

Cabinet - 1 March 2006

Rushall Community College

Portfolio: Councillor Eddie Hughes, Children's Services

Service Area: Education Walsall

Wards: Hatherton Rushall

Forward Plan: No

Summary of report

This report outlines a recent and substantial decline in pupil numbers at Rushall Community College and seeks Cabinet's approval to consult on the future of the school from 31 August 2006.

Recommendations

That approval be given for consultation to take place on the closure of Rushall Community College from 31 August 2006.

Resource and legal considerations

- 1.1 The proposed closure of Rushall Community College would be subject to the approval of statutory proposals. In addition, the Shelfield-Rushall federation will need to be dissolved.
- 1.2 Rushall Community College was established on 1 September 2003 as a Fresh Start school in federation with Shelfield Sports and Community College following the closure of Manor Farm School.
- 1.3 These arrangements were based upon the admission of 90 pupils each year to Year 7 at Rushall Community College. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are educated at the Rushall site whilst those in Years 10 and 11 are educated at the Shelfield site.
- 1.4 Over the last 2½ years these arrangements have worked effectively with close collaboration between the two sites and pupils have benefited from accessing the improved facilities at Shelfield where there has been a significant investment over the last few years.

2. Pupil Numbers

2.1 During this period, however, there has been a reduction in the number of pupils transferring from the primary sector to the secondary sector and this is increasingly affecting secondary schools in Walsall.

2.2 Details of the projected decrease in secondary school rolls were reported to Cabinet in July 2005 and are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Pupil Numbers – Secondary Sector

	Year	Under 16	16 & Over	Total
Actual	2003/04	18,636	2,845	21,481
	2004/05	18,555	2,826	21,381
Forecasts	2005/06	18,349	2,824	21,173
	2006/07	17,963	2,872	20,835
	2007/08	17,453	2,942	20,395
	2008/09	17,230	2,910	20,140
	2009/10	17,204	2,766	19,970
	2010/11	17,135	2,687	19,822
	2011/12	17,181	2,640	19,821

2.3 This data shows a significant fall of over 1,500 pupils (7%) in the secondary school population over the next five years and a strategy to address this will be developed for Cabinet's consideration.

2.4 This reduction in numbers has been evident in recent admissions rounds as is shown in Table 2 below which provides details of the number of pupils in each year group in Walsall secondary schools.

Table 2 Secondary Pupils in Walsall, September 2005

Year 11	3,662
Year 10	3,795
Year 9	3,749
Year 8	3,562
Year 7	3,393

2.5 Inevitably, when there is a fall in pupil numbers this does not impact equally on all schools. Often, smaller schools are disproportionately affected and this is particularly evident in the case of Rushall.

2.6 Rushall has 90 places in each year group and although there was some recovery in pupil numbers, the overall reduction in pupils transferring to the secondary sector has meant that this has not been sustained.

2.7 Details of the number of pupils at Rushall Community College are provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Rushall: Pupil Numbers, September 2005

Year Group	Pupils	
Year 11	70	Educated at Shelffield site
Year 10	67	
Year 9	72	Educated at Rushall site
Year 8	70	
Year 7	45	
Total	324	

- 2.8 In September 2005, only 50% of Year 7 places were taken up. This trend has accelerated and the number of first preferences for places in September 2006 is 15. A year group of this size is not viable educationally, socially or financially and in these circumstances there is no alternative but to make other arrangements for these pupils.

3 Proposal

- 3.1 Set in the context of overall decreasing numbers, there is no indication that this trend in number at Rushall is likely to be reversed, especially following a year in which no pupils are admitted. In these circumstances, there is no alternative but to consider the future of the school and Cabinet is recommended to approve consultation on closure from 31 August 2006.

- 3.2 The commitment of Shelffield and Rushall to the federation is such that the governors are keen to ensure that pupils on roll at Rushall continue to be educated within the federation. The completion of the major schemes to improve facilities at Shelffield means that it will be possible to offer a place at Shelffield to all Rushall pupils although, of course, parents would be free to make other arrangements should they so wish. In order to ensure that the transitional arrangements do not impact adversely on pupils, it is proposed to educate Year 8 and Year 9 pupils on the Rushall site during the 2006/2007 school year and all pupils would transfer to the Shelffield site in September 2007. No additional accommodation requirements are envisaged.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Consultation on the proposal will include meetings, presentations and discussions with the parents and staff at Rushall Community College and also with the federated governing body. Meetings will also be offered to staff and parents of pupils at Shelffield.
- 4.2 A consultation document will be issued to all parents, staff and governors and made available on the Education Walsall website.
- 4.3 Teachers' professional associations and other unions would be included in the consultation process.

- 4.4 A report on the outcome of consultation would be brought to Cabinet on 12 April 2006. If Cabinet decides to proceed, a statutory proposal would be published. If no objections are received during the six weeks representation period, the final decision on the future of the school will be taken by Cabinet. If any objections are received, the final decision will be taken by the School Organisation Committee. It is expected that the final decision will be taken in late June 2006.

Citizen impact

The proposed closure of Rushall Community College would remove uncertainty regarding the viability of secondary school provision in the locality. There is every indication that Shelfield will continue to be a viable and popular school in the years to come.

Community safety

There are no community safety issues arising from this report.

Environmental impact

There are no environmental considerations arising from this report.

Performance and risk management issues

The proposed closure of Rushall Community College would reduce the number of surplus places in the secondary sector.

Equality implications

There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Consultation

Through discussion with the Executive Headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body, the Governing Body as a whole is aware of this situation. Staff have been alerted to the very low numbers of preferences and the implications of this for staffing in the school. This overcapacity would need to be managed through staff reductions regardless of any closure proposals.

Vision 2008

The proposed consultation would contribute to the delivery of Walsall's vision for 2008 – Section 4 Make Our Schools Great – by securing sustainable provision of secondary school places for the local community.

Background papers

None.

Contact officer

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Signed:



Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 17 February 2006

Signed:



Managing Director, Education Walsall

Date: 17 February 2006

Signed:



Portfolio Holder: Councillor E F Hughes

Date: 17 February 2006