

By: Rosalind Turner, Managing Director, Children, Families and Education

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 October 2009

Subject: THE FUTURE OF HIGH SCHOOL PROVISION IN DEAL

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the need for a public consultation on the future of High School provision in the Deal area.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) There are currently two High Schools located in Deal which serve principally the Deal and Walmer communities. Castle Community College and Walmer Science College have a common catchment area, although the schools themselves are located 1.18 miles from each other in Deal and Walmer respectively (see Appendices 1 and 2).

(2) The prospect of falling secondary school rolls across the area over the next few years poses a significant challenge to the viability of the two schools as separate stand-alone institutions. In January 2009 Castle Community College had 533 students at 11-16 with a sixth form of 128. Walmer Science College had 671 at 11-16 with a sixth form of 125. By January 2018 with the impact of falling secondary school rolls, these numbers are predicted to fall, with Castle forecast to have 478 at 11-16 and 92 in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form, and Walmer 509 at 11-16 and a 6<sup>th</sup> form of 100.

(3) Secondary schools of less than 4 forms of entry (600 students at 11 – 16) face considerable challenges in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum which offers optimum student choice and diversity while making cost effective use of resources.

(4) Schools in the Dover District, including those in Deal and Walmer, stand to benefit from substantial capital investment through Wave 5 of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. In order to secure optimum capital investment which will benefit all students, the Local Authority is required to consider cost effective school organisation solutions which will improve education outcomes, secure viable long term provision and make best use of available resources.

## **Background**

2. (1) Both Walmer Science College and Castle Community College are good schools which serve their communities well. The challenge is to secure viable long term provision which will enable standards to be maintained and improved against a background of falling rolls with consequential reductions in student numbers, funding and staffing if action is not taken now.

(2) Walmer Science College was last inspected in November 2007. It was judged “a good school with some outstanding features.” “All aspects of the school’s provision are improving rapidly.” “Students achieve well throughout the school. Standards are below national averages, but students make faster progress than in most other schools.” Walmer Science College achieved 36% 5 A\* – C, including English and mathematics in 2008 and 37% 5 A\* - C, including English and mathematics in 2009.

(3) Castle Community College was last inspected in November 2007. It was judged “an outstanding school....students make excellent progress in their studies.” “Students enter the school with well below average standards”.. but leave with “a well above average percentage of 5 A\*-C grades.” “The compulsory vocational courses in Year 10 and 11 contribute to the school’s success. The curriculum is outstanding as it is relevant to students’ interests and, in the light of job opportunities, to their future training and education.” Although technically a National Challenge School, Castle Community College achieved 33% 5 A\* - C, including English and mathematics in 2008 and 33.3% 5 A\* - C, including English and mathematics in 2009.

(4) Standards at both schools are potentially in jeopardy over the medium-long term if action is not taken to address the issue of falling rolls. Forecasts based on actual roll data for January 2009, suggest that by 2018/19, (the end of the current BSF planning time frame) both schools would be operating well below 4 FE. Inevitably this would be likely to pose financial, organisational and curriculum pressures, constraining the educational offer to students. In addition the Local Authority is unlikely to secure optimum capital investment in two separate institutions which serve the same community and which between them have a school population at 11 – 16 of less than 1000 pupils.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) To undertake a public consultation on the future of High School provision in Deal. This would include, effectively, the amalgamation of Castle Community College and Walmer Science College by closing the existing two schools and establishing a new successor school, if possible in September 2010. All students who are attending the two predecessor schools at the point at which the new school is established would be guaranteed a place at the new school should they need one.

(2) The new school could be established either as a Trust school working with an external partner(s) to raise standards or by means of a competition. The governing bodies of Castle Community College and Walmer Science College have indicated that they wish to explore the possibility of setting up a Trust School. If the Local Authority supports such a proposal an application could be made by the putative trust to the Secretary of State for exemption from the competition requirement, in which case the Local Authority could agree and implement the proposal. There would still be consultation on the proposal but a decision could be secured more quickly than via the competition route. The timescales for each route are shown at Appendix 3.

(3) In coming to a decision the Secretary of state will consider:

- Existing range of local provision – types of schools, size, specialisms etc
- Local standards
- Whether there is an urgent need for the new school
- Parental preferences

(4) The Local authority itself could apply to the Secretary of State for exemption from the competition requirement under Section 10 of the Education and

Inspections Act 2006 (see Appendix 4). However, there is a presumption against the establishment of new Community Schools, without a competition process and such an exemption is unlikely to be granted.

## **Site Issues**

4. (1) The Castle Community College site is larger than the Walmer Science College site and already has significant community use. The proposed site for a new successor school is therefore the Castle Community College site which would be substantially redeveloped with a significant new build, through the BSF programme.

(2) Walmer Science College has some good quality new building stock as well as other less suitable accommodation. Subject to the outcome of the consultation and decisions yet to be taken by elected members, part of the Walmer Science College site could be retained for development as a vocational centre for all schools in the Dover District, while some of the site could be declared surplus. This would form an aspect for future consultations *but* no decisions have yet been taken.

