

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

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 7 January 2010

Subject: WALMER (COMMUNITY) SCIENCE COLLEGE AND CASTLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE - PROPOSED AMALGAMATION – OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out the results of public consultation on the future of High School provision in the Deal area. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on whether Walmer Science College and Castle Community College should be amalgamated and a new school established to replace them.

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

Introduction

1. (1) There are currently two High Schools located in Deal which serve principally the Deal and Walmer communities. Castle Community School and Walmer Science College have a common catchment area, although the schools themselves are located 1.18 miles from each other in Deal and Walmer respectively.

(2) The prospect of falling secondary school rolls across the area over the next few years poses a significant challenge to the viability of the two schools as separate stand-alone institutions. In January 2009 Castle Community School had 533 students at 11-16 with a sixth form of 128. Walmer Science College had 671 at 11-16 with a sixth form of 125. By January 2018 with the impact of falling secondary school rolls, these numbers are predicted to fall, with Castle forecast to have 478 at 11-16 and 92 in the 6th Form, and Walmer 509 at 11-16 and a 6th form of 100.

(3) Secondary schools of less than 4 forms of entry (600 students at 11 – 16) face considerable challenges in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum which offers optimum student choice and diversity while making cost effective use of resources.

(4) Schools in the Dover District, including those in Deal and Walmer, stand to benefit from substantial capital investment through Wave 5 of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. In order to secure optimum capital investment which will benefit all students, the Local Authority is required to consider cost effective school organisation solutions which will improve education outcomes, secure viable long term provision and make best use of available resources.

(5) Both Walmer Science College and Castle Community College are good schools which serve their communities well. The challenge is to secure viable long term provision which will enable standards to be maintained and improved against a background of falling

rolls with consequential reductions in student numbers, funding and staffing if action is not taken now.

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. A copy is attached as Appendix 1.

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.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 2.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) Approximately 80 members of the public attended the public meeting at Castle Community School on 17 November 2009 chaired by Valerie Dagger. Approximately 70 people attend the public meeting at Walmer (Community) Science College on 18 November 09, chaired by Mrs Susan Carey. A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached as Appendix 3.

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 (if appropriate)

7. The views of the LSC have been sought via telephone calls, email and a hard copy of the consultation document. It is expected that a view will be forthcoming and available for the meeting on 7 January.

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 21st 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 Pupils

9. Castle Community College School Council Statement of Support

“We, members of the Castle Community College School Council, support this merger for these reasons:

- We do not want the schools to close. Children of Deal and Walmer should be able to go to school near their homes, not in Dover or Sandwich. This means we can take part in all the clubs and after-school activities provided.*
- The new school could help more students because a greater range of course could be offered. It wouldn't matter what you were good at, you could study the subject with really good facilities.*
- The school needs to be modernised and new buildings would make all students and staff feel proud. This would be an investment in us all. There would be more space to get to know everyone and to work in. We feel excited by this opportunity.*

- *The new build on our site would mean that the new school did not take a big chunk out of Deal but everyone could use it.*
- *There would be better facilities for those areas our schools do very well in. At Castle Community we could have more facilities for Performing Arts, Sports and Vocational subjects for example, and Walmer could get better science facilities. We could even study new subjects if the school attracts new teachers.*
- *Even more children would want to come to the new school so that no-one in the area would have to travel to Dover or Sandwich and that would save money and the environment.*

Thank you for this opportunity to say why we support the merger.”

Views of the Local Children’s Services Partnership Board

10. 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

11. 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.

Views of the Area Children’s Services Officer

12. (1) I believe that the consolidation of High School provision in Deal on the Castle Community site would be in the long term interests of local learners and their communities. It would secure the future of High School provision in Deal by creating a viable school with a critical mass of students and staff, not only to survive but to thrive, building on the significant strengths of the predecessor schools.

In the circumstances I would commend to members option C of the three options outlined in Section 15 of the report.

(2) In anticipation of the need for future change, the two governing bodies have already put together an Expression of Interest (EOI) indicating their desire to establish a single trust covering both schools. They have not pursued the establishment of a Trust beyond that point because they wished to work in partnership with the Local Authority to identify a way forward and to align the relevant planning timescales.

The EOI which the governors have developed would need to be adapted to form the basis of a proposal for a new Trust School. However, the EOI clearly indicates that there is a high level of commitment and capacity to realise a new Trust School model. Members could therefore take the view that on the basis of the work which has already been done the Local Authority should endorse in principle an application by the promoters to the Secretary of State for permission to publish a proposal for a new Trust School with exemption from competition arrangements. This route if approved by the Secretary of State would still allow for extensive consultation on the detailed proposal and critical scrutiny and

evaluation of the proposal by elected members before a final decision is made. Ultimately if the Local Authority does not submit its own proposal via the competition route, the Local Authority determines whether to approve the proposal with or without modifications or whether to reject the proposal.

(3) With regard to specific issues raised during the consultation process I would like to address two in some detail.

Consideration is being given to the possible alternative use of the Walmer site, if the proposal to amalgamate the schools is implemented. There is a need to consider the whole future of vocational provision in Dover district to ensure complementary provision across the district which makes optimum use of existing facilities and secures engagement and partnership with schools and tertiary providers. Development of the Walmer site as a sixth form facility meeting the core needs of the combined sixth form could be one element of this development, details of which will be worked upon in consultation with the schools. Draft proposals are being developed which will be subject to broad consultation and public scrutiny in the New Year before final decisions are taken on the future of the amalgamation proposal.

Some concern has been expressed about the timetable for amalgamation and in particular a view that September 2010 is not achievable. In response to these concerns and allowing for the possibility of slippage in the proposed schedule, I would support and commend to members a modification of the timetable proposed in the consultation document. If the decision is to support a Trust proposal and pursue exemption from competition, I would recommend a revised implementation date of January 2011. I would not propose any change to September 2011 if the competition route is agreed.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

13. (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.

Proposed Timetable

14.

Cabinet Member Decision to support a proposal for a new Trust School or to initiate a competition	January 2010
If the Cabinet Member supports a Trust School proposal from the proposed Trust and exemption from competition is granted by the Secretary of State	
Proposed Trust submits an application to Secretary of State for exemption from competition	January 2010
If exemption is approved by the Secretary of State, proposed Trust consult on their proposal	22 February to 6 April 2010
Proposed Trust issue a public notice	22 April 2010
Public Notice expires	3 June 2010
Cabinet Member Decision on the proposal for a new Trust School and the closure of the existing schools	June 2010
Implementation	January 2011
New buildings available on the Castle site	By 2014
If the Cabinet Member initiates a competition	
'Invitation to Bid' Competition Notice period	25 February to 25 June 2010
'Summary of Proposals' Competition Notice period	15 July to 27 August 2010
Cabinet Member Decision OR Referral to the Schools Adjudicator for a Decision (if the Local Authority submits its own proposal)	By 27 October 2010 By 10 September 2010
Adjudicator Decision – if referred	November 2010
Implementation	September 2011
New buildings on the Castle site	By 2014

Recommendation

15. Members are asked to consider the responses to the consultation and express a view on the following options.

- a) Do nothing – status quo
- b) Initiate a Competition Process inviting potential promoters to submit a bid to establish a new school.
- c) 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.

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

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

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board of 8 October 2009.