kent.

(4) The Academy would seek to provide:

- specialist status and centre of excellence quality for Mathematics & Computing and Music;
- a good academic/vocational balance, with full coverage of the four core National Curriculum subjects;
- an 11-19 age range with innovative partnerships with the two Grammar Schools to deliver the 14-19 curriculum;
- a focused early intervention to improve students' capabilities and address their particular needs;
- a local collaborative partnership with the two Grammar Schools that will promote high quality teaching and build economies of scale by sharing teaching staff in subject shortage areas.

(5) The Sponsors, working in a dynamic partnership, will establish and develop a robust governance that draws on a wide ranging base of expertise. This strong leadership will seek to ensure that the Academy achieves good outcomes for students. The Sponsors will seek to develop an Academy that promotes a new model of learning that:

- links the acquisition of knowledge directly to the experience of the world;
- brings together people from different places to exchange ideas and skills;
- promotes enterprise for wealth creation and active citizenship;
- gives responsibility to students as citizens for the conduct of their lives, relationships and learning.

(6) It is proposed that the Aspen II unit, currently part of Archers Court Maths & Computing College be retained as part of the new Academy.

## **Site Issues**

4. (1) Archers Court is located on an extensive site which would enable the new build to be developed, away from the existing school buildings, minimising disruption to students. See appendix 2.

(2) There are some relatively new buildings and facilities on the Archers Court site which could potentially be assimilated into the new Academy design subject to feasibility.

## **Resource Issues**

### *Capital & Revenue*

5. (1) A budget has yet to be confirmed by the DCSF for the Academy's development. The capital costs of the scheme will be met by the DCSF.

(2) Appleyards, the appointed management consultants, will receive funding from the DCSF to cover feasibility costs.

(3) Canterbury Christ Church University as a multiple educational sponsor is not itself required to make a cash contribution to the Academy. Christ Church will however have a responsibility for encouraging contributions into the endowment.

(4) The Dover Academy Trust (name to be determined during feasibility) will receive its funding directly from the DCSF each year. It will be funded at a rate equivalent to other Kent specialist schools, and have a proportional share of the central Local Authority budget.

#### *Human*

(5) Consultation would take place in accordance with the requirements of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment, Regulations 1981). Costs of new staffing (TUPE applies to current staff) and costs associated with TUPE, including any valid termination of employment for staff that cannot transfer or be deployed elsewhere in Kent schools, would be negotiated with the DCSF on a case by case basis.

(6) There is a statutory requirement to recruit the Academy principal via a competitive recruitment process following national advertisement. The existing headteacher is eligible to apply for the post should she choose to do so.

### **Views of the Local Member**

6. Mr Bryan Cope, the Local Member, is of the view that the proposal is an opportunity to acquire state of the art facilities for a local school. He is in favour of proceeding to consultation on the proposal.

### **Views of the Governing Body**

7. The governing body has been consulted and understand the reasons for the proposal. The governors fully support the option of replacing the school with a government funded Academy.

### **Views of the Local Children Service Partnership Board**

8. The Partnership has been consulted and is of the view that the aims of the Archers Court proposal are broadly in line with the objectives of the board.

### **School Improvement Implications**

9. (1) The closure of the school to provide for the establishment of an Academy would lead to new 'state of the art' facilities, curriculum innovation, together with the recruitment and retention of high quality staff. The significant contribution of the sponsors in supporting school improvement plus investment in facilities and the curriculum and funding flexibility that the Academy would bring, would have a positive impact on current and future standards of attainment.

(2) Archers Court Maths and Computing College was last inspected in September 2007 and graded as "good" with all members of staff "focused on raising standards whilst providing thoughtful and attentive care for every student". "From well below average starting points, many students achieve well, particularly in Years 7 to 9, and do better than predicted in their GCSEs in Year 11. Standards in all years are below average but they have improved considerably over the past four years".

(3) As a 'wide – ability' school a new academy would have the capacity to meet the needs of a broad ability spectrum with a potentially positive impact in raising overall standards.

## **Equality Issues**

10. There are no specific equality implications arising from this proposal.

## **Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications**

11. The establishment of an academy as a 5 form entry school to replace the existing school in its current buildings will have minimal impact in the short term. The new academy will actually be smaller than the existing school, reflecting the impact of falling secondary school rolls in the area. The planning and construction of new buildings will involve consultation with planners on transport and the environment amongst other issues.

## **Proposed Timetable**

12.	
SOAB 1 meeting	8 Oct 2009
Consultation period	19 October to 30 November 2009
Public meeting	week commencing 2 November 2009
SOAB 2 meeting	3 December 2009
Decision by Cabinet Member	21 December 2009
Public Notice Period	14 January to 25 February 2010
Decision by Cabinet Member	5 March 2010
Referral to Adjudicator (if required)	2 April 2010
Adjudicator decision (if required)	17 May 2010
Implementation	September 2010

## **Recommendations**

13. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on undertaking a public consultation on a proposal to close Archers Court Maths and Computing College to be replaced with a government funded Academy.

Martyn Doole  
Area Children's Services Officer  
Thanet & Dover  
(01227) 284407

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The Local Member is Mr Bryan Cope

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*Background Documents:*

*None*