

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 2 April 2008

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF AXTON CHASE SCHOOL, LONGFIELD, DARTFORD AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY.

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report presents the results of a public consultation on the proposal to close Axton Chase School, Longfield, Dartford and replace it with a government-funded Academy. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) The School Organisation Advisory Board, at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008, supported a recommendation to consult on the proposal to close Axton Chase School, Longfield, Dartford and replace it with a government-funded Academy. The report is attached as Appendix 1.

(2) This report sets out the results of the public consultation.

## **Background and Accommodation Issues**

2. (1) Axton Chase school is an 11-18 mixed, non-selective Community high school with a roll of 935 for Years 7 to 11 and 105 post 16 students.

(2) The school serves both rural and urban communities located in the Dartford district. Pupils attend the school from two of the most deprived wards in Dartford, Temple Hill and Swanscombe.

(3) In Axton Chase school, the socio-economic profile of the student intake is below the national and Kent average overall. The proportion of students with a statement of Special Educational Needs is 6%, above the Kent (2.8%) and National average (2.2%). The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 10%, which is below the National average of 13.6%, yet above the Kent average of 7.9%.

(4) The vision for the Axtane Academy is that it will develop a new first class approach to education. The Academy will instil a pride in and a love of learning. This will motivate students to aim high and become skilled and flexible learners. The ethos will be to provide the best possible avenue of development for these young people to become socially, emotionally and behaviourally confident citizens, employees and employers. The Academy will have a particular focus on vocational education, creating a mix of academic and vocational experiences.

(5) It is planned that the Academy will specialise in Science and the Creative and Expressive Arts, with a bias towards technology based programmes. It will also have a specialist centre for students in the autistic spectrum.

(6) The Academy will be part of a hard federation with the Leigh Technology Academy. The Leigh Technology Academy Trust will be the sole legal body responsible for both Leigh and the new Axtane Academy.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) It is proposed to close Axton Chase Community Secondary School on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008.

(2) It is proposed that a new government funded Academy will replace Axton Chase School, opening on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008. The name of the Academy is likely to be The Axtane Academy. The Academy will be federated with the Leigh Technology Academy, which is the lead sponsor with co-sponsors Kent County Council (KCC) and the University of Kent.

(3) It is proposed that the Academy will open on the existing site and premises with a Published Admission Number of 180, and a capacity of 900, plus up to 200 post 16 places. The new buildings are expected to be completed in September 2010 on the same site, adjacent to the current premises.

## **The Consultation**

4. (1) The consultation process began on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008 and finished on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

(2) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 2 was circulated according to the County Procedures for Review. This circulation included Local Members, Dartford Borough Council, local libraries, the Member of Parliament and all Dartford Primary and Secondary School head teachers. Axton Chase School was sent enough copies for all staff, governors, parents and carers to receive one. Attached to the consultation document was a reply form for respondents to express their views. Approximately 1500 copies of the document were circulated

(3) The document can be viewed on the KCC website at:  
<http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/education-and-learning/soab-axton-08.htm>

(4) A public meeting was held at Axton Chase School on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2008. Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chair of SOAB, chaired the meeting. In attendance were Dr Ian Craig, Director Operations. Mr Simon Webb, Area Education Officer for Dartford & Gravesham. About 15 members of the public attended.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

### *Written Responses*

5. (1) 25 responses have been received, of which 20 are in favour, 4 against and 1 is undecided.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 3.

## *Public Meeting Responses*

(3) A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached at Appendix 4.

### **Views of Local Members**

6. The Local Member for the County Division where Axton Chase School is sited is Mr Bertie Bassam. Mr Bassam is also the Chair of the Governing body of Axton Chase School. Mr Bassam has been informed of the proposal and is fully supportive.

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

7. The Local Member of Parliament is Dr Howard Stoate. Dr Stoate has been informed of the proposal and has no comment to make at this stage.

### **Views of Dartford Borough Council**

8. Dartford Borough Council has been fully informed of the proposal. No reply has been received.

### **Views of the Governing Body**

9. The Governing Body of Axton Chase School is fully supportive of the proposal.

### **Views of the Pupils**

10. The headteacher of Axton Chase School has kept the pupils and their parents informed and involved through the school newsletter. The pupils are all looking forward to the school becoming an Academy.

