

By: ROSALIND TURNER, MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN,
FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

To: SARAH HOHLER, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES
AND EDUCATION

Subject: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ASTOR OF HEVER SCHOOL AND ITS
REPLACEMENT WITH A GOVERNMENT FUNDED ACADEMY.

Classification: UNRESTRICTED

Summary: The Cabinet Member is requested to agree to issue a public notice to close
Astor of Hever School and replace it with a government-funded Academy

Introduction

1. The majority of the School Organisation Advisory Board supported a recommendation to consult on the proposal to close Astor of Hever School and replace it with a government-funded Academy.

Background and Accommodation Issues

2. (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 more than balanced by the reduction in overall 7 to 11 numbers.

(3) Astor of Hever is part of the Maidstone 1 Local Children's Service Partnership of schools. It occupies a site on the Oakwood Park Campus. The school largely serves the urban community of West Maidstone.

(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% and the national average of 13.4%.

(5) The Local Authority became concerned about declining standards at Astor of Hever and intervened at the beginning of 2008. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics rose from 19% in 2008 to 28% in 2009, and is expected to be well in excess of 30% in 2010. Astor of Hever is a National Challenge school and was given a Notice to Improve at its last inspection (April 2009). A recent HMI monitoring visit (Nov 2009) judged that the school was making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and raising the students' achievement.

(6) 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.

(7) 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 dining facility is small and uninviting. 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.

(8) Reopening a 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.

The Proposal

3. (1) The new Academy is planned to 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 and Higher Education Institutions, a post-16 curriculum which will directly meet local needs. The Academy will be a Member of the ME16 group which includes local grammar schools.

(2) The Academy will provide for:

750 pupils (aged 11-16 years)

200 post 16 pupils (aged 16-19 years)

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.

(3) The academy's specialism will be finalised during the feasibility stage.

The Consultation

4. (1) The consultation process began on the 9th November 2009 and finished on the 21 December 2009.

(2) The consultation document was circulated according to the County Procedures for Review. This circulation included Local Members, Maidstone Borough Council, local libraries, the Member of Parliament, the dioceses of Southwark (RC), Rochester (CE) and Canterbury (CE), and all Maidstone Primary and Secondary School head teachers. Astor of Hever School was sent enough copies for all staff, governors, parents and carers to receive one. Local primary schools received sufficient copies for parents of their years 5 and 6 pupils. Attached to the consultation document was a reply form for respondents to express their views. Approximately 1500 copies of the document were circulated

(3) The document can be viewed on the KCC website at:
<http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/education-and-learning/soab-axton-08.htm>

(4) A public meeting was held at Astor of Hever School on 25 November 2009. Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chair of SOAB, chaired the meeting. In attendance were: Chris Jones, Area Children's Services Officer for Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone, Mr Peter Coveney the Chair of Governors, Mrs Vanessa Everett the Executive Head teacher and Mrs Julia Campbell the Head of School. Approximately 35 members of the public attended. The Area Children's Services Officer held additional meetings with school staff, the Student Council and Local Borough Councillors.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

5. 32 responses have been received, of which 27 are in favour, 2 are undecided and 3 are opposed.

Views of Local Members

6. The Local Members for the County Division where Astor of Hever School is sited 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.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

7. The Member of Parliament for Maidstone and the Weald is The Rt Hon Ann Widdecombe. Ms Widdecombe does not object to Astor of Hever becoming an academy. She believes that the main objective of this transition must be to improve teaching and learning and thereby raise standards. Importantly, the school's aspirations for its students must be raised.

Views of Maidstone Borough Council

8. Maidstone Borough Council has been fully informed of the proposal. No reply has yet been received.

Views of the Governing Body

9. The Governing Body of Astor of Hever School is supportive of the proposal. The Chairman of the Governing Body read out a supporting statement at the Public Consultation Meeting.

Views of the Local Children's Services Partnership

10. The Partnership has been informed of the proposal and is fully supportive.

Resource Issues

11.

Capital

(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

(3) The academy will receive its revenue funding directly from the DCSF each year. It will be funded at a rate equivalent to other Kent specialist schools.

Human

(4) Consultation would take 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, are negotiated with the DCSF on a case by case basis, but are usually borne by the DCSF.

Views of the School Organisation Advisory Board

12. The majority of the School Organisation Advisory Board supported the proposal to issue a public notice to close Astor of Hever School and replace it with a government-funded Academy. The report is attached as appendix 1.

Recommendation

15. The Cabinet Member is requested TO AGREE to issue a public notice to close Astor of Hever School and replace it with a government-funded Academy.

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*

Previous Committee report –
School Organisation Advisory Board – 8 October 2009
School Organisation Advisory Board of - 7 January 2010