



The
CHATHAM & CLARENDON
GRAMMAR SCHOOL
Federation

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BSF (Lite) is Back!!

Following recent meetings with officers from the KCC Property Services team last week, we have been invited to submit a new (reduced cost) BSF scheme for consideration of capital grant from central government by the end of this term. Official ‘expert assessors’ from Partnerships for Schools, acting for the DfE will visit all the Thanet schools whose original Wave 4 schemes were stopped last summer. Our visit from the PfS assessors’ team will be on Wednesday 30th March. It has been made clear that at best we could only expect to receive 50-60% of the funding originally assigned to our capital project. Also that the three key criteria for project approval of any scheme will be Sufficiency (do we have enough room?), Suitability (is what we have fit for 21st Century educational needs?), and Condition (how much of our building stock is physically sound & safe?). The PfS assessors will look at everything we have on both sites, grading each building on an A to F scale where A = excellent, as new: no work needed, and F = building has failed, unfit for occupancy, serious issues: demolish.

From their perspective the local authority are still keen to pursue a single-site co-location approach, as opposed to the Urban Campus. Our view remains that squeezing all the Chatham & Clarendon students Years 7-13, onto the Chatham site is neither technically feasible nor acceptable on educational grounds. There is however a compromise position which is more likely to please parents/carers than either of the two alternates, and may find favour with Mr Gove. Namely that we accommodate Years 7-11, boys and girls, on the Chatham site, and use Cavendish and the main Clarendon buildings as the Sixth Form Centre. The upside – it would require less building work at Chatham, therefore put less pressure on the outdoor sport/playing space, be more affordable and more likely to get DfE approval. This solution would remove the need for any inter-site movement for Years 7-11 students, and once the scheme was completed the boys in Years 7-11 could stay at Chatham House, sharing it with the girls. There would be far less movement between buildings for the Sixth Form (except for PE/Games), and Cavendish-Clarendon could be remodelled into an excellent spacious “Sixth Form College” arrangement without having to spend too much money. The downside: (i) it would detach the Sixth Form from most of their daily inter-action with the younger students – we would have to contrive opportunities to sustain prefect and mentoring links, and indeed ‘grow’ Year 11 prefects to take on some of the student leadership roles traditionally associated just with Sixth Formers; and (ii) concentrating Years 7 – 11 on the Chatham site would constrain our capacity to expand the main school in future years if there is any increased demand for places.

What building improvements do we need from this BSF-Lite scheme? At Chatham: a new Sports Hall, a new Science-Technology Maths block, significant modernisation of the interior of the main Chatham House building, and – ideally – refurbishment of St Georges Church as a school-community use multi-purpose Hall. At Clarendon: just remodel & refurbish the interiors of the main building for dedicated Sixth Form teaching, including curriculum area lecture theatres & tutorