

**Open Report on behalf of Andy Breckon, Assistant Director School Improvement Service**

Report to:	<b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>25 February 2011</b>
Subject:	<b>Consultation on the future of Holbeach, The George Farmer Technology and Language College and Crowland, The St Guthlac School</b>

**Summary:**

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

The St Guthlac School 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 The St Guthlac School 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 preferred option following an option appraisal completed by the Local Authority (LA).

**Actions Required:**

The proposal is to close The George Farmer Technology and Language College and The St Guthlac School on 31 August 2011 on the condition that they are replaced on 1 September 2011 with a new co-educational Academy. This report requires discussion and feedback on the proposal (see also Appendix A) within the formal consultation period, which forms the first part of the statutory process, commencing on 26 January and potentially leading to a final Executive decision in July and implementation in September.

**1. Background**

The George Farmer Technology and Language College and The St Guthlac School are both secondary schools serving deprived rural communities, being ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 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 (HPSS) 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.'

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%. 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.

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 required.

**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 Department for Education (DfE) and the Governing Body of the two federated 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 (as reflected by the current budget - Appendix B).

**3. 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 (see Background Papers).

The first stage of this process commenced on 26 January with a 7 week formal consultation period with all interested parties. During this period 2 public discussion meetings are scheduled to be held, one at each school.

Following consultation a paper will be produced for an Executive Councillor decision in April 2011 on whether or not to progress to the publication of a Statutory Notice. If the Statutory Notice is published this would then begin the 6 week Representation Period prior to a paper being taken to the Executive for a final decision to be made in July to either approve or reject the proposal. The final 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.

**a) Policy Proofing Actions Required**

n/a

**4. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Consultation Document on the Proposal to close Holbeach The George Farmer Technology and Language College and Crowland The St Guthlac School to enable the formation of an Academy
Appendix B	Summary of Independent Review

**5. 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
Closing a Maintained Mainstream School - A Guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies	<a href="http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg">www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg</a>

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