

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 12 March 2009

Subject: PROPOSAL TO ADD A SIXTH FORM TO THE NORTH (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL, ASHFORD.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report presents the results of a public consultation on the proposal to add a sixth form to The North School, Ashford.

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

Introduction

1. (1) The School Organisation Advisory Board, at its meeting on 8 January 2009, supported a recommendation to consult on the proposal to add a sixth form to The North (Community) School, Ashford.

(2) This report sets out the results of the public consultation, which took place in January and February 2009.

The Proposal

2. (1) The proposal is to add sixth form provision to The North School for 185 pupils. It is believed that through extending the age range of the school the quality of provision, for the 11-16 age group will improve. Pupils will have onsite older students to act as role models, and access to new curriculum pathways to keep them engaged in education and training beyond the age of 16 years. The wide range of courses will enhance the learning experiences of pupils and enhance their future employment prospects.

(2) Under the current PFI rebuild of The North School capacity was increased slightly to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate 240 pupils per year. The rebuild has been completed in phases. In September 2008 the published admissions number was 200, accounting for the incomplete building works. The works have recently been completed.

(3) The proposal is to increase the PAN for pupils aged 11-16 to 215, leaving 125 places for post 16 provision. Added to this will be the 60 places in the planned vocational centre (funded by the school – Hadlow College), giving 185 places in total.

(4) There is (19 surplus places) a paucity of places in school sixth forms in Ashford (forecast for the 16 plus age groups can be found in the consultation document attached as appendix 1). These indicate a 539 place deficit by 2014-15. Currently accommodation used for statutory aged pupils and mobile classrooms (for example at Towers School) is to be used to accommodate post 16 pupils.

(5) The North proposes to offer Diploma courses for the 14-19 age range within the following subject areas:

- Environmental and Land Based
- Applied Science
- Technology and ICT
- Retail
- Art & Design
- Creative & Media
- Sport

(6) The school will continue to build on its specialist areas (i.e sports) and continue to deliver Land Based studies (due to its farm) in conjunction with Hadlow College. Both of these areas would complement, rather than compete, with existing provision. It is proposed that the above courses would run in close collaboration with other providers in the Ashford 1 Partnership.

(7) It is proposed that the school will offer 'A' Level Geography, which would link into the Environmental and Land Based framework. Arrangements would be made for those pupils to move to other institutions at age 16 (ie neighbouring school sixth forms, the FE sector or work based learning) as appropriate to access courses and qualifications that meet their needs.

(8) Final decisions about the qualifications and courses offered will be made following discussion with the Leaning Skills Council.

The Consultation

3. (1) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 1 was circulated according to the County Procedures for Review. This circulation included Local Members, Ashford Borough Council, the Member of Parliament, the Learning and Skills Council, South Kent College and Sixth Form, the Canterbury Diocese and head teachers within a radius of 3 miles. The North 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 2,000 copies of the document were circulated and the document can be viewed on the KCC website.

(2) A public meeting was held at The North School on 24 February 2009. Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chair of School Organisation Advisory Board (SOAB), chaired the meeting. In attendance were Mr David Adams, Area Children's Services Officer and the Headteacher and Chair of Governors of The North School. Approximately 25 people attended. A summary of the main issues raised is attached as Appendix 3.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

4. (1) The consultation process began on 26 January 2009 and ended on 27 February 2009. As at the close of the consultation 316 responses were received, of which 297 were in favour, 16 were opposed and 3 were undecided.

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

Public Meeting Responses

(3) Summaries of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting are attached as Appendix 3.

Views of Local Member

5. (1) The Local Member for The North School, Mrs Elizabeth Tweed is supportive of Sixth Form provision at the school, which will give young people in the Ashford district real choice. In these difficult times, it is more important than ever for students to access the courses which will best equip them for their working lives.

(2) In supporting this however, Mrs Tweed would like to be assured that sufficient parking space on site will be provided for any students arriving by car, and they should be encouraged to use the improved public transport.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

6. The Local Member of Parliament, Mr Damien Green has been consulted on the proposal. A response is awaited.

Views of Ashford Borough Council

7. The Chief Executive and Leader of Ashford Borough Council have both been consulted on the proposal. Council officers have sent the consultation document to Ward Members. Their comments are awaited.

Views of the Learning and Skills Council

8. The Learning and Skills Council have been consulted on the proposal. Their comments are awaited.

Views of the Governing Body

9. The Governing Body is supportive of the proposal. It is recognised that there are gaps in the choices available to 16 to 19 year olds in the Ashford area. The North School has the facilities and expertise to provide a number of those required additional curriculum opportunities. The proposal is good for the school, good for Ashford and good for Kent.

Views of the Pupils

10. Pupils of The North School have been consulted on the proposal. Feedback from the Student Council was positive. Details of written responses received are included as appendix 2. 75 year 11 pupils have registered their interest in staying on into the sixth form.

Views of the Partnership Board

11. The Ashford 1 Partnership Board has been consulted on the proposal. Their comments are awaited.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

12. (1) Sixth form places in Ashford are under significant pressure. The growth of the Town, together with new legislation to secure post-16 participation will intensify this pressure. The Secretary of State has recently expressed a view that all schools in the National Challenge, like the North School, should have post-16 role models on site. The North School is a good school (Ofsted 2008) and provides significant value added (top 5% statistically). I believe the addition of a sixth form will support the raising of standards across the age range of the school.

(2) The proposal has received a lot of public support, although there are issues concerning sixth form students travelling to school and parking. It will be crucial to ensure that an appropriate school travel plan is in place upon the opening of the sixth form accommodation. Students will be encouraged to travel to school through the most sustainable methods possible, including a good uptake of the Kent Freedom Pass.

(3) The school has committed to work with residents to ensure that the changes proposed will not cause further disruption in neighbouring roads. Parking spaces will be available on site for use by sixth formers. The school will undertake modelling work to ensure these are sufficient.

Resource Implications

Capital & Revenue

13. (1) There are no capital implications for the LA. The school and Hadlow College will fund the vocational block. The vocational centre has received planning approval. Building works started at the end of November 2008.

(2) Revenue funding is provided by the Learning and Skills Council via a formula process.

Human

(3) The proposal may require the school to increase its staffing.

Proposed Timetable

14. If it is decided that a public notice should be issued in respect of this proposal, the following timetable is likely to apply:

Issue public notice 23 April 2009

End of representation period 21 May 2009

Decision by Kent County Council

June 2009

Implementation (earliest date)

1 September 2009

Recommendations

15. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the issuing of a public notice to add a sixth form to The North (Community) School, Ashford.

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The Local Member is Mrs Elizabeth Tweed

Background documents:
'Education & Inspection Act' 2006