

Open Report on behalf of Debbie Barnes, Assistant Director for Children's Services

Report to:	Mrs P A Bradwell, Executive Councillor for Children's Services including Post 16 Education
Date:	10 March 2011
Subject:	Proposal to close St Bede's Catholic Science College and expand The Haven High Technology College in Boston - Decision regarding publication of a Statutory Notice
Decision Reference:	01838
Key decision?	No

Summary:

St Bede's Catholic Science College in Boston was designated as a National Challenge school with substantial educational difficulties, potential financial sustainability issues, and requiring a structural solution to improve and sustain secondary education in Boston. In 2009 the Governing Body was removed by the County Council with government approval and an Interim Executive Board (IEB) was established. The school was inspected in 2009 and placed in an Ofsted category. The County Council has been in discussion with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), now the Department for Education (DfE), and the Diocese over several months to identify a suitable solution. Initially the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) proposal was at the centre of the plan however since that programme has been cancelled, further discussions have taken place.

It is proposed that the St Bede's site becomes part of The Haven High Technology College under the leadership and management of the Boston Witham Schools' Federation (BWSF). This has the agreement of the DfE, Diocese and the BWSF. There are two related statutory processes that must take place in parallel to enable this amalgamation to take place. One is to close St Bede's Catholic Science College and the other is to expand The Haven High Technology College onto the St Bede's site. Each process is conditional on the other going ahead. It is vital that the number of school places in the secondary school sector in Boston is retained whilst improving educational standards and opportunities for the young people in the area.

The process commenced on this proposal with a six week period of consultation which closed on 17 February 2011. This report advises the Executive Councillor on making a decision regarding the publication of a Statutory Notice, as required by law, to propose the closure of St Bede's Catholic Science College and the expansion of The Haven High Technology College under the BWSF. If the Executive Councillor gives approval to the publication of a Statutory Notice

there will follow a further 6 weeks representation period giving another opportunity for people and organisations to express their views and ensure that they are taken into account when the final decision is taken by the Executive in June 2011.

Recommendation(s):

Following the completion of the consultation period, the first phase of the statutory process, the Executive Councillor is recommended to take the next step of publishing the Statutory Notice confirming the proposal to close St Bede's Catholic Science College and expand The Haven High Technology College onto the St Bede's site under the BWSF with an implementation date of 1 September 2011

Alternatives Considered:

1. That the Statutory Notice is not published and the consultation process is stopped. This would mean that St Bede's Catholic Science College would remain open and no action would be taken to expand The Haven High Technology College and pupils would continue with their education on the same site and at the school at which they are currently on roll.

However, this alternative would have the following disadvantages:

The Local Authority (LA) would not be complying with the DfE requirement to find a structural solution necessary because St Bede's Catholic Science College is not meeting the government floor standards.

This would retain the current educational standards of St Bede's Catholic Science College which are falling below the government floor standards.

This would mean that St Bede's Catholic Science College would continue to experience difficulties in recruiting qualified teaching staff with suitable specialisms, consequently it would be unable to provide a staffing structure capable of delivering an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum thus limiting the range of opportunities available for students.

As a stand alone school it is likely that St Bede's Catholic Science College would enter a deficit budget within the near future.

Makes it more difficult to provide a wider range of services and facilities to the local community.

May not provide enriched provision and integrated services for children and young people in the area.

2. That the Statutory Notice is not published, the consultation process is stopped and no action is taken to expand The Haven High Technology

College, but consideration is given to federating with an alternative unidentified school. This would mean that pupils would continue with their education on the same site and at the school at which they are currently on roll. However, these possibilities have already been explored without success. The Diocese tried firstly to find a Catholic partner and then sought a church solution by means of a partnership with a local church school but was unable to do either. In any potential partnership an important criterion was that the Catholic element of the school be retained and although all options were explored the current proposal remained the only viable alternative.

Reasons for Recommendation:

