

## **Special Cabinet – 3 August 2009**

### **Sneyd Community – A Specialist Maths and Computing College**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Rachel Walker, Children's Services

**Service:** Education

**Wards:** All Wards (in particular Bloxwich East, Bloxwich West, Willenhall North and Short Heath)

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Summary of report**

This report sets out the response of the portfolio holder for Children's Services to the resolution of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel on the future of Sneyd – A Specialist Maths and Computing College.

#### **2. Recommendations**

That Cabinet confirms the decisions taken at its meeting on 15 July.

These being:

1. That Cabinet note that an 11-19 academy is not a viable proposal for the future of Sneyd.
2. That Cabinet approves a short consultation, as advised by the DCSF, on option A, that current education provision at Sneyd ceases on 31 August 2012. No pupils would be admitted to Year 7 or the sixth form in September 2010 and subsequent years. Pupils already in the school would transfer on a year on year basis at the end of the key stage to places at other schools in the Borough as set out in the Cabinet report of 22 April 2009. For new Year 7 pupils, who would otherwise have gone to Sneyd, the other local schools will, of course, apply their agreed admission policies ensuring these pupils will get priority with regard to entering their preferred school in line with these policies.
3. That Cabinet delegates to the Executive Director, Children's Services in consultation with the portfolio holder for Children's Services, the approval of the consultation document. Consultation on Option A will commence at the beginning of the Autumn Term, September 2009.
4. That officers be requested to pursue an Expression of Interest for a University Technical College.

### 3. Feasibility of an 11-19 academy

On several occasions the Officer of the Schools Commission has made it clear that an 11-19 academy is not a viable solution for Sneyd and as such an 11-19 academy was not one of the options for consultation.

The working group, established by Children & Young People's Scrutiny, was also asked to pursue the proposal of an 11-19 academy following a presentation made by Ormiston Trust.

The Office of the Schools Commission offers the following advice regarding the establishment of Academies:

"The DCSF considers academy proposals from LAs based on the needs identified that the academy is proposed to meet. LAs proposals need to take account of the whole LA area, and the medium and longer term as well as the short term. The position in relation to academies is not changed by the identification of a potential sponsor. As I know you are aware, we work with Local Authorities to find and agree a sponsor once an Academy proposal based on the needs identified is agreed."

In considering, therefore, the feasibility of an Academy, officers considered the numbers of pupils wishing to attend Sneyd school and ongoing predictions of those numbers. Over a number of years the numbers of pupils wishing to attend Sneyd school have reduced considerably as a result of falling rolls across the borough and standards within the school. The admissions data demonstrates that admissions to the school had reduced from 241 Year 7 pupils in 2004/5 to 123 pupils in 2007/08, 113 in 2008/09 and 73 predicted for September 2009. Obviously whilst the potential closure of the school will have impacted on admission numbers for 2009 and to some extent 2008, the falling rolls and Ofsted outcomes had already very significantly reduced the numbers to a level below viability. Pupil admission numbers are attached to this report at **Appendix A**. Officers, therefore, took the view that a viable 11-19 Academy was unlikely to be developed, therefore, the OSC were unlikely to support a proposal and would not seek to identify a sponsor.

It has been suggested that in the meeting with the Minister he indicated that the DCSF would support a proposal for an 11-19 Academy if a sponsor was in place. Officials of the OSC have informed us that:

"During the meeting between the action group and the Minister, the Minister heard the arguments put forward by the action group. In particular, the action group stated that a sponsor had been identified and that there was school and community support for an 11-19 Academy at Sneyd. During the discussion it was explained to the action group why this was not a viable proposition."

The Minister was, however, keen to be assured that the viability issue had been fully explored. The OSC officials, having discussed this with the officers of the Authority have stated:

"We have supported the proposals that the LA has made for Sneyd, which are seen to be appropriate given the requirement to reduce surplus places and to

improve standards. If the LA was to propose an academy at Sneyd it would not be a viable proposition unless accompanied by revised proposals to reduce surplus places elsewhere.”

