

By: Rosalind Turner, Managing Director Children Families and Education

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 October 2009

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ASTOR OF HEVER (COMMUNITY) SCHOOL, MAIDSTONE AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a public consultation on the closure of Astor of Hever (Community) School and its replacement with a government funded academy subject to Ministerial approval.

Introduction

1. (1) Astor of Hever (Community) School is a Specialist Sports College and admits 150 girls and boys into each year group. Its age range is 11 to 18 years. The school has the capacity to admit 869 pupils; 735 pupils into years 7 to 11 and a sixth form with the capacity to admit 134 boys and girls into years 12 and 13. As at spring 2009, the school had 568 pupils on roll in Years 7 to 11 and 93 in the sixth form, a total roll 661 pupils.

(2) According to Local Authority pupil place forecasting data, the number of years 7 to 11 pupils in the Maidstone area is predicted to fall over the next five years. Forecasts indicate a rise in pupils opting to remain in education post 16, but this rise is balanced by the reduction in overall 7 to 11 numbers.

(3) Astor of Hever is part of the Maidstone 1 Local Children's Service Partnerships of schools. It occupies a site on the Oakwood Park Campus. See Appendix 1 for site map and Appendix 2 for a map showing the school site in relation to other schools in the area. The school largely serves the urban community of West Maidstone. Appendix 3 shows the distribution of pupils within a three mile radius. Appendix 4 is included to show that there are few pupils who live more than three miles away.

(4) The proportion of pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs is 2.3%, slightly above the Kent average of 2% and the National average of 2.1%. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is 14.4%, which is above the Kent average of 10.7%, but well below the current National average of 23.8%.

(5) Astor of Hever has been without a substantive Headteacher since April 2008. The Local Authority required the school to enter into a partnership with The Westlands School (a high performing high school in Kent), because of its challenging circumstances and lack of experienced senior leadership. Under this arrangement the Headteacher of Westlands School has acted as Executive Headteacher. From

September 2009, a new collaboration has been established for 2009/10 with Mascalls School.

Academy Proposal

2. (1) The Astor of Hever Academy will open in January 2011 in existing buildings and move into its new buildings in the academic year 2013-2014. It will be a high performing comprehensive school for boys and girls of all abilities aged between 11 and 19 years located on the Oakwood Park campus in West Maidstone. The Academy will develop, in collaboration with neighbouring schools further and Higher Education Institutions, a post-16 curriculum which will directly meet local needs.

(2) The new Academy will have a strong vision, developed by the Sponsor (Woodard Schools) in consultation with the local community. It will be led by an Executive Principal and a governing body, whose membership will be appointed by the Woodard Trust, but to include additionally LA representation and staff and parent governors. All pupils from Astor of Hever School will transfer over to the new Academy. The Academy will provide for:

- 750 pupils (aged 11-16 years)
- 150 post 16 pupils (aged 16-19 years)

(3) Kent County Council has secured the skills and expertise of Woodard Schools¹ as co-sponsor for the development of the Academy. The resources of the Woodard group will be used to support the development of the Academy. Woodard's model of education will be the driving force behind the new academy in raising the expectations of young people and the local community.

(4) The involvement of parents and students in their learning is central to the Woodard vision. The new Academy will work with parents and students to set goals, identify strategies for learning and develop appropriate, personalised support structures. The Woodard Schools website states:

“A Woodard Academy reflects the culture and vision of Woodard Schools. We believe that a good education should be a given but in addition each child should be treated as an individual, given opportunities where they can flourish and have the confidence and the tools needed to cope with the demands and responsibilities of adult life.

Educating 27,000 pupils a year and employing over 2,500 educational colleagues, we have an unrivalled breadth and knowledge in education across both the private and state sectors. We actively welcome students and staff from all faiths or no faith at all, adding to the diversity and rich culture of our school communities. ”

(5) Representatives of Woodard Schools have met with the governing body. It was made clear that the vision for the school would be developed by Woodard in full consultation with all stakeholders, rather than being simply a pre-formulated one imposed on the school. Woodard Schools Will bring to Astor of Hever an emphasis on developing in young people personal and social values, in addition to striving for high educational achievement. There will be a strong focus upon meeting the needs of the

¹ Further information regarding Woodard Schools can be found on <http://www.woodard.co.uk/index.htm>

individual and developing the whole person. Although Woodard Schools' origins are in the Church of England, it emphasises that it welcomes members of all faiths and none, and that the values which it espouses are ones which are essentially common to all major religions and our society at large.

(6) Woodard has links to over 40 schools and believes that the pool of educational expertise upon which it can draw will be of value in supporting Astor of Hever's development. However, Woodard also strongly believes that the school should remain part of the family of Maidstone schools, with the continuing local collaboration which that implies.

(7) Following its meeting with representatives of Woodard Schools, Astor of Hever's governing body voted unanimously for Woodard Schools to become the school's academy sponsor.

(8) It is probable that the academy's specialism will be confirmed through the Expression of Interest process, although it may be finalised during the feasibility stage.