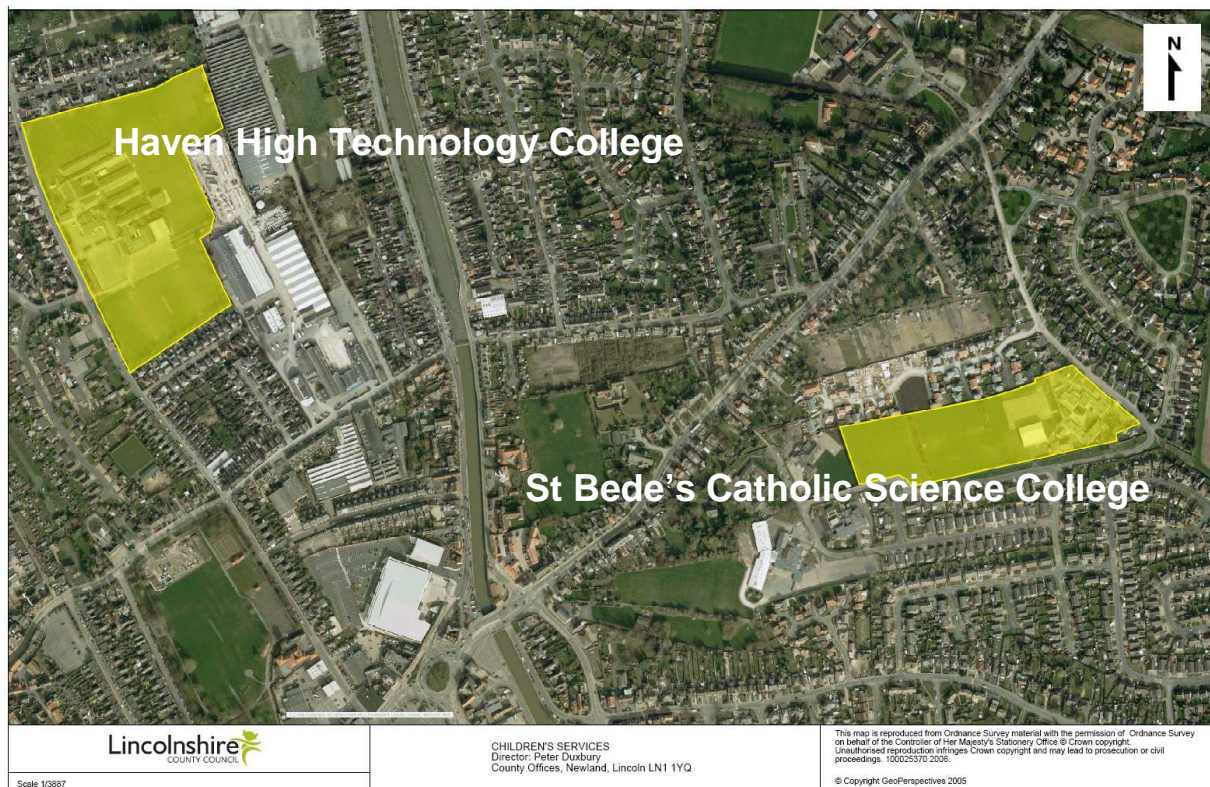
- The proposal for St Bede's Catholic Science College to become part of the BWSF will allow staff and pupils to be part of a larger school community. This school community fully reflects the local Boston community, with provision for 3 – 16 education, supported by wrap-around extended services. BWSF has an excellent reputation and has demonstrated over time the capacity for sustainable improvement through a balanced curriculum, consistently good quality teaching and learning, high quality extended provision and excellent leadership. The LA supports the proposal for the following reasons:-
-
- To enable the process to continue to the next stage and allow a further opportunity for people and organisations to express their views about the proposals and ensure that they will be taken into account by the Executive.
-
- It is the only sustainable solution for secondary education within Boston.
-
- To enable the statutory and legal processes to proceed.
-
- To meet the requirement for a transformational agenda to address a school facing the challenge of not meeting the National Challenge targets of 5 A* to C including mathematics and English at Key Stage 4 nor the new floor standard.
-
- Greater curriculum choice including wider access to specialist vocational facilities across the federation.
-
- Wider access to a range of extended services including speedy referral to support services.
-
- Access to a comprehensive menu of study support activities throughout the year.
-
- Improved opportunities for community and family learning.
-
- Increased opportunities for continuity of educational provision from

primary to secondary school within the BWSF.

-
- Wider development opportunities for all staff to help maintain stability and provision of high quality teaching and learning.
-
- Greater focus on the development for senior and middle leadership models.
-
- The proposal allows for the Catholic element of the school to be retained in two ways, namely (i) Catholic religious education will continue to be part of the curriculum offer in the secondary school and (ii) members of the Catholic community will have representation on the Governing Body of the Federation. Both of these aspects have been discussed and agreed with the BWSF Governing Body and the Catholic Diocese.

1. Background

St Bede's Catholic Science College and The Haven High Technology College are located in the north of Boston approximately 0.75 miles apart by line of sight and 1.1 miles apart by nearest walking route. They form the only non-selective secondary education within the town of Boston which also includes the selective grammar federation of Boston High School and Boston Grammar School. This proposal does not affect the Boston Grammar Schools Federation.