### **Views of the Cluster Board**

11. The Cluster board has been informed of the proposal and is fully supportive.

### **Views of the Area Education Officer**

12. The Area Education Officer considers that this is an innovative proposal, designed to enhance the life opportunities of young people in the Dartford district and is therefore fully supportive of the proposal.

### **Transport, Admissions and Community Impact**

13. (1) There is no change in the location of the site. There is a possibility that the Academy will attract pupils from slightly further afield, but overall there is no change to the transport situation.

(2) The Academy will receive advice and support from the local authority to produce a new travel plan.

## Resource Implications

### Capital

14. (1) There are no capital costs to KCC connected with the closure of Axton Chase School.

(2) Part of the site is due to be sold with the subsequent receipt being used to support the Academies and BSF Programme. The Academy will take on the rest of the site.

### Revenue

(3) Running costs for Academies are paid by the government and the sponsors.

### Human

(4) The Academy will formulate its own staffing strategy. If there are to be any redundancies, these costs will be borne by the local authority.

## Equality Issues

15. PLASC data for Axton Chase School records a low percentage of pupils with an ethnicity that is not White English or Other White British. *Assessment: Low.*

## School Improvement Implications

16. The Academy will be at the core of the community and will be characterised by:

- (a) creating an environment that automatically has high expectations for all;
- (b) having the highest standards of behaviour and commitment;
- (c) developing an enthusiasm for learning by creating a curriculum that incorporates the Sciences and the Creative and Expressive Arts as a rich strand running throughout all aspects of education;
- (d) creating a culture of continuous improvement;
- (e) developing its distinctive approach to creating excellence in education by working in close partnership with the Leigh Technology Academy enabling a greater proportion of young people to achieve the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for our knowledge Society.

## Proposed Timetable

17. It is proposed that planning for the building work will commence after a decision has been reached.

7 Feb 2008	SOAB
12 Feb 2008	Start of Consultation
25 Feb 2008	Public Meeting
25 Mar 2008	Close of Consultation
2 Apr 2008	SOAB
Apr 2008	Cabinet Member Decision
Apr 2008	Public Notice issued, if agreed by Cabinet Member
Jun 2008	End of Statutory Representation Period
31 Aug 2008	Axton Chase School closes
1 Sep 2008	New government funded Academy opens

## **Recommendation**

18. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on
- (a) the proposal to close Axton Chase School, Longfield, Dartford and reopen as a government funded Academy; and
  - (b) the issuing of a public notice.

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The Local Member is Bertie Bassam

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*Background Documents:*

None

*Previous Committee Reports:*

Report to School Organisation Advisory Board 7 February  
2008

By: Director – Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 07 February 2008

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF AXTON CHASE SCHOOL AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY.

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a public consultation, in conjunction with the governing body, on the closure of Axton Chase School and its replacement with a government-funded academy.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) Axton Chase school is an 11-19 mixed (non-selective foundation) high school with a roll of 935 for Years 7 to 11 and 105 post 16 students. Attached as Appendix 1 is a map showing the location of the school.

(2) The school serves both rural and urban communities located in the Dartford district. The school draws from an area which includes three of the most deprived wards in Dartford, pupils attend from two of them, Temple Hill and Swanscombe.

(3) In Axton Chase school, the socio-economic profile of the student intake is below national and Kent average overall. The proportion of students with a statement of Special Educational Needs is above 6% the Kent 2.8% and National average 2.2%. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 10%, which is below the National average 13.6%, yet below the Kent average 7.9%.

(4) The vision for the Axtane Academy is that it will establish an outstanding Academy that will develop new first class approaches to education. The Academy will instil a pride in and love of learning, motivating students to aim high, become skilled and flexible learners and develop into socially, emotionally and behaviourally confident citizens, employees and employers. The Academy will have a particular focus on vocational education creating a mix of academic and vocational experience.

(5) The Axtane Academy will specialise in Science and the Creative and Expressive Arts, with a bias to technology based programmes. It will also have a specialist centre for students in the autistic spectrum.

(6) Axtane Academy will be part of a hard federation with the Leigh Technology Academy. The Leigh Technology Academy will be the sole legal body responsible for both Leigh and Axtane Academies.

## **Academy Proposal**

2. (1) It is proposed that the Academy will replace Axton Chase School and will be known as Axtane Academy. The Axtane Academy will be federated with the Leigh Technology Academy, who are the lead sponsors with co-sponsors Kent County Council (KCC) and the University of Kent.