Communications, DCSF guidance, legislation and meetings with the OSC confirm that for an Academy proposal three essential and committed partners are needed. These partners comprise a sponsor, the department and the Local Authority. As the Local Authority can not demonstrate a viable demand for an Academy and as the OSC would not support the development of an Academy for Sneyd and not be prepared to seek a sponsor this option can not, therefore, be pursued. Equally, the Council would need to seek to reduce surplus accommodation elsewhere and consider changes or closure of other schools in the borough if this were to be a preferred route. In addition, during this further period of consideration a meeting was held bringing together representatives of Sneyd school with officers of the Schools Commission and officers of the Council. The notes of this meeting, reinforcing what has already been stated, are attached as **Appendix B**.

#### **4. Costs associated with transitional arrangements**

The main transitional costs for pupils who transfer to other schools would be home to school transport and the purchase of uniforms.

##### Transport

Walsall’s transport policy would apply to pupils who transfer from Sneyd to other schools through the transitional arrangements that would be put in place. The cost of the transport is met for pupils who live outside the statutory walking distance of 3 miles to their nearest appropriate school. Children from low income families may qualify for transport to schools between 2 and 6 miles from their home. Children from low income groups are legally defined as those whose families are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit. Eligibility for transport assistance is assessed on an annual basis.

Usually, home to school transport costs are covered through the issue of a bus pass. However, consideration would be given to whether other arrangements, such as a school bus, would be more appropriate, depending upon pupil numbers, destinations and existing public transport routes. Information about bus routes to other schools would be made available to parents when their preferences for alternative school places are sought.

##### Uniforms

Pupils transferring to other schools would do so at the end of the school year and would start at their new school in September. The summer holiday is a time when parents often replace items of school uniform in response to wear and tear of growth over the previous 12 months.

## **5. Resource Consideration**

### 5.1 Financial

Any decision to support parents in meeting the additional cost of transport and uniforms for pupils as they transfer from Sneyd etc. to alternative schools will have resource implications. A full report on these implications will be brought forward to the Schools Forum and the Council to ensure that the needs of schools receiving pupils transferred from Sneyd can be met as soon as the pupils transfer, and that the pupils transport and uniform requirements can also be met.

### 5.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications to this report.

## **6. Citizen Impact**

The proposal to close Sneyd will provide opportunities for current and future pupils of the area to access places at educationally and financially viable schools.

## **7. Community safety**

There are no direct implications for community safety.

## **8. Environmental impact**

There are no direct environment implications to this report.

## **9. Performance and risk management issues**

### 9.1 Risk

The proposal to close Sneyd – A Specialist Maths and Science College will mitigate the risk of the school becoming financially variable.

### 9.2 Performance Management

Sneyd – A Specialist Maths and Computing College was inspected in November 2008 and was judged by Ofsted to require a 'Notice to Improve'. A recovery plan was submitted to Ofsted about how the school, with Local Authority and BCC support, would address the issues raised.

As a category school, Sneyd Computing College is subject to statutory HMI monitoring visits. The outcome of the HMI monitoring visit (May 2009) was that the school, with effective support from BCC and the Local Authority, was making satisfactory progress, however, HMI acknowledged that there is still some distance to travel before standards at the end of KS4 match those reached by students nationally.

As a National Challenge school there is a high expectation that the school will make rapid and sustainable improvement. The school remains a school causing

concern and an intensive school within the BCC and the Local Authority, requiring the maximum level of support available to improve.

A National Challenge School is where results are below the 30% floor target of 5A\* - C including English and Maths.

Results for 5\* - C including English and Maths in 2008 were 19% compared with the national average of 47.6%.

The school predicts 26% 5\* - C including English and Maths for 2009; this is still below the national floor target of 30%.

## 10. Equality implications

Pupils and their parents will be supported to appropriate alternative school places.

Pupils transferring to higher performing schools will receive enhanced opportunities to maximise their educational potential.

## 11. Consultation

The next stage of consultation will commence in September and will be reported to Cabinet on 22 October.

### Background papers

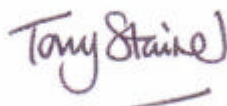
- Cabinet report (22 October 2008 – review of secondary schools)
- Cabinet report (22 April 2009 – The Future of Sneyd)
- Scrutiny report (20 November 2008)
- Cabinet report (15 July 2009 – The Future of Sneyd)

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Pauline Pilkington  
Executive Director  
24 July 2009



Tony Stainer  
Managing Director  
24 July 2009



Councillor Rachel Walker  
Portfolio holder  
27 July 2009



**Sneyd – Admissions**

The number of pupils admitted to Year 7 at Sneyd has reduced over the last five years as shown in the table below.

