

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held on Wednesday, 14 November 2007 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mr R B Burgess (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr C J Capon, Mrs E Green (substitute for Mr A Poole) and Mr M J Northey.

Mr R Bristow, Director of Education, Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education was also present.

OFFICERS: Dr I Craig (Director – Operations), Children, Families and Education Directorate; Mrs A Osborne, Area Education Officer, Canterbury and Swale; Mr David Adams, Area Education Officer, Ashford and Shepway, Mr S Webb, Area Education Officer, Dartford and Gravesham and Mr G Mills (Legal and Democratic Services).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M C Dance, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education – Operations, Resources and Skills.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 October 2007
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2007 be agreed as a true record.

2. Ethelbert Road (Community) Infants School, Faversham – Proposed Change to an All-through Primary School – Outcome of Public Consultation
(Item 4 – report by Director - Operations)
(Mr T Gates was present for this item)

(1) This report set out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to change Ethelbert Road Infant School, Faversham to an all-through primary school. The report also sought the views of the Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice to change the age range of the school.

(2) Mrs Osborne said that the consultation exercise which had been undertaken demonstrated that there was strong support within the local community for the proposal to extend the age range taught at Ethelbert Road from Year R to Year 6 with the result the school would become an all through primary. The proposal would mean that from September 2008 and in successive years, Year 2 children would stay on at the school instead of having to find alternative places elsewhere. All children currently attending Ethelbert Road would be guaranteed places from Year 3 through to Year 6 and the new PAN of 15 would apply to entry to Year R from September 2008. Currently, approximately 30 children enter at Year R and leave at the end of Year 2 and therefore the new arrangement would offer 15 pupils education across all primary key stages, Year R to Year 6.

(3) Mr Gates, as the local Member said the public meeting which took place at the school showed through the quality of discussion and debate that there was strong support within the community for these proposals which he very much welcomed. Providing an all through primary school solved the problem of transfer to another school at the end of Year 2 and was a common sense approach to addressing this issue.

(4) In response to Members questions, Dr Craig said that the proposal was consistent with everything which the County Council had done in relation to the development and implementation of the Primary School Strategy. In looking at small schools, one of the guidelines which was used was to ask could a school justify four classes and did it have a hundred plus pupils. If the proposal to make Ethelbert Road an all through primary school was approved, then those guidelines would clearly be met and the school would be able to support four classes. Officers also responded to questions regarding travel to school patterns and the resource implications should for example Ethelbert School be closed and provision made for its pupils through expanding one of the other nearby primary schools. Mrs Osborne said that as detailed in the report, these issues had been considered very carefully and the firm belief was that the retention of the school as a primary school would best serve local needs.

(5) Mrs Osborne also confirmed that Ethelbert Road would continue to use the playing fields at the Abbey School which was situated some 500 yards away. The two schools were divided by a main road but that was crossed by way of a footbridge. Mrs Osborne said she was also completely satisfied with the plans which had been made by the Headteacher and staff to deliver the wider curriculum which would come in as a result of having pupils at the school through to Year 6. In addition, the Swale Cluster was very supportive of the proposals and could if needed, give any further curriculum and development support which may be required. Also, the proposal would be phased and take four years to fully implement so there would be of more than sufficient time for the teaching staff to be fully prepared for teaching pupils through from Year R to Year 6.

(6) Following discussion, the Advisory Board agreed unanimously to the proposal to change Ethelbert Road (Community) Infants School, Faversham to an all through primary school and to the issuing of a public notice to change the age range. The Advisory Board also agreed that subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme be provided on the basis identified in the report.

3. The Proposed Closure of Danley Middle School as an Addition to the Previously Notified Proposed Closures of Minster College and Cheyne Middle School, to be replaced with an Academy Conditional Upon a Funding Agreement Forthcoming from the Department for Children, Schools and Families
(Item 5 – report by Director – Operations)

(1) This report informed the Advisory Board of a revision to the steps necessary to achieve the secondary phase of education within the two-tier system on the Isle of Sheppey.

(2) Members of the Advisory Board noted that as a result of these revisions when the Public Notice in respect of this matter was issued, it would need to propose the closure of Danley Middle School in addition to Minster College and Cheyne Middle

School with their replacement by an Academy on the Minster College and Cheyne Middle School sites, subject to the Funding Agreement.

3. New School Competitions

(Item 6 – report by Director - Operations)

(1) Mr Adams said that the Education Act 2004 placed a requirement on local authorities to undertake a competition to seek a promoter when it considers there is a need for a new secondary school. This requirement was extended to cover all primary schools under the Education Inspection Act 2006. This report explained the implications of the legislation and put forward a proposed process and indicative competition timeline for consideration by the Advisory Board.