The Haven High Technology College is part of the BWSF which also includes Carlton Road Primary School and Staniland Primary and Nursery School. The

governors of the BWSF agreed to St Bede's Catholic Science College joining the federation from September 2010. The proposal is then for St Bede's Catholic Science College to close as a school on 31 August 2011 and for The Haven High Technology College to expand onto the St Bede's site from 1 September 2011, effectively creating one school under one name across two sites with one DfE number and so retaining the number of non-selective secondary school places in the area.

Boston St Bede's Catholic Science College

St Bede's is a Voluntary Aided, Catholic, non-selective mixed secondary school maintained by the LA and within the trusteeship of the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham.

It is a specialist Science College; however its redesignation as a specialist school has recently been assessed as probationary.

At the last school census return in January 2011 the College had 323 pupils on roll making it one of the two smallest secondary schools in Lincolnshire. In the DfE's planning terms, the smallest viable secondary school is one with an annual intake of 120-150 pupils – the College has just over 60 pupils per year.

In August 2008 St Bede's Catholic Science College was the second lowest performing school in England for the 5A*-C including English and maths (5ACEM) measure and was identified by the DCSF as a National Challenge School. The National Challenge was introduced by the previous government to ensure that no school performed below 30% 5A*-C including English and maths. The new government is increasing this floor target to 35%.

In September 2009 the school had an Ofsted inspection and as a result was given a "Notice to Improve". This followed the decision, upheld by the DCSF, to replace the Governing Body with an IEB in January 2009.

In July 2010 a monitoring visit by Ofsted judged the school to be making satisfactory progress on the key issues requiring urgent improvement.

The Haven High Technology College was inspected in June 2010 and assessed as good, with 10 outstanding features.

Educational perspective to support proposed closure

There are three main justifications for the closure of St Bede's Catholic Science College from an education perspective. These focus on the following:

- current and future standards of attainment
- breadth of curriculum
- recruitment of specialist, high quality teaching staff, including a headteacher.

Current and future standards of attainment

In June 2008, a three-year National Challenge programme was announced by the government to address under-performance in secondary schools. This programme requires all Local Authorities to demonstrate that their secondary schools have the capacity to reach the National Challenge floor target of 30% of pupils achieving 5ACEM by July 2011 or to make proposals for structural changes.

The rationale for the target is to improve the life chances of young people by identifying a minimum standard that should be achieved at the end of KS4. A further function of the floor target can also be viewed as a way of ensuring that no pupil attends a mainstream secondary school at which the overall attainment falls below a certain level – it having been shown that the overall attainment of a cohort influences the attainment of individuals within that cohort. ('Using data, improving schools' Ofsted 2008).

Due to the very low percentage of pupils achieving 5ACEM St Bede's Catholic Science College has been part of the National Challenge programme. Considerable additional funds from central government totalling £428K have been allocated to the school since September 2008 to support its leadership capacity and widen the range of intervention strategies (see Table 1). In addition to these funds, high levels of consultant and advisory support have been provided on a weekly basis from the School Improvement Service. The National Challenge programme ceases at the end of the academic year 2010/11.

Table 1

	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
National Challenge funding	£91K	£234K	£103K

In considering the school's capability to reach the floor targets of 30% 5ACEM, it is important to consider the general nature of the school roll. The most recent analysis of pupil cohorts at St Bede's Catholic Science College clearly identifies the high proportion of the pupil population with special educational needs, those for whom English is an additional language (EAL) together with ability of the cohort, calculated by the KS2 Average Point Score (APS) compared with the National APS. See Table 2 below:

Table 2 Cohort Summary 2010/11 (Sept 2010)

	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
Number in cohort	64	58	64	70	66
Number of EAL pupils	38	26	28	27	27
% EAL of cohort	59.4	44.8	43.8	38.6	40.9
Number of SEN pupils	29	17	19	21	17
% SEN of cohort	45.3	29.3	29.7	30	25.8
KS2 APS		25.1	20.3	22.0	20.7
KS2 National APS		27.9	27.9	27.9	27.9

Using the data provided by Fischer Family Trust (FFT) based on the prior attainment of the pupil cohorts at KS2, the future standards of attainment for St Bede's Catholic Science College are estimated as follows (see Table 3). The

model of estimation used provides an indication of what might be achieved if pupils made sufficient progress to be within the top quartile of schools nationally.

Table 3 FFT estimates for KS4 examination year

	2011	2012	2013	2014
5ACEM	27%	29%	23%	23%

Taking all the above factors into account, current and future standards of attainment at St Bede's Catholic Science college indicate strongly that reaching the government floor target of 35% 5ACEM is neither achievable nor sustainable in the longer term. The school is therefore judged to be at severe risk and in such circumstances Local Authorities have been required to find a structural solution. Significant pressure has been exerted on the LA and the Diocese to confirm the structural solution(closure), as St. Bede's Catholic Science College was the only school in the county that did not have an agreed plan. The DfE recognises the benefits of the proposed amalgamation and supports the plan.

Breadth of curriculum

The Published Admission Number for St Bede's Catholic Science College is 70, giving an expected 350 on roll for this 11 – 16 school. The actual number on roll as at January 2011 was 323.

In the government's planning terms, the smallest viable secondary school is one with an annual intake of between 120 and 150 pupils. This enables a school to provide the minimum number of curriculum options to meet pupil aspirations and provide viable group sizes to stimulate learning through social interaction to promote the sharing of ideas, information and experiences as well as enabling pupils to participate meaningfully in team games, sports and other community activities.

A secondary school with a projected annual intake of 70 pupils will face an increasing challenge in providing a staffing structure able to deliver an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum, even in collaboration with other educational institutions.

St Bede's Catholic Science College is finding it increasingly difficult to provide an appropriate range of viable option choices for Y10 and Y11 within its own resources even though it does fund courses offered by other educational institutions such as Boston College. The IEB (which has replaced the Governing Body) recognises that many of the smaller sized groups are unsustainable as well as not providing a stimulating learning environment for pupils. Some groups have to operate outside of curriculum time in order to meet pupil demand or miss lessons to comply with specific requirements of its Science specialism. For example, in order to provide for the study of Chemistry, Physics and Biology (Triple Science), pupils have to miss lessons in Citizenship.

Recruitment of teaching staff

Most secondary schools on Lincolnshire's east coast experience difficulties in recruiting qualified teaching staff with appropriate subject specialisms. In addition, the nature and context of St Bede's Catholic Science College has significantly affected the extent to which it has been able to attract a suitably qualified and experienced Catholic Headteacher to lead the school and appeal to high calibre teaching candidates for key roles.

Such is the lack of suitably qualified candidates that a significant proportion of the teaching staff appointed in the past has not had Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). In the 2009/10 academic year, 42% of lessons were taught by instructors. Although keen to teach, instructors will have received no formal training in how to plan and deliver effective lessons or how to assess the quality of learning and ensure the level progress expected of individual pupils.

A comprehensive programme of support for instructors has been implemented and the opportunity for such training has been warmly received. The quality of teaching and learning has improved as a result but overall, across the school, this aspect remains as broadly satisfactory.

The small size of St Bede's Catholic Science College is reflected in the small size of subject departments. Many subjects are single person departments and there are thus fewer departmental role models for emergent leaders. This seriously limits the opportunity for professional dialogue and the scope for career development. Whilst there is a high degree of loyalty to the school, qualified teachers who may wish to expand their range of skills and abilities need to look for posts elsewhere. This is currently evident in the school's Mathematics department where all the teaching staff has been successful in securing posts and promotions elsewhere.

Financial Sustainability

The future number on roll appears stable and the school underspent by £93k last year which was an increase on the previous year. However, the school is currently in receipt of National Challenge funding which is due to end this year. Also, it receives through its School Development Grant, £100k for Leadership Incentive Grant. The DfE is considering whether to alter the way in which this grant is distributed to schools from April 2011. So, whilst the school has been able to maintain an underspend in recent years, it will be unable to do so from 2011/12 when significant reductions are made to its budget through Government decisions. Furthermore, as the rest of this report demonstrates, current levels of spending in the school have not been sufficient to offer a broad curriculum and to ensure that the percentage of 5ACEM is at an appropriate level. There is therefore a strong financial case for change and the longer it takes to make, the bigger the deficit will be.

2. Conclusion

The educational challenges faced by St Bede's Catholic Science College as outlined above are not temporary in nature; they are features of the size and nature of the school and the context within which it operates. Satisfactory progress has been made in addressing the key priorities, as noted in a recent Ofsted monitoring visit, but to a very large extent such improvements have been funded and supported by substantial additional funding through the National Challenge programme. This funding and support ceases in August 2011. The capacity of the school to improve the educational provision in a sustainable manner is not likely to be adequately addressed without a structural solution. The structural solution proposed for St Bede's Catholic Science College is for the school to close and become part of the BWSF (currently comprising The Haven High Technology College, Carlton Road Primary School and Staniland Primary and Nursery School) with the expansion of The Haven High Technology College onto the St Bede's site.

