

**PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF WALMER SCIENCE COLLEGE AND CASTLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW SUCCESSOR SCHOOL ON THE CASTLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SITE**

**Summary of the Public Meetings held**

The key issues raised are summarised below with responses from the Area Children's Services Officer in italics.

**17 November at Castle Community College**

Approximately 80 people attended the public meeting including parents, governors, a local member and other interested parties.

**Martyn Doole** the Area Children's Services Officer outlined the background to the proposal explaining that this is a consultation on the future of high school provision in Deal because the rolls of both schools are projected to fall over the next few years, threatening the future of the schools. Amalgamation would secure sustainability. If the proposal went ahead a new school could be established either through a Trust School proposal coming forward from the governors of both schools with external partners, or established through a competition process.

**Christine Chapman** the headteacher of Castle Community College spoke about past difficulties but now the school is judged by Ofsted as Outstanding. The people of Deal do not like change but must recognise the advantages that this proposal would bring for the children of Deal, including new state-of-the-art buildings and facilities. Discussions with Walmer Science College on the future of both schools started several years ago. The schools now have a joint 6<sup>th</sup> form which is able to offer many more courses. This has resulted in 100 additional students electing to stay in Deal for their Post 16 education instead of travelling out of town. 14 year olds now have 13 options because of joint planning and students from both schools have had no difficulty in working together, as many were friends from primary school days.

The vision for a new school includes the concept of schools within schools. The idea would be to have four mini schools, each with a student population of 300-350. These students would be taught by teachers in a small school environment but with the advantages of an overall larger school being able to offer a wider range of opportunities. This proposal is very exciting and would bring major advantages for all children in Deal.

**Vice Chair of Governors** – the governors want the school to continue forward as outstanding and the two schools joining together will be the best way forward.

**The following points were made by different members of the public, including parents, staff and governors, some of the points being made more than once.**

- Removal of choice by only having one school
- Parents chose Castle because it is a small school
- Parents have concerns about a bigger school but it would be underpinned by Castle's caring ethos
- It would not be possible to provide the best education for your children in the future operating as two separate schools.

- The joint sixth form already offers options that the schools could not have hoped to offer separately.
- SEN pupils do not achieve in a larger environment
- How would KCC evidence improved educational outcomes? There would be disruption to the children's education during the transition period 2010-15.
- Children cope better with change than we think.
- The opportunity of BSF funding and a new school is a golden opportunity that should not be thrown away by parents.
- Very concerned as to whether the funding is guaranteed.
- Clarification is needed about the buildings with regard to redevelopment and new build.
- Nothing is mentioned in the consultation document about how any vocational or further education provision on the Walmer site would be funded if this proposal goes ahead.
- Concerns about the timescale and the appointment of a headteacher within that timescale.
- Staff are already leaving Walmer Science College because of the disruption and a new school will have a new staffing structure.
- The new housing proposed for the area will result in more children.
- The consultation document was not circulated widely enough and should have been sent to more primary school parents and local residents.
- The word 'amalgamation' is misleading as in reality both schools would close and a new school would open.
- The question missing in the response form could result in inaccurate data.
  
- *Parental choice – a more difficult decision may have to be made in the future about the two schools as their future is inextricably linked because they serve the same community. If a decision is not taken now, we could find that falling rolls would require a reorganisation proposal to be revised in 2-3 years time, at which point we would have missed the current window of opportunity to secure BSF funding.*
- *There is a commitment to substantial new build but figures are not included as this should not be a debate about finances. Castle Community College and Walmer Science College would both contribute to the design of the new school.*
- *No decisions have been made by Members about the Walmer site.*
- *There is no evidence that a pupil with SEN, whose needs can be met in a mainstream school, would be disadvantaged in a larger school. Individual needs would be addressed and providing for pupils with SEN would be an elemental part of any proposal coming forward for a new school.*
- *There would be a greater threat to standards if this proposal did not go ahead. Any proposal coming forward for a new replacement school would have to rigorously focus on school improvement. A transition plan would be put in place by the leaders of both schools and the new headteacher.*
- *We believe funding for the BSF wave in which Dover sits is secure and there has been no indication from central government to the contrary.*
- *Christine Chapman will be retiring and there will be a decision made about the leadership of this school. It would be possible to appoint a Headteacher designate prior to the final decision being made.*
- *Some staff do not like change and will choose to leave but teachers would have the opportunity to be part of the new school. Consultation with staff supported by the Schools Personnel Service (SPS) is being arranged in parallel with the public consultation.*
- *The roll predictions do take into account extra housing, but new housing does not always generate extra pupils. Discussions will continue to take place with Dover*

*District Council and local planners on future housing projects, which have currently been put back because of the financial climate. The birth rate has risen but will take 10-11 years to impact on secondary rolls.*

- *All the primary schools received copies of the consultation document in addition to those for Year 6.*
- *Amalgamation is achieved by closing existing schools and establishing a new school under a single leadership and governance regime.*
- *There was a printing error on the original response form. Replacement forms were issued as soon as this was noticed.*

### **18 November 2009 at Walmer Science College**

Approximately 70 people attended the public meeting including parents, governors and other interested parties.

**Martyn Doole** the Area Childrens Services Officer outlined the background to the proposal, the options open to the Local Authority, the reasons why this particular proposal is being considered and the benefits accruing from the proposed change. He explained that the main driver for change was one of pupil numbers and the need for the school serving the area to have the critical mass to maintain a viable school providing a wide curriculum for the local community. BSF will not support the rebuilding of 2 small schools in the same area, but will make a transformational change to 1 larger school. He stressed that both schools were very good schools and there was no question of change being made because of any current perceived shortcomings.