(2) It is proposed that the Axtane Academy will open in September 2008 on the existing site and premises with a Published Admission Number of 180, with a capacity of 900 with up to 200 post 16 places. The new buildings are expected to be built for completion in September 2010 on the same site, adjacent to the current premises.

(3) The academy will be at the core of the community and will be characterised by:

- (f) creating an environment that automatically has high expectations for all
- (g) having the highest standards of behaviour and commitment
- (h) developing an enthusiasm for learning by creating a curriculum that incorporates the Sciences and the Creative and Expressive Arts as a rich stand running throughout all aspects of education.
- (i) creating a culture of continuous improvement
- (j) developing its distinctive approach to creating excellence in education by working in close partnership with the Leigh Technology Academy
- (k) enabling a greater proportion of young people to achieve the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for our knowledge Society.

## **Resource Implications**

### *Capital*

3. (1) KCCs contribution is £1 million to the Academy Endowment Fund. This will supplement the funding received from the DCSF.

### *Revenue*

(2) The academy will receive its revenue funding directly from the DCSF each year. It will be funded at a rate equivalent to other Kent specialist schools.

### *Human*

(3) Consultation will take place in accordance with the requirements of TUPE. Costs of new staffing (TUPE applies to current staff) and costs associated with TUPE, including any valid redundancies of staff who cannot transfer or be deployed elsewhere in Kent schools, are borne by the DCSF.

## **Transport and Road Safety Implications**

4. Early discussions will take place with Dartford Borough Council and Kent Highways. They will be fully consulted as part of the design and development phase of the new Academy and it is also expected that a travel plan will be produced prior to the opening in 2008.

## School Improvement Implications

6. (1) The closure of the current school and the setting up of the Academy would allow for new facilities, flexibility of curriculum and recruitment of high quality staff. It is intended that the investment in facilities, curriculum and funding flexibility that the academy would bring, would have the positive impact on standards that are required for the students of the Dartford and for improved life opportunities in the local communities.

(2) Axton Chase school was last inspected in November 2007 when it was found that *'the education provided was satisfactory overall, with particular strengths. The sixth form were found to be confident, purposeful and ready to take on responsibilities both within the school and beyond. The curriculum needs greater breadth and cohesion in order to serve all students well.'*

## Views of the Governing Body

7. The governing body of Axton Chase School and the Leigh Technology Academy Board are in full support of this proposal.

## Views of the Area Education Officer

8. The Area Education Officer considers that this is an innovative proposal, designed to enhance the life opportunities of young people in the Dartford district. It is, therefore, appropriate to conduct a public consultation for the closure of Axton Chase School.

## Proposed Timetable

9. Should public consultation be agreed, the following timetable is proposed:

School Organisation Advisory Board	07 February 2008
Publication of consultation document	12 February 2008
Public meeting	w.c. 25 February 2008
Closing date for responses	24 March 2008
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board	April 2008
Cabinet Member decision	April 2008
Issue public notice	May 2008
End of public notice period	June 2008
Implementation	1 September 2008

10. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the proposal for a public consultation to be undertaken in conjunction with the governing body on the proposal for the closure of The Axton Chase School and its replacement with a government funded academy.



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*Background Papers:*

None.

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF AXTON CHASE SCHOOL AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY

**SUMMARY OF WRITTEN RESPONSES**

Consultation documents distributed: 1500  
 Responses received: 25

	Support	Against	Undecided	Total
Parents/Carers of pupils at Axton Chase School	15		1	16
Members of staff at Axton Chase School				
Governors of Axton Chase School	4			4
Members of Staff at other schools				
Interested Party	1	4		5
Total	20	4	1	25

In support of the proposal:

- The new academy will benefit children already at the school as well as future pupils.
- Will make a good school into an even better Academy.
- It will bring facilities that will provide greater development to all future students.
- Improved facilities can only benefit pupils and staff.
- Only concern is that the Academy is not overpowered by Leigh.
- Existing premises is run down and poorly heated.
- The school has a fantastic team of staff and they should be given this wonderful opportunity.
- If Axton Chase does not get academy status, this will be devastating for students as they are all so excited.
- I am very happy with the leadership of Mr Stokes.
- New building needed, but not at the sacrifice of education for children.
- The school will benefit from the extra funding
- This will benefit the school and the community

Opposed to the proposal:

- There is already a good education mix in the local area
- Existing high schools cannot compete against the power of £25million funding
- Will create a three tier system in Dartford
- KCC do not have a policy in place to ensure the education of less advantaged students.