This proposal presents the children and young people of Boston with the best opportunity to reach their full potential. Publishing a Statutory Notice confirming this proposal will allow the process to continue and a decision is required from the Executive Councillor as to whether to proceed. The factors to consider in making this decision are within this report and all responses made during consultation must be considered.

3. Legal Comments:

These recommendations encompass two proposals namely the closure of St Bede's Catholic Science College and the expansion of The Haven High Technology College. Both these procedures need to follow the steps which are prescribed by legislation. The comprehensive guidance which is attached to the report sets out the legislative background and the steps that should be taken. Following consultation the Authority now needs to consider whether to publish the Statutory Notice taking into consideration the responses that have been received from all consultees. Following the publication of the Notice there will be a further period allowing another opportunity for representations to be made.

This is a decision within the remit of the Executive Councillor.

4. Resource Comments:

St. Bede's Catholic Science College is unlikely to be able to provide the breadth of curriculum, reach Government minimum standards and remain financially viable. Approval of the recommendation in this report will allow a solution to be implemented.

5. Consultation

A paper was presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2010 when approval was given to commence the consultation process. The statutory guidelines for this process are detailed in the guides "Closing a Maintained Mainstream School" (Appendix A) and "Expanding a Maintained Mainstream School by Enlargement or Adding a Sixth Form" Appendix B) both published by the DCSF. Under these guidelines the LA must ensure that sufficient time and information are provided for people to understand and form a view on the proposal and make a response. The consultation document must set out the problem that is being addressed and invite comment on one or more solutions. The LA must take all reasonable steps to draw the consultation to the attention of all those who might be interested and take into account their views.

The Education Act 2002 states the requirement for current pupils to be consulted and this was further extended by subsequent legislation to also include all pre-school children over the age of 3. The Education & Inspections Act 2006 specifically includes as interested parties the registered parents of registered pupils at the school and also the appropriate District and Parish Councils for the area. The Headteacher has actively consulted with the students currently attending the two schools, and will continue to do so during this process, and a summary of the pupils' responses is attached as Appendix I.

A letter (Appendix C), together with a consultation document (Appendix D), was sent out to interested parties (Appendix E) on 6 January 2011 to commence a six week period of consultation. A public meeting was also held on 20 January 2011 attended by representatives of the LA and the IEB together with parents/carers and other interested parties. All attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions and notes were taken which were published on the website www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/provisionplanning and are also attached here as Appendix F. Copies of the letter commencing consultation and the consultation document were also published on this website. There was the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation by letter, email or by returning the response form (Appendix G) attached to the consultation document by 17 February 2010.

The written responses received during consultation have been provided to the Executive Councillor for consideration and are also summarised in this report (Appendix H). In total there were 53 valid responses with 24 supporting the proposal, 19 against and 10 expressing views neither in favour nor against the proposal. 49 of the responses were received from individuals with 4 representing organisations, these being a trade union and 3 Parish Councils. Approximately half of all the consultation responses were from parents with 7 in favour, 13 against and 8 neither for nor against.

If the Executive Councillor decides to proceed to Statutory Notice, this would initiate a 6 week Representation Period giving a further opportunity for people and organisations to express their views and ensure that they are taken into account when the final decision is taken by the Executive Councillor in June 2011. The LA, as decision maker, must be able to show that all relevant issues raised are taken into consideration in the decision making process. Points raised can be considered unpersuasive but must not be ignored altogether.

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

Yes

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

n/a

c) Scrutiny Comments

A paper was submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2010 where it was resolved to give approval to the recommendation to start the process of consultation regarding the related proposals to close St. Bede's Catholic Science College and expand The Haven High Technology College onto the St Bede's site.

d) Policy Proofing Actions Required

An approved Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed for this report.

6. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	DCSF Guide "Closing a Maintained Mainstream School"
Appendix B	DCSF Guide "Expanding a Maintained Mainstream School by Enlargement or Adding a Sixth Form"
Appendix C	Letter sent to interested parties to commence consultation
Appendix D	Consultation document
Appendix E	List of interested parties consulted
Appendix F	Questions and Answers from public consultation meeting
Appendix G	Response Form
Appendix H	Summary of written responses to consultation
Appendix I	Summary of consultation with current pupils at both schools

7. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Consultation on the future of St Bede's Catholic Science College, Boston (10 December 2010)	Lincolnshire County Council Committee Records (Reference - Policy and Scrutiny)

This report was written by Paul Holmes, who can be contacted on 01522 553366 or Paul.holmes@lincolnshire.gov.uk.