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Admissions to Year 7 at Sneyd</b>	<b>Admissions to Year 7 at Walsall schools</b>
2009/10	73*	3,553*
2008/09	113	3,510
2007/08	123	3,485
2006/07	159	3,481
2005/06	195	3,561
2004/05	241	3,745

**Notes**

*\*Offers as at 20 July 2009*

<b>VISIT OR CONTACT REPORT</b>	
<b>DATE / TIME:</b> 2PM ON 5 JUNE 2009	<b>LOCATION:</b> WALSALL CIVIC CENTRE
<b>Main contact:</b> Tony Stainer, Education Lead	
<b>Address:</b> Walsall Children's Services – Serco, Education Development Centre, Pelsall Lane, Rushall, Walsall, WS4 1NG	
<b>HEADLINES</b>	
<p>OSC's position in relation to the LA's school organisation proposals was explained.</p> <p>Sneyd's interim Head and Chair of Governors accepted that Sneyd could not become an 11-19 academy and that any new education provision on the site would not be a direct replacement of Sneyd.</p> <p>It was agreed that the best outcome for current and future pupils would be achieved if all concerned worked positively towards securing agreement to, and implementation of, the LA's plans for Sneyd.</p>	
<b>VISIT</b>	
<b>Purpose of visit:</b> to discuss the rationale behind the LA's proposals for Sneyd School	
<b>Attendees:</b> Pauline Pilkington, Acting DCS Tony Stainer, Education Lead and MD Cllr Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader Dr Sean Sweeney, Interim Head John de Hayes, Chair of Governing Body Jacky Griffin, LA Liaison Consultant Note taker	<b>Organisation:</b> Walsall LA Walsall LA/Serco Walsall LA Sneyd School Sneyd School OSC, DCSF Walsall LA
<b>KEY DISCUSSION POINTS AND DECISIONS</b>	
<p>Sean Sweeney set out the context of the school indicating that, despite persistent very low standards of achievement and CVA, progress had been made at the school and staff were keen to ensure that the future education of pupils was secured. He and John de Hayes shared the LA's interest in opportunities for retaining education on the Sneyd site in some form, preferring an 11-19 academy although this had not been proposed.</p> <p>Jacky Griffin explained the role of OSC in relation to LA's school organisation plans, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the responsibility of the LA for making proposals for its schools based on the need to ensure that appropriate number of school places of high quality, requiring removal or addition of school places according to evidence of demand</li> <li>• the role of BSF in securing educational transformation through rapid, significant and sustainable improvements in standards and of the OSC's role in contributing to the assessment of LA's BSF plans</li> <li>• the expectations that schools would be of a suitable size to ensure curriculum and financial viability</li> <li>• the process of agreeing Academy proposals, starting with the development of an LA's proposal into a Statement of Intent</li> <li>• the need to consider schools and pupils across boundaries when proposing sizes and locations of schools</li> <li>• that the proposed skills centre or UCT would draw students from a very wide area and offer specialist provision which meant that it could be developed outside BSF as the pupil numbers implications would be small for Walsall. For this reason, and the nature of such a specialised institution, it could not be seen as a replacement for Sneyd</li> <li>• if the LA was proposing to open an academy the OSC would need to agree that a LA statement of</li> </ul>	



**VISIT OR CONTACT REPORT**

intent was submitted for approval by the Minister; such a proposal for Sneyd would not be supported as the LA needed to reduce the number of secondary school places and the viability of the school was therefore a significant issue.

- the LA was not proposing an academy to replace Sneyd and thus the OSC did not have a role in approving this. The OSC was content with the LA's proposals and understood the reasons behind the proposals for the closure of Sneyd.

Tony Stainer indicated that the proposals for the current Sneyd pupils, and for the replacement of some of the places at Sneyd, were currently being consulted upon.

SS and JdH accepted that an 11-19 academy at Sneyd was not an option. It was agreed that the transition arrangements for pupils moving from Sneyd to other schools would need careful planning and management to ensure that the pupils' learning did not suffer.

At Pauline Pilkington's suggestion, it was agreed that it was in the best interest of current and future pupils if all concerned worked positively to secure agreement to and implementation of the school organisation plans.

**ACTIONS**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
No specific actions as follow up be addressed through existing work streams		