

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

To: School Organisation Advisory Board Members

Subject: Proposed closure of Ashford Christ Church CE (Voluntary Aided) School and its replacement with an Academy

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: (1) This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposed closure of Ashford Christ Church CE (Voluntary Aided) School and its replacement with an Academy.

(2) It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a Public Notice to close the school to make way for an Academy.

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**This paper should be read in conjunction with the report to School Organisation Advisory Board of 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 close Linden Grove (Community) Primary School and Ashford Chris Church CE (Voluntary Aided) School, in order that they may be replaced with a government funded all-age Academy.

(2) Unfortunately, due to funding issues it has not been possible at this stage to incorporate a primary element in the proposed Academy and therefore the closure of Linden Grove has not been included in the Consultation.

(3) This report sets out the results of the public consultation exercise that took place between 2 November and 14 December 2009 on the proposal to close Ashford Christ Church CE School and replace it with a secondary-aged Academy.

## **Background**

2. (1) Ashford Christ Church CE (Voluntary Aided) School is a co-educational secondary modern school in South Ashford with an age range of 11-16 years.

(2) The school is one of the government's National Challenge Schools as less than 30% of its Y11 students achieved the Government Floor Target in 2007. The school is judged to be at high risk of failing to reach the floor target by 2011 – the deadline set within the National Challenge.

(3) The school has lead school designation for pupils with Physical Disabilities, for pupils with Hearing Impairment and for pupils with Speech & Language difficulties.

These designations will be retained in the Academy.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) The proposal is that the school would close on 31 August 2010, with an Academy opening in its place on 1 September 2010. Initially the Academy will occupy the existing school buildings and move into its new buildings by 1 September 2013. It would be an Academy with a religious character (Church of England) for boys and girls of all abilities, aged between 11 and 19 years. It is proposed that the Academy would cater for 1050 secondary school aged pupils (11-16 years) and 250 post 16 pupils (16-19 years).

(2) Lead Sponsor for the Academy is the Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education. Co-sponsors are Canterbury Christ Church University, Benenden School and Kent County Council.

## **The Consultation**

4. (1) A Public Consultation Document, attached as Appendix 1, was widely distributed. Hard copies were provided for all parents/carers, students, staff and governors of Ashford Christ Church CE (Voluntary Aided) School and Linden Grove (Community) Primary School. In addition, hard copies were provided for year 6 pupils of feeder primary schools and local Early Years providers. Hard copies or links to the electronic copy on the County's website were distributed to all schools in the area, Local Members, Cabinet Members, SOAB Members, the local Member of Parliament, Ashford Borough Council, the Diocesan Boards, local libraries, key colleagues in the Children, Families and Education Directorate and others.

(2) Approximately 3,000 copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. A copy is attached as Appendix 1.

## **Responses to the Public Consultation**

### *Written Responses*

5. (1) 224 responses have been received, of which 87 are in favour, 84 are opposed and 53 are undecided.

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

(3) The views of the pupils are summarised at Appendix 3.

### *Public Meeting Responses*

(4) Summaries of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meetings are attached as Appendix 4.

### **Views of Local Members**

6. (1) Jim Wedgbury is broadly in support of the Academy but does have concerns about the disruption the building works will have on existing pupils. He would also like to see a representative of the community on the governing body (eg parish or borough councillor), as the current representation seems too remote from the community they supposedly represent.

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

7. None have been received.

### **Views of Ashford Borough Council**

8. None have been received.

### **Views of the Parish Council (if appropriate)**

9. The parish council are alarmed at the apparent lack of representation from the local community in its proposed governance arrangements. They believe that a number of long standing local community representatives need to have seats on the top trustee executive board where the key decisions will be made. If the local community has an effective say, they will feel part of the new Academy School and thereby enhance the prospects of its success.

### **Views of the Diocesan Authorities (if appropriate)**

10. Canterbury Diocese is the lead sponsor and is fully supportive of the proposal.

### **Views of the Learning and Skills Council (if appropriate)**

11. The LSC submitted a letter of support for the Academy proposal at the Expression of Interest stage. No formal response has been received to the consultation.

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

12. The Governing Body is in support of the proposal.

### **Views of the Pupils**

13. These are summarised at Appendix 3.

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

14. The views of the Partnership Board are awaited.

## **Views of the Area Children's Services Officer**

15. (1) I brought forward the proposal for the all aged Academy as a systemic response to the historic repeated failing of education provision in south Ashford. I fully support the secondary aged Academy proposal as it will bring fresh impetus and renewed focus on educational standards, and will contribute to the wider regeneration ambitions of the local community.

(2) The academy will offer a unique opportunity to ensure that the future curriculum offer can effectively be delivered in learning spaces designed for the purpose. This will allow for an expansion and broadening of the curriculum offer available, not only to the students of the academy, but the wider student population of Ashford.

(3) The comments made during the consultation process regarding ensuring the needs of pupils with hearing impairment are appropriately considered during the design stage of the building, are particularly important. Equally important are the arrangements made to support students through the transition process, and the Sponsors and current school staff will need to work closely together to achieve this.

(4) The significant efforts made to capture the student voice are greatly appreciated. There is clearly a need to include students in the development of the academy as it will be their school. It is welcomed that most of those responding felt there would be at least a little benefit to them of the proposal.

## **Resource Issues**

### *Capital*

16. (1) The Academy team at the DCSF are being consulted on the costs of the new building. There is no Capital implication for the County Council, although KCC will lose the land value from its portfolio.

(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.

### *Revenue*

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

### *Human*

(3) Consultation is currently taking place in accordance with the requirements of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment, Regulations 1981). Costs of new staffing (TUPE applies to current staff) and costs associated with TUPE, including any valid redundancies of staff that cannot transfer or be deployed elsewhere in Kent schools, will be negotiated with the DCSF on a case by case basis, but are usually borne by the DCSF.

## **Proposed Timetable**

17. If it is decided that the matter proceed, then the following timetable could apply:

Issue Public Notice	w/c 4 Jan 2010
Public Notice expires	19 Feb 2010
Cabinet Member decision	end Feb 2010
Adjudication (if required)	Mar – May 2010
Implementation date	1 Sep 2010

## **Recommendation**

18. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the issuing of a Public Notice be issued to close the Ashford Christ Church CE (Voluntary Aided) School on 31 August 2010 subject to its replacement with a government funded Academy, to open on 1 September 2010.

David Adams  
Area Children's Services Officer  
Ashford & Shepway  
Tel 01233 898559

The Local Member is Jim Wedgbury

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*Background Documents:*

None

*Previous Committee Reports:* SOAB report seeking permission to consult: 8 Jan 2009

