

## PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

### Proposal to close The Astor of Hever Community School and replace with a new Government funded Academy

**Summary of the Public Meeting held on  
Wednesday 25 November 2009 at 7.00 pm  
The Astor of Hever Community School, Oakwood Road, Maidstone ME16 8AE**

**Attended by:           Members of the Public**

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Issue or Comment	Response
<i>Are Woodard Schools, the Sponsors, only involved in the UK?</i>	Woodard Schools are only involved within the UK.
<i>How did the Local Authority decide on Woodard Schools as the sponsor, was there a bidding process?</i>	The LA had considered other sponsors who had been rejected. The DCSF had introduced Woodard Schools as an approved sponsor. The representative from Woodard Schools had been interrogated by various officers of the LA and then again by Astor of Hever's Governing Body. Woodard Schools had therefore been approved by the DCSF, the LA and then the Governing Body.
<i>Accountability within the Academy process? The school is inspected regularly and has certain standards to meet – how would this continue as an academy school?</i>	With regard to accountability, academies were still inspected by OfSTED. They do have to follow the National Curriculum core subjects but do have flexibility and are accountable directly to the Secretary of State rather than the LA as other schools are.
<i>Concern about children's education whilst the academy is built, where will the children be housed, what effect does it have on them. Are you keeping the site here? How will you build the school with the pupils still here?</i>	There are clearly issues with re-building the school. Firstly, in terms of the site, the school will remain on the Oakwood Park Site and in loose terms upon land associated with the school, still to be determined. A key issue in the Feasibility Stage will be to look at where should the school be rebuilt, what should it be like and how can that be managed in such a way that it will not disrupt the education of children in the school, not only for the children's sake, which is very important, but also bearing in mind standards which

	cannot be allowed to slip during this time. We will need to talk to the consultants about this and get some confirmation from them. Details will follow in the next phase.
<i>Will the governing board remain?</i>	No. When an Academy is opened a new Governing Body is appointed. Whether any existing Governors sit on that body is yet to be determined, we haven't got to that stage yet. It is proposed that the LA will have two seats on the Governing Body so there will be some LA continuity there.
<i>There will be a new principal. Does that mean that the people who are raising the standards now, will have no involvement or will someone be brought in from outside?</i>	There is the opportunity for the staff to transfer to the new academy and to continue to make a significant contribution to the new academy if that is what they wish, and there is no reason to believe that they wouldn't wish to do that. The way the sponsor has expressed this is 'that there is a seat on the bus for anybody who wants to go on that journey'. There is no reason to suppose that there will be a complete change of staff and that people working in the school will be lost, but they have a choice.
<i>You have shown some very impressive figures from the position of being in special measures to very close to the National Challenge requirements and I am just wondering, why has that all got to stop? You talk about sustainability, are you saying that it is impossible to sustain those figures and to build on them with the current status quo, or are you only having to go to the academy to build on that?</i>	The LA had reflected upon this a lot before deciding to move forward in this way. The whole proposal is about ensuring that the improvement and development continues and grows and that it does not go backwards. Astor of Hever is comparatively small as a secondary school which has implications for its resources. We want the school to be supported by a framework that can intervene and provide support if necessary. The role of the LA in respect of schools is declining, the government's policies like the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century schools sees schools as being more independent but having a greater role in supporting each other. We need to make sure that Astor is surrounded by a structure of support.

	<p>Astor's unique selling point recently was that it is a small school. It works well for students in the close knit community that they are supported and guided. With the opportunities with Woodard Schools, the school is not looking to grow or merge with anybody else. The opportunity is to build on the successes that we have already and to merge those successes with the experience of Woodward Schools. This is what will secure a really positive future for the school over and above perhaps where we may get to as a stand alone school on our own without the support of approximately 40 schools that Woodard is already involved with. It's not just the opportunities for students to network across schools, it's also the opportunities for staff to share ideas across other schools and get a broader dimension. In the longer term, the school has already developed relationships within the site here, and with the re-branding of the school we have an opportunity to reinvent ourselves with the local schools and colleges and get an even better collaboration working.</p>
<p><i>I'm not so interested in the new buildings I'm more interested in the quality of the teaching staff and the students.</i></p>	<p>Agreed - the buildings matter less than the staff and students. Sometimes it is easier to attract new staff when you need to replace them if you are offering them excellent facilities and a good working environment. The number one priority is getting the school right in terms of the teaching and learning and the attitudes that are in it.</p>
<p><i>Are all the Woodard Schools successful and growing or do they have any failures?</i></p>	<p>As far as Woodward is concerned – I would like you to challenge Woodard yourself at the next stage because I feel that the answer to this question would have more meaning to you if it came direct from Woodard Schools themselves.</p>