Site and accommodation Issues

3. (1) Astor of Hever's main school building was built in 1970 and is of SEAC construction with steel glazed screens, brick cavity walls and flat roofs with asphalt coverings. The school does not currently have an assembly hall and has five mobile classrooms as additional teaching facilities. The dining facility is small and uninviting. The front entrance is not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. The general consensus is that the main school building is outdated and in a poor state of repair and should be completely rebuilt. There is a recently-opened building which incorporates a reception area, assembly hall and six classrooms. It is anticipated that this would be retained in the rebuild.

(2) In September 2005, KCC acquired, on behalf of Astor of Hever School, a leisure facility (The Westborough Sports Centre) which is based on the same site as the school. The school previously operated it under a joint use agreement with Maidstone Borough Council. Community use of this building is currently being reviewed because it has been running at a loss to the school's budget. The building is considered to be outdated and remains a significant maintenance liability to the school. It is expected that any new building will involve consultation with the local community to ascertain whether community aspirations may be met.

(3) Reopening Astor of Hever School in new and refurbished facilities, with a full suite of extended services, would serve the needs of the young people and community of West Maidstone and provide an environment fit for learning in the 21st century.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

4. (1) A budget has yet to be confirmed by the DCSF for the Academy's development. The capital costs of the scheme will be met by the DCSF.

(2) KCC will incur administrative and development costs in the period leading up to the opening of the Academy. These include the costs of the appointed consultants. These costs will be met out of the DCSF budget for the Academy.

(3) Woodard as a multiple educational sponsor is not itself required to make a cash contribution to the academy. The Woodard Trust will however have a responsibility for encouraging contributions into the endowment.

Revenue

(4) The Academy will receive its funding directly from the DCSF each year. It will be funded at a rate equivalent to other Kent specialist schools, and have a proportional share of the central Local Authority budget.

Human

(5) Consultation will take place in accordance with the requirements of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment, Regulations 1981) and the employment rights of all current staff who transfer to the Academy are protected. Where any members of staff are unable to transfer to the Academy, this will be managed in accordance with relevant employment policies and procedures. Any employment costs associated with new Academy staff are borne by the DCSF.

Views of the Local Members

5. (1) The local members for Maidstone Central are Mr Dan Daley and Mr Malcolm Robertson. Mr Daley and Mr Robertson recognise the need for complete regeneration of Astor of Hever School and support in principle any means which will achieve this. They will, nevertheless, wish to be consulted about detailed proposals as they are developed.

School Improvement Implications

6. (1) It was last inspected by Ofsted in April 2009 and was graded as 4 – inadequate. The school was given notice to improve. Of particular concern was achievements and standards where it was identified that:

"Standards are well below average by Year 11 and students' achievement is inadequate because they are not making sufficient progress between Years 7 and 11. This is reflected in the school's GCSE examination results, which have declined over the past three years on almost all measures. They were exceptionally low in 2008, with most groups of students underachieving in relation to their starting points. Although the results at five or more A to C grades including English and mathematics were close to the school's targets, these targets were insufficiently challenging. The school's results in AS and A-level examinations in 2008 were well below average, and students underachieved in relation to their GCSE performance, with particular weaknesses in the results in some vocational courses. Standards remain well below average but, as a result of the school's actions, current students make satisfactory progress."*

The full report can be viewed at

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu_reports/download/\(id\)/109555/\(as\)/118795_326892.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu_reports/download/(id)/109555/(as)/118795_326892.pdf)

(2) Astor of Hever has made an impressive gain of 8% in the 5A*-C including English and mathematics figure, based on provisional results for August 2009. This still leaves the school as part of the National Challenge, but is an encouraging gain. A gain of 11% in the total 5A*-C figure underlines the improvements the school is making.

Jonathan Whitcombe from Westlands school is now returning to his own school, and his post of Executive headteacher is being taken by Vanessa Everett from Mascalls School.

(3) Key Stage 3 data is currently not available.

| GCSE | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|----------|------|-------|-------|
| 5A*-C | 32% | 33.8% | 54.7% |
| 5A*-C EM | 24% | 19.0% | 27% |

Equality Issues

7. (1) The development of an Academy will broaden the opportunities available to the young people and neighbouring community of West Maidstone. The Academy will need to comply with legislation regarding Disability Discrimination, Employment Law etc. The proposal does not raise any particular equalities issues.

(2) In 2008 (the latest data available) Astor of Hever School had 21 pupils with English as an additional language (3.6%). This compares against a Kent average of 3.6% and a National average of 10.5%.

Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications

8. (1) Early discussions will take place with Maidstone 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 school travel plan will be produced prior to the opening of the Academy.

Proposed Timetable

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

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| SOAB | 08 October 2009 |
| Start of Public Consultation | November 2009 |
| Publication of consultation document | November 2009 |
| Public meeting | November/December 2009 |
| Closing date for responses | December 2009 |
| Report to School Organisation Advisory Board | 20 January 2010 |
| Cabinet Member decision | February 2010 |
| Issue public notice | February 2010 |
| End of public notice period | March 2010 |
| Decision by Local Authority | March 2010 |
| Proposed implementation | January 2011 |

Recommendations

10. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the proposal for a public consultation to be undertaken on the proposal for the closure of Astor of Hever (Community) School and its replacement as a government funded academy subject to Ministerial approval.

Chris Jones
Area Children's Services Officer
Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling
Tel 01233 898560

The local members are Mr Dan Daley and Malcolm Robertson

Background Documents:

None