**Nick Cavell** the chair of Governors of Walmer Science College informed the meeting that the governing body had voted in favour of the proposal with some caveats. The governors together with the governors of Castle Community College would like to pursue the Trust model. Governors believe that implementation of the proposal would bring significant improvement to education in the area. Concerns included: September 2010 was too tight; worries about funding; what would happen to the existing buildings on the Walmer site?

**Martyn Doole** in response agreed that the timescale was tight, but it could be changed. *Experience suggests that once a proposal is agreed it is better to move to implementation as quickly as possible to reduce uncertainty. BSF is a central government initiative and we have been assured there is no serious risk to the Dover Wave of the programme. Some of the Walmer buildings could be used for vocational education, but no definitive plans are in place.*

**Julie Rook** the Local member does have worries about the removal of choice of school. Some parents have concerns about a larger school. We do appear to be in a “use it or lose it” scenario with regard to BSF which is a once in a lifetime opportunity. She urged all to send back the consultation forms. She put in a plea for the retention of the ground for the cricket club. She asked about guarantees on class sizes and how robust is the data on falling rolls, and would extra capacity be built in?

**Simon Heaton** headteacher of Walmer Science College said that both existing schools are very good schools, but the reality is that the numbers are falling. Walmer is investing in the future meeting the needs of the youngsters.

In a Trust Foundation school there will be a governing body that will lead and direct the school. Trust partners will not have the majority of the governors. In essence the governing body of the new school will carry out the same duties as governors of Castle and Walmer do now. The Trust itself is separate. They will meet a few times a year –

they will not be responsible for the day to day running of the school. The Trust cannot sell off the land – it gets handed back if the Trust folds.

The proposed school will use the school within a school model whereby there will be 4 mini schools retaining the advantage of a small school within a bigger structure. The new school would be able to offer a wide choice of courses.

**The following points were made by different members of the public, including parents, staff and governors, some of the points being made more than once.**

- 1 school instead of 2 means removal of choice
- Bigger is not necessarily better
- 1 larger school will increase the number of courses available and offer choice
- We should be encouraging all children to walk or cycle to their local school
- There is a massive new house building programme scheduled for Deal which will produce more children
- If a Trust is established we would be transferring the land to the Trust and should the school close the land would be retained by the Trust
- The Trust would control the curriculum and could dictate what is taught.
- A credible local organisation needs to be part of the Trust
- No one has proved how good Trust schools are.
- This proposal will have an impact on the traffic
- At Castle there is little off road parking
- How can KCC create safe access to Castle?
- Walmer is a community site
- It is safer at Walmer
- Many people send their children to Sandwich from Deal
- Will there be protection for staff?
- Not confident about BSF money being available following a general election.
- Why does a decision have to be made now?
- The consultation document should have been distributed more widely
- Who will pay for a vocational centre at Walmer?
- Will land be sold off for development?
- There is a growing number of SEN children
- The Local Authority should appoint independent statisticians to validate the roll predictions.
- Will there be extra capacity built in should numbers rise?
- Families are migrating to the South East and will need school places
- Worried that the cricket club might lose its ground as a result of the proposal
- The Ofsted reports for both schools are outstanding
- There is a need for stability; worried about the impact of change on current pupils
- The proposed site at Castle is a land fill site
- Castle is on a flood plain
- At present both schools work together with the 6<sup>th</sup> Form, with benefits for the students
- Can those who go to Sandwich be brought back to Deal?
  
- *It is true that there will be 1 school rather than 2, but within the new school there will be greater choice*
- *Journey times would vary – it would be shorter for some and longer for others*
- *If plans are delayed money may not be available*

- *Officers have liaised with Dover District Council planners, and pupil numbers are based on current patterns while taking into consideration the impact of housing developments*
- *Staff will transfer to the new school under TUPE. Protection will apply*
- *The educational Trust will be established if exemption from competition is granted by the Secretary of State. KCC will determine the outcome of a proposal*
- *The consultation documents were distributed to the parents in both schools, all year 6 parents in the feeder primary schools, other stakeholders and posted on the KCC website.*
- *SEN planning needs to feature in the proposal – it is intended to build on existing strengths*
- *Disruption during transition will be kept to a minimum.*
- *The possible use of the Walmer buildings for vocational education, or the possible sale of the site has not yet been decided*
- *Members will make decision about the use of the land.*
- *The ability to maintain standards will be impaired by lower numbers. Choices will be limited for students if both schools remain as they are and the numbers dwindle. There are economies of scale which will permit a larger institution to deliver a more varied curriculum while the school within a school model retains the advantages of smaller units*
- *4 years ago when KCC consulted on primary reorganisation, some claimed that new housing would result in an increase in numbers. To date the numbers have continued to decline. KCC is confident that pupil numbers forecast are accurate.*
- *KCC's interest is to get the best for the public while ensuring the optimum use of public funds.*
- *Partnership for Schools allows an in built surplus of 5%*
- *A bigger school does not necessarily mean bigger class sizes*
- *KCC takes account of public opinion, but a consultation is just that, the number of responses do not equate with votes. Members make decisions based on the quality of the argument*
- *The roll of KCC in the running of schools has declined. 20 years ago the LA ran schools, this has changed. KCC's duty is to ensure the supply of school places. KCC has an enhanced role with intervention.*
- *Planners will look at the Castle site regarding suitability, but the school has been there for 70 years. The footprint of the proposed new buildings is unknown. The whole site will be developed.*
- *Existing access is not good, but a major reconfiguration is being examined. No proposal will get through unless site issues are addressed.*
- *KCC cannot force Deal parents to remove their children from Sandwich schools and send them for education in Deal. It is against the law.*