Undecided Comments

- Noted that standards slipped at Swanley School, when there was a fundamental change in the leadership team and ethos

## PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

### Proposal to close Axton Chase School and replace with a new Government Funded Academy

Summary of the public meeting on 25 February 2008  
held in the Hall at Axton Chase School

Issue or Comment	Response
Approximately 15 people attended the public meeting including headteachers, staff governors and parents.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Area Education Officer set out the case for closing Axton Chase School and opening a Government funded Academy.</li> <li>• The Area Education Officer assured the meeting that all comments received would be carefully considered and used to develop the proposals further.</li> <li>• The proposal is that the Axton Chase School will close and in its place a Government funded Academy will open. The new Academy will be known as Axtane Academy.</li> <li>• The Axtane Academy will be federated with the Leigh Technology Academy, who are lead sponsors with co-sponsors being Kent County Council and the University of Kent.</li> <li>• New Axtane Academy will open in September 2008 on the existing site with a Planned Admission Number of 180.</li> <li>• Following this consultation, the outcomes will be reported to the School Organisation Advisory Board on 2 April 2008.</li> <li>• A decision will be made on whether to take the proposal forward.</li> <li>• If so, a Public Notice will be published for a further 6 weeks.</li> <li>• Further representations can be made</li> </ul>	

<p>to the proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A determination will then be reached on whether the proposal progresses.</li> <li>• June 2008 will mark the end of Statutory Representation period.</li> </ul>	
<p>A parent felt the consultation had been very “last minute”, with the Public Consultation document only being received shortly before the mid term break and the Public Meeting being ‘hastily’ organised immediately after the holiday. He and other parents felt the timings unfortunate. There also appeared to be several factual errors within the Public Consultation document, which he felt should be rectified and resent.</p>	<p>The Area Education Officer felt the documents had been distributed within a reasonable time and was in line with the normal procedures for Public Consultations. Apologies were made for the errors contained within the Public Consultation document, however it was felt that they did not detract from the general message</p>
<p>The same parent was also concerned about the link-up with the Leigh Technology Academy, with reports in press/media about class sizes of up to 60 children.</p>	<p>The Executive Principal of Leigh Technology Academy understood parents may have concerns regarding the reported class sizes at the new academies and in order to allay any fears, extended an invitation for small groups of parents to visit and observe lessons at the Academy.</p>
<p>As a Governor of a local Primary School he sought clarification on the position of the Governing Body and whether parents will have an opportunity to oversee what happens in both of these schools.</p>	<p>The Executive Principal of Leigh Technology Academy explained that there was a strong, active Parents Council in operation at the Academy, which offered a forum for parents to discuss education provision of students within the community.</p>
	<p>The Director of Operations explained that a definitive answer could not be given with regards to class sizes, as it was up to the Governors to make that decision as and when the new Academy is established. By grouping 60/90 students together in a ‘lecture style’ environment will free up teaching staff to assist in other specialised areas.</p>
	<p>The headteacher at Axton Chase School felt that by joining a hard federation with the Leigh Technology Academy, in so far as the Governing Body and Senior Leadership Team were concerned, lessons could be learnt from the experiences of Leigh becoming an Academy. Both he and the Executive Principal at Leigh were looking forward to working collaboratively to offer the best opportunities for students.</p>

<p>A parent enquired whether a new school was finally going to be built, as planning permission for the new development had been granted sometime ago.</p>	<p>It was explained that although outline planning permission had been granted, as the opportunity for Axton Chase to become an Academy materialised, it was felt more expedient to seize that opportunity for a number of reasons, including additional funding. It is also about ensuring that what is built is appropriate for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century</p>
	<p>The Director of Operations explained that KCC were not in a position to rebuild schools, therefore, in order to get £20-25m required to build a new secondary school, they would need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Sell land</li> <li>b. Wait for Government funding</li> <li>c. Jump the queue of Building Schools for the Future programme.</li> </ul>
<p>The Area Education Officer reiterated the procedure to make comments.</p>	
<p>Meeting closed at 8pm.</p>	