(3) The proposal envisages the potential establishment of a new Foundation Trust school in advance of the development of the Castle site. It is currently envisaged that BSF would deliver new accommodation by 2013. Until that time the new Trust school, if Trust Status is approved by KCC and the DCSF, would operate under a single leadership and governance regime but on the two existing sites.

## **Resource Issues**

### *Capital & Revenue*

5. (1) A new school of 7FE would achieve long term viability in terms of revenue funding. Consolidation of High School provision in Deal onto a single site would enable the Local authority to make optimum cost effective use of available resources and maximise capital investment in new school infrastructure, providing a first class learning environment for all students.

### *Human*

(2) A new trust school would require the establishment of a single governing body and the appointment of a single headteacher to lead the school. Recruitment to the post of headteacher would require a competitive recruitment process and national advertisement.

(3) There would be some efficiencies arising from consolidation on a single site but it is not possible to quantify these at the current time. Falling rolls poses a significant risk to jobs. Amalgamation offers the potential to align staffing establishment with pupil numbers in a coherent and managed way.

(4) Staff employed by each of the two predecessor schools at the point at which the new trust school comes into being would be entitled to transfer to the new school via TUPE arrangements.

## **Views of the Local Members**

6. (1) The Local Members are Mr Kit Smith and Mrs Julie Rook whose views are as follows:

### Mrs Julie Rook

*"I fully support the amalgamation of Walmer Science College and Castle Community College. Both boards of governors meet regularly and have been working together already for many years to deliver shared Post 16 education across both sites and can both see the value of a full merger. Neither school will be able to survive falling rolls and the Castle Community College building has little life left, so will, in the near future, require massive investment. Both schools are performing very well, but amalgamation will improve sharing of best practices and cost savings through economies of scale as well as further raised academic standards across the board as the school will aim to excel. Pupils will also be taught in a state of the art building giving young people the pride and aspiration that will improve the overall educational offer. The plan also for a vocational provision on the Walmer site is to be welcomed. Walmer College is the perfect site for a broad educational offer including vocational provision and possibly adult education as Deal simply does not currently have these facilities, and young people find themselves having to travel out of town to Dover, Folkestone, Ashford and Canterbury to further their education. Deal is a large town in its own right with over 30,000 people. Having to travel many miles to access Post 16 education is totally unacceptable and as Walmer station is so very close to the current Walmer site, developing the potential of the site would attract people in from outlying villages and towns. Being the Kent County Councillor for the division of Deal, I of course want the best for Deal, and believe that this project will not only meet my aspiration and that of the community, but also the aspiration of Kent County Council who I believe also want to deliver the very best education they possibly can, making our local school the number one choice for local people. The people of Deal need to have access to a broad range of educational provision at 11-18 and beyond, providing the educational attainment skills and training to keep local people in local jobs. It will bring business and money into the town and into the wider district and would most definitely put Deal on the map. I do however realise that there may be differing views on this proposed amalgamation and wholly approve of the Council seeking to consult."*

### Mr Kit Smith

*"I have heard the well argued and what would appear to be a logical case for the proposal to amalgamate Walmer Science College and Castle Community College. However, it is essential that there is ample opportunity for a wide and genuine consultation on the proposals, as there are almost certainly valid and differing views and arguments that must be considered. I approve of the proposed consultation."*

## **Views of the Governing Body**

7. Both governing bodies have resolved to explore the implications of establishing a Trust school, working with the Local Authority and external partners to address future challenges. They will submit a formal view as part of the consultation process.

## **Views of the Local Children's Services Partnership Board**

8. The Partnership Board has been briefed on the proposal and recognises the issues facing secondary school organisation in Deal in the near future. The Board welcomes the opportunity for consultation.

## **School Improvement Implications**

9. Allowing the roll of both schools to decline significantly would threaten the viability of both institutions which would make it difficult to maintain standards as pupil numbers, funding and staffing levels diminish. The establishment of a new Trust School would potentially engage the support of one or more external partners in working with governors and staff of the new school to raise standards.

## **Equality Issues**

10. A new school would serve the same catchment as the two exiting institutions and would continue to provide high quality non – selective education for its students. Given the nature of the proposal and the profile of the two existing schools, there are no adverse implications for any minority groups distinguishable by race, gender, ethnicity, disability, religious conviction, social, economic backgrounds or sexual orientation.

## **Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications**

11. The establishment of one larger school based on one site in place of two schools in separate locations will result in a significant reduction in school related traffic in the Walmer area. There will be an increase in traffic in the Mill Hill area of Deal, and a new Travel Plan will need to be agreed in consultation with Transport.

## **Proposed Timetable**

12. The timetable will depend on whether or not the two governing bodies working with an external partner(s) decide to submit a proposal for Foundation Trust status, whether or not the Secretary of State grants exemption from competition for a proposal for a new Trust School initiated by both governing bodies and whether or not the Cabinet Member decides to support a Trust School proposal or prefers to initiate a competition to establish the new school. Appendix 3 outlines the possible timelines for all scenarios.

## **Recommendations**

13. That a public consultation is undertaken to seek views on the future of High School provision in the Deal area.

Martyn Doole  
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The Local Members are:

Mrs Julie Rook and Mr Kit Smith

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*Background Documents:*

*None*