

By: ROSALIND TURNER, MANAGER DIRECTOR, CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

To: SARAH HOHLER, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

Subject: THE PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF WALMER (COMMUNITY) SCIENCE COLLEGE AND CASTLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE - DEAL

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: The Cabinet member is requested to agree to the proposal on the future of High School provision in the Deal area and asks whether Walmer Science College and Castle Community College should be amalgamated and a new school established to replace them.

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## **Introduction**

1. The School Organisation Advisory Board supported a recommendation to amalgamate Walmer Science College and Castle Community College and establish a new school to replace them

## **The Proposal**

2. (1) The proposal is to amalgamate Castle Community College and Walmer Science College by closing the existing two schools and establishing a new successor school, if possible in September 2010. All students who are attending the two predecessor schools at the point at which the new school is established would be guaranteed a place at the new school should they need one.

(2) The new school could be established either as a Trust school working with an external partner(s) to raise standards or by means of a competition. The governing bodies of Castle Community College and Walmer Science College have indicated that they wish to explore the possibility of setting up a Trust School. If the Local Authority supports such a proposal an application could be made by the putative Trust to the Secretary of State for exemption from the competition requirement, in which case the Local Authority could agree and implement the proposal. There would still be consultation on the proposal but a decision could be secured more quickly than via the competition route.

(3) The Local Authority could initiate a competition and publish an 'Invitation to Bid' public notice specifying the detailed requirements for the new school and inviting interested parties to submit a proposal to run the school. Both the Local Authority and the putative Trust could submit a proposal as part of the competition process. If the Local Authority did decide to submit a proposal for a new Community school, the final decision would be made by the Schools Adjudicator.

## **The Consultation**

3. (1) The consultation document was distributed to staff, governors and parents at both

schools, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, the Learning and Skills Council, 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 2500 copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

### *Written Responses*

4. (1) 153 responses have been received, of which 51 are in favour, 97 opposed and 5 undecided.

## **Views of Local Members**

5. (1) Mr Kit Smith is also a Dover District Councillor and comments as follows:

*"I had heard the arguments for the proposed amalgamation and was pleased that there was a real opportunity for local interested parties to express their views at two open public meetings held at both schools as well as being able to send in written submissions.*

*I attended both of the meetings, one held at Castle Community College on 17 November and a similar meeting at Walmer Science College on 18 November. At both of these we heard the argument and information in favour of amalgamation from Martyn Doole and other speakers as well as well argued and at times passionate speeches from a wide range of people. These were both well run and well attended meetings. Everyone present had a full opportunity to participate. There was good and fair press coverage in the local papers and the meetings were well advertised.*

*My conclusions from those meetings and talking to parents, teachers, governors and learners is that on balance it will be to the advantage of learners if there is an amalgamation as proposed, both in the short and long term.*

*My only caveat to that conclusion is that for some parents, teachers and learners the period of change over the next year or so may be a difficult one. This needs to be noted and acted upon with care, compassion and understanding to provide support and advice where necessary.*

*I am confident that for most people, including learners, the amalgamation will be extremely good news with new and varied and sustainable opportunities for all."*

(2) Ms Julie Rook is also a Dover District Councillor and comments as follows:

*"Unfortunately I was unable to attend the consultation event at Castle Community, but did attend Walmer Science College on 18 November.*

*I do believe that these two consultation events were the perfect opportunity for parents, young people and members of our community to express their views and they did so in a reasoned and articulate manner. There has also been the opportunity for interested parties to submit their views in writing and there has been fair coverage in the local press. The meetings were well advertised and fairly well attended.*

*At Walmer Science College, Martyn Doole answered questions put before him in a very reasoned and effective manner and the meeting was effectively chaired by Councillor Susan Carey.*

*I have spoken to many people, both before, during and since the meetings took place and after careful consideration, have reached the conclusion that it will be to the advantage of young people both now and in the future that an amalgamation take place.*

*I do however wish to point out three areas of major concern to the School Organisation Advisory Board.*

- Firstly that KCC and the schools involved do take the necessary steps to ensure that during the amalgamation, young people, especially those approaching examinations, are given the support they need to ensure nothing inhibits exam success and that the amalgamation is without disruption to pupils and is as smooth as possible.*
- Secondary, I do have grave concerns regarding sufficient road infrastructure at Castle Community and wish to make those concerns known to the School Organisation Advisory Board.*
- And lastly, that it is in the interests of the community that KCC make a formal statement regarding the future use of Walmer Science College and its land. I also make particular reference to Barns Close Cricket Club, whose land is under KCC ownership and is of vital importance to the community.”*

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

6. The local MP is Mr Gwyn Prosser who has sent the following in response to the consultation: “Communities have a very understandable resistance to the prospect of seeing their local schools closed, which I share, and past ill-judged school closures in my area by Kent County Council have done little to give my constituents confidence in the Council’s ability to conduct a fair and meaningful consultation exercise or arrive at a just conclusions.

However, it’s acknowledged that rolls are falling in East Kent and it’s difficult to ignore the negative impact this will have, even on well performing schools like Walmer Science College and Castle Community College. If we are to believe the predictions, the combined 11 -16 roll will fall below 1000 within 10 years and it’s unlikely that any funding regime would support such low pupil numbers spread over two local sites.

To take full advantage of the Government’s *Building Schools for the Future* funding and to ensure that children in the Deal area continue to receive a full curriculum it’s sensible to merge the two schools on to one site provided the concerns raised in respect of special needs provision can be addressed.

Based on the information provided by KCC I support the recommendation to merge both schools on to the Castle Community College site.”

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

7. The LSC’s view is around the proposal as it affects 16-19 provision. Our relevant 16-19 functions transfer to Kent County Council with effect from 1 April 2010. The 16-19 contextual background is progression within the 14-19 phase; increasing the participation of 16-19 year-olds; and the skills agenda.

Within that context, the LSC supports the proposed merger. We agree with KCC's view over the benefits of the single institution and the LSC believes that those benefits would stand to offer greater opportunities for post-16 provision in the area than retaining the existing two sixth forms.

We believe that at this stage it is not appropriate for the LSC to offer a formal view as to whether the single school should be created as a Trust school or through a competition.

However, given KCC's impending new overarching responsibilities for commissioning all 16-19 provision, we strongly believe that the 16-19 offer following the establishment of the new school needs to be considered very carefully and innovatively within the wider strategic East Kent context. That applies both to the direct offer at the new school on the Castle Community College site as well as the use to which the Walmer site is put.

We expect that 16-19 (and perhaps some adult) learners in East Kent could benefit substantially from innovative collaboration between the school and college sectors and employers, and the Walmer site stands to contribute significantly to those collaborative solutions. Whilst potentially Thanet and Canterbury colleges are key partners, the Walmer site could perhaps particularly play a role in future developments for learners currently served by South Kent College.

In summary, we support the proposal for merger. Should it proceed, we would expect the Walmer site to be part of a wider strategic approach to post-16 provision in East Kent.

## Views of the Governing Bodies

8. (1) Walmer Science College – The following response has been received from the Chair of Governors of Walmer Science College expressing the collective view of the governing body.

*“The governing body of Walmer Science College is in favour of the proposals to close down the two existing schools and open a new one on the Castle Community College site. We have identified three areas where we would like some reassurance:*

- i. The timetable, as laid out in the consultation document, with the new school coming in to being September 2010, seems very short. To appoint a new Headteacher and then expect him/her to engage in the necessary staff re-organisation in the proposed timescale would be, we feel, impossible. On a personal note, I feel that it might be possible to just appoint a Head and then give him or her the period 2010-2011 to properly look at school organisation.*
- ii. There is some concern at the funding of any future new build and Governors at Walmer Science College would like some indication, as far as that is possible, that money is in place for a new school. The main concern is that a new school would be created and the money would not be there and we would have to operate on a split site, in buildings, on the Castle Community College site, which everybody has identified as not fit for 21<sup>st</sup> Century education; which would be the worst outcome.*
- iii. The governors at Walmer Science College are very proud of the new buildings which were erected fairly recently, at some not inconsiderable cost. Because of this we would like some flesh on the bones of the proposal put forward, in the consultation document, regarding a vocational centre on the present Walmer Science College site.*

*Finally, I would just like to note, though it is not really part of the present consultation, that the Governors of Walmer Science College, in conjunction with our colleagues at Castle Community College, are actively pursuing Trust status. The reasons for this are, by taking that route the local community retains control of the process and can take decisions which reflect the needs and aspirations of their area. We are of course aware that the decisions are made by Members of the County Council, but we would hope that Members would agree that the best people to determine educational provision in an area, are those who live there.”*

(2) The governing body of Castle Community College has placed on record, at the joint governing body meetings of Walmer Science College and Castle Community College, their total support for the plans to merge with Walmer Science College. The governing body has agreed a Trust School proposal in conjunction with Walmer governors that they hope will be accepted by Kent County Councillors.

### **Views of the Local Children's Services Partnership Board**

9. The Partnership Board agree that this proposal will benefit the young people of the area, the caveat being that the benefit will only be realised if the new building goes ahead.

### **Views of Highways**

10. The existing main access point to the Castle Community College site would not be suitable as the main access point for the new school. If the proposal is agreed, access to the new school will need to be looked at and a traffic assessment should include all the surrounding junctions with traffic counts. The means of transport to the school by pupils should be assessed and included in a Travel Plan. Integration into the existing cycle routes in the area should also be considered.

### **Resource Issues**

#### *Capital & Revenue*

11. (1) A new school of 7FE would achieve long term viability in terms of revenue funding. Consolidation of High School provision in Deal onto a single site would enable the Local authority to make optimum cost effective use of available resources and maximise capital investment in new school infrastructure, providing a first class learning environment for all students.

#### *Human*

(2) A new trust school would require the establishment of a single governing body and the appointment of a single headteacher to lead the school.

(3) There would be some efficiencies arising from consolidation on a single site but it is not possible to quantify these at the current time. Falling rolls poses a significant risk to jobs. Amalgamation offers the potential to align staffing establishment with pupil numbers in a coherent and managed way.

(4) Staff employed by each of the two predecessor schools at the point at which a new school comes into being would be entitled to transfer to the new school via TUPE arrangements.

### **Views of the School Organisation Advisory Board**

12. The majority of the School Organisation Advisory Board supported the proposal to Endorse, in principle, the proposal from the governing bodies of the existing schools working with their external partners to establish a new Trust School. Subject to the formal endorsement of the Local Authority an application would then be submitted by the promoters to the Secretary of State for exemption from the competition process. The report is attached as appendix 1a.

## **Recommendation**

13. Cabinet Member is asked to agree to:

Endorse, in principle, the proposal from the governing bodies of the existing schools working with their external partners to establish a new Trust School. Subject to the formal endorsement of the Local Authority an application would then be submitted by the promoters to the Secretary of State for exemption from the competition process.

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The Local Members are: Mr Kit Smith, Ms Julie Rook

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*Background Documents:*

None

*Previous Committee Reports:*

School Organisation Advisory Board - 8 October 2009.  
School Organisation Advisory Board – 7 January 2010