

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:	04 April 2011
Subject:	Proposal to close Holbeach The George Farmer Technology and Language College and Crowland The St Guthlac School to enable the formation of a new Academy - Decision regarding publication of a Statutory Notice
Decision Reference:	01847
Key decision?	No

Summary:

The George Farmer Technology and Language College (GFTLC) and The St Guthlac School (StGS) are both rural secondary schools in the south of the county operating within a selective education system. GFTLC is a popular oversubscribed school which also has a sixth form with a total number on roll of 999. StGS is a small school for pupils aged 11-16 with a number on roll of only 339. Approximately 43% of pupils living in the natural catchment area of StGS choose to attend the school with 23% attending grammar schools.

StGS has been experiencing the following significant difficulties for several years:

- Falling numbers on roll
- Standards of pupil attainment
- Breadth of curriculum
- Recruitment of teaching and leadership staff
- Financial sustainability

The educational challenges facing StGS as a stand alone school, which are further explained in the consultation document (Appendix A), are not temporary in nature but are a feature of the size and nature of the school and the context within which it operates.

In order to provide the best quality of education for children in this area, as well as finding a solution to these problems, the two schools have been working together for a number of years resulting in a hard federation in September 2007. The schools have worked well together and progress has been made but a long term sustainable solution is required. The formation of an Academy is the preference following an option appraisal completed by the Local Authority (LA).

It is proposed that GFTLC and StGS close with effect from 31 August 2011 on the condition that they are replaced on 1 September 2011 with a new co-educational Academy sponsored by the University of Lincoln. This proposal has the support of the Department for Education (DfE) and the federated Governing Body the two schools. This will retain the number of school places in the secondary school sector in the area whilst at the same time improving educational standards and opportunities for the young people in the area.

The process commenced on this proposal with a seven week period of consultation which closed on 16 March 2011. This period was extended by one week to close on 23 March to allow further time for interested parties to consider the documentation produced by the Sponsor as part of the separate consultation on a potential Academy model which has been available since 10 March (with a deadline for responses of 20 May 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 GFTLC and StGS. If the Executive Councillor gives approval to the publication of Statutory Notices 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 July 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 GFTLC and StGS on 31 August 2011 to enable the formation of a new Academy 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 both GFTLC and StGS would remain open as they are currently constituted and no action would be taken regarding the formation of a new Academy, so that 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:

This would retain the current educational standards of StGS which are below the average for all Lincolnshire schools.

This would mean that StGS 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 StGS cannot balance its budget and the current deficit of around £300k is likely to increase significantly year on year with an anticipated deficit in excess of £1 million in 2012/2013.

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

It is unlikely that GFTLC will continue the federation with StGS.

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

2. That the Statutory Notice is not published and the consultation process is stopped with GFTLC continuing in its current form with no action to be taken regarding the formation of a new Academy but consideration given to an alternative structure for StGS.

However, an independent review has been undertaken to consider 3 potential alternative models for StGS to continue as a stand alone school on its current site and this has confirmed that none of the 3 options would result in an economically viable solution providing a broad and balanced curriculum to equip students with the necessary skills for today's world. (See a summary of the independent review in Appendix B)

Reasons for Recommendation:

- The Council would not be actively participating in this process if it did not see significant advantages for children and young people, their parents/carers and the local communities in the Crowland and Holbeach area. The proposal sustains provision in the wider area and will enhance the quality of provision as detailed in the reasons for the recommendation below.
- The Academy will be able to provide a full range of courses to meet students' academic and vocational needs. This greater curriculum choice, including wider access to specialist vocational facilities across the federation, will provide the opportunity for young people in the area to achieve their maximum potential.
- Access to a comprehensive menu of study support activities throughout the year will also be provided as an integral part of this wider curriculum.
- The proposal will receive funding from the DfE to improve facilities within the secondary sector. This proposal will be able to take advantage of capital funding in excess of £8 million which will not otherwise be available. This will enable investment in the facilities and help to address existing shortfalls.

- The Academy will benefit from the expertise and leadership of a Headteacher who has successfully managed a popular and oversubscribed school which has demonstrated over time the capacity for sustained improvement through a balanced curriculum, consistently good quality teaching and learning, high quality extended provision and excellent leadership.
- The Academy will benefit from extensive links with the lead Sponsor, the University of Lincoln, which will be further enhanced through the support of key business partners who are major sector employers in the area. The Sponsors' vision is the creation of an integrated education hub, with the Academy working in a dynamic partnership with the University's National Food Manufacturing Centre which is already situated adjacent to the Holbeach site on the University's Holbeach Campus. Over time, the University will also seek to develop a national centre for agro-science and agro-engineering provision within the Campus and locally. The evolving partnership between the Academy and the University's National Centre will play a major role in raising aspirations, widening curriculum opportunities and strengthening progression opportunities for students at the Academy.
- The Academy will provide significant stability to the education of young people in the local area and will ensure that secondary provision remains sustainable for the future.
- The Academy will enable wider access to a range of extended services and improved opportunities for community and family learning.
- The Academy will offer wider development opportunities for all staff, particularly with the links with the University, which will help maintain stability and provision of high quality teaching and learning whilst securing the quality of staffing. It will also enable a greater focus on the development for senior and middle leadership models so increasing leadership capacity.
- If the Academy goes ahead, other educational opportunities are likely to arise for Crowland if the site is not retained for use as a secondary school in the future.
- This will 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.
- This will enable the statutory and legal processes to proceed.

1. Background

The George Farmer Technology and Language College and The St Guthlac School are both secondary schools serving deprived rural communities, being ranked 33rd and 30th respectively on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) for Lincolnshire secondary schools.

George Farmer is a popular school and is regularly oversubscribed. In the last three years it has gone through a process of improvement and expansion including the acquisition of High Performing Specialist School status, the development of an Applied Learning Sixth Form and a unique school based Apprenticeship programme. The achievement of pupils at 5 GCSE A*-C including English and maths (5ACEM) over the last four years has maintained a strong upward trend of 25%, 35%, 36% and 47%. The Ofsted inspection in December 2010 states 'George Farmer is an extraordinary school providing a good quality of education due to provision and leadership that are good and outstanding.' There were 152 first preference applications for places for September 2011 with a PAN of 150.

St Guthlac is a significantly smaller school with a falling roll which is projected to be less than 300 by 2013. The results achieved by pupils at 5ACEM over the last four years are 19%, 26%, 29% and 39% which are a testimony to the federation. The Ofsted inspection in December 2010 states the school was satisfactory with satisfactory capacity to improve. It obtained Grade 3 for all categories except pupil attainment which was a Grade 4. There were 39 first preference applications for places for September 2011 with a PAN of 80.

A number of schools in the area were approached to discuss the possibility of federation with St Guthlac and George Farmer was the only one capable of considering the option at that time. The two schools have worked together for a number of years leading to a hard federation in September 2007 and this strong support provided by George Farmer has led to improvement in standards and a wider curriculum at St Guthlac through young people being transported to Holbeach for Key Stage 4 courses. However, a long term sustainable solution is now essential.

2. Conclusion

It is recommended that the proposal is implemented to ensure the best educational opportunities for the children of Crowland and Holbeach. The advantages of implementing this proposal are detailed in sections 2 and 4 of the consultation document (Appendix A). The proposal has the support of the DfE and the federated Governing Body of the two schools. An independent review has also confirmed that providing a broad and balanced curriculum to equip students with the necessary skills for a technological world is not economically viable at The St Guthlac School.

This proposal presents the children and young people of Crowland, Holbeach and the surrounding area with the best opportunity to reach their full potential. Publishing a Statutory Notice to confirm 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 (summarised in Appendix I).

3. Legal Comments:

There recommendations encompass two proposals namely the closure of The George Farmer Technology and Language College and the closure of The St Guthlac School. 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:

Crowland The St.Guthlacs school is unlikely to be able to provide the breadth of curriculum required by pupils and remain financial viable. Approval of the recommendation in this report will allow a solution to be implemented.

5. Consultation

In order for the two schools to close to enable the formation of an academy, the LA must follow the necessary statutory legal processes as required by the Secretary of State in accordance with the Education and Inspection Act (EIA) 2006 and the guidance of the DfE. (Appendix C)

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. An assembly was held on each site addressing all pupils and explaining the proposal being consulted on. Pupils were all given the opportunity to feedback through School Council representatives and their form tutors. There was no written feedback received by the 23rd March other than through responses from parents which are included in Appendix I. School activities related to the proposal and school council discussions are ongoing, but are clearly dependent on this decision.

A letter (Appendix D) was sent out to interested parties (listed in Appendix E) on 26 January 2011 to commence a seven week period of consultation which was subsequently extended to an eight week period. A public meeting was held on 16 February 2011 at StGS, with a further public meeting on 17 February 2011 at GFTLC, both of which were attended by representatives of the LA and the federated Governing Body 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 County Council 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 16 March 2011. Following the extension of the consultation period to 23 March 2011 an updated response form was published on our website showing the new deadline. (Appendix H)

The written responses received during consultation have been provided to the Executive Councillor for consideration and are also summarised in this report in Appendix I, along with responses to the general categories under which they could be classified. In total there were 439 valid responses with 165 supporting the proposal, 196 against and 78 expressing views neither in favour nor against the proposal. 65% (285) of all the consultation responses were from parents with 42% of those responses in favour, 35% against and 23% neither for nor against. 10% (44) of responses were from teachers and non-teaching staff. Of those responses 77% were for the proposal, 14% against and 9% neither for nor against. Further statistics from the responses can be seen in Appendix I.

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 at the meeting of the Executive in July 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. The last stage of the statutory process would be the implementation of the proposal in September 2011 if it is decided to proceed.

Details of the potential Academy are being consulted on through a separate process led by the sponsor and the Governing Body of both schools which will run alongside the consultation process carried out by the LA. This consultation document together with further details can be viewed at www.holbeachacademy.org

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 25 February 2011 where it was resolved to support the decision to go to consultation regarding the proposal to close both schools to enable the formation of an Academy.

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	Consultation document
Appendix B	Summary of independent review
Appendix C	DCSF Guide "Closing a Maintained Mainstream School"
Appendix D	Letter to commence consultation
Appendix E	List of interested parties
Appendix F	Questions and Answers at the public meetings
Appendix G	Response form
Appendix H	Response form for extended consultation period
Appendix I	Summary of written consultation responses

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 Holbeach The George Farmer Technology and Language College and Crowland The St Guthlac School (25 February 2011)	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.