(2) During the course of discussion, it was said that the consultation process and the competition timeline as detailed in the report, should make it clear that as a matter of course local members be included in the consultation process. This was agreed. It was also said and agreed that in the competition timeline the initials LEA would be replaced by the initials “LA”.

(3) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board agreed to the proposed procedure for operating a New school Competition subject to the views expressed during the course of the discussion. On that basis, Dr Craig said he would submit to the next meeting of the Advisory Board a revised competition timeline which took account of the views expressed by Members.

4. Templar Barracks, Ashford – Proposed New Primary School Provision

(Item 7 – report by Director - Operations)

(Mrs Elizabeth Tweed was present for this item as the Local Member)

(1) To take account of significant increases in the provision new housing, this report set out the case for a new school to be built on the site of the former Templar Barracks, Ashford.

(2) Mrs Tweed spoke about the dilemma between the phasing of the housing construction and the point at which construction of the new primary school should commence. The new school would be an integral part of the new community that was being created and therefore she questioned whether its construction should not commence sooner so the school could open before the proposed date of September 2010. Mrs Tweed also spoke about the future of the Victoria Road School which she believed was on land which had been identified for a future road widening scheme. Dr Craig said that planning for the opening of a new school was important because not opening it at the right time could lead to pupils being drawn away from other local schools which then in turn could find themselves under pressure to maintain pupil numbers on roll. Therefore whilst a 2009 opening of the new primary school may be possible, opening it in 2010 was in all the circumstances the preferred option. As to the Victoria Road School, Mr Adams said discussions were ongoing but should it prove necessary at some in the future stage to relocate the school, then that would be done on a cost neutral basis. A suitable site on which the school could be relocated had already been identified and that would allow for the construction of new buildings and provide more playing fields than was currently available.

(3) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board endorsed the undertaking of a public consultation on the need for a new school on the Templar Barracks site in Ashford.

5. Rowhill School, Wilmington – Proposal to Enlarge and Relocate to the Old West Kent Hospital School Site and Relocate the West Kent Health Needs Education Service and the Phoenix Centre onto the Rowhill Site
(Item 8 – report by Director - Operations)
(Mrs A Allen and Mr R Bassam were present for this item as local Members)

(1) This proposal seeks to relocate the Rowhill School to the old site of the West Kent Hospital School at Main Road, Longfield, Dartford and to enlarge the school buildings in order to increase capacity from 96 places to 120 places. The proposal also seeks to relocate the West Kent Health Needs Education Service onto the old Rowhill site in Stock Lane, Wilmington and to relocate The Phoenix Centre onto the old Rowhill site in Stock Lane, Wilmington.

(2) Mrs Allen said that she supported the proposal but there needed to be a good travel plan put in place to meet the different needs of the pupils. Mr Bassam said that he was delighted that Rowhill was being relocated into Longfield but hoped that construction could start as soon as possible rather than having to wait until 2009.

(3) Mr Webb said that travel arrangements would be put in place to meet the various needs of the pupils and its effectiveness reviewed on an annual basis. With regard to timing, Dr Craig said that taking into account the requirements to go through a formal statutory consultation process, and to undertake the contractual and tendering procedures, would in his judgement mean that the earliest that these proposals could be introduced would be 2010. Mr Webb said that everything possible would be done to maintain the ethos and character of Rowhill School and he was confident that that could be successfully achieved. Mr Webb also said that the needs of all of those subject to the proposal would be taken very carefully into account and he felt the needs of all pupils would be better met by the proposals now being put forward. Dr Craig said that the proposal was entirely in accordance with the principal of supporting the inclusion agenda but also at the same time it would provide special needs facilities where parents want them for their child.

(4) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board unanimously approved the principle to enlarge the Rowhill Special School to its pre-2004 size and gave approval in principle to the relocation of the Rowhill Special School to the West Kent Hospital site on Main Road, Longfield. The Advisory Board also approved in principle the relocation of the Phoenix Centre to the Stock Lane site and gave approval in principle to the relocation of the West Kent Health Needs Education Service to the Stock Lane site.

6. Schools Applying for Foundation/Trust Status
(Item 9 – report by Director - Operations)

(1) A report was presented to the Advisory Board at its meeting on 17 October 2007 advising Members of the Government's encouragement of all schools to consider Foundation/Trust Status and of the "Fast Track" procedures to achieve that.

(2) As part of that report it was agreed that responses to these proposals would be reported to the Advisory Board and these were detailed in the report.

(3) Following discussion, the Advisory Board noted the contents of the report.

