

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

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 3 December 2009

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

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to close Archers Court Maths & Computing College so that it may be replaced with a government funded academy. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice.

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

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.

(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.

(3) 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

2. (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 are consulting on the establishment of the new academy, which is

taking place 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-educational, 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. The new academy would therefore continue to meet the specialist needs of students with Profound, Severe and Complex Needs, offering practical opportunities for inclusion within the mainstream setting, according to individual needs.

The Consultation

3. (1) The consultation document was distributed to staff, governors and parents at the school, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local libraries, the District Council and others in accordance with the agreed County policy. The document was also posted on the KCC website and the link to the website widely circulated via email.

(2) Approximately 1800 copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. A copy is attached as Appendix 1.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

4. (1) Details of the number of responses will be tabled at the meeting on 3 December.

(2) Responses received so far have indicated support for the proposal. A final summary of responses received will be tabled at the meeting.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached as Appendix 2.

Views of Local Member

5. Mr Cope is supportive of the proposal to replace Archers Court Maths & Computing College with a government funded academy. He hopes that this proposal will help to improve standards, and feels that with Christ Church University as the main sponsor the students will have the opportunity for a more complete educational experience which will also help to enhance the opportunities for their future careers.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

6. (1) The following has been received from Mr Gwyn Prosser, MP for Dover and Deal

(2) Whilst I have certain reservations about the creation of academies, mostly in relation to the influence that some types of sponsors could bring to bear on the curriculum, I am pleased to confirm my support regarding the particular proposals in respect of Archers Court.

(3) Archers Court Maths and Computing College has made significant progress under the enthusiastic leadership of Elaine Hamilton and her team. However, Kent's selection system predicates against schools like Archer's Court rising above a certain level, especially when situated in areas like Buckland and I believe the pupils will benefit greatly from the boost they will obtain by becoming part of a new academy.

(4) Academy status will allow new additional Government funding, support from the sponsors and provide the opportunity for a new start and everyone I've talked to has been supportive of the move.

(5) With careful planning the change does not need to cause disruption to pupils' studies and although it may be outside the consultation remit, I'd like to put on record my hope that Elaine Hamilton and her staff will be able to enjoy the fruits of their labours by being re-employed by the new academy.

Views of Dover District Council

7. Paul Watkins, leader of Dover District Council, has indicated support for the proposal.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

8. The Learning and Skills Council supports the proposal.

Views of the Governing Body

9. The Governing Body has been involved in discussions about the future of the school, and is fully supportive of the proposal.

Views of the Partnership Board

10. The Partnership has been consulted and involved in discussions which resulted in the current proposal being formulated.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

11. The establishment of a new academy would bring long term educational benefits for local learners. The new academy would have the organisational flexibility to operate according to local needs and circumstances. The ability to cater for the full ability range would also enhance the schools capacity to achieve and sustain significant increases in attainment levels, taking the school out of National Challenge.

The mix of sponsors supporting and driving sustainable improvement within a first class learning environment offers the prospect of durable, transformational change which will create a successful and popular learning community, improving the learning experience for young people, locally.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

12. (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. However, the Local Authority is required to incur some development costs, which are likely to be in the region of 3% of the capital investment.

(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.

Proposed Timetable

13. If it is decided that a public notice should be issued in respect of the proposal, the following timetable could apply:

Cabinet Member decision (to issue a public notice)	beginning of January 2010
Public Notice period	14 January to 25 February 2010
Decision by Local Authority	5 March 2010 (approx)
Adjudication (if required)	April/May 2010
Implementation	September 2010

Recommendation

14. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:

- (a) the closure of Archers Court Maths & Computing College, and;
- (b) if agreed, the issuing of a public notice to close the school so that it may be replaced by a government funded academy.

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The Local Member is Mr Bryan Cope

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board - 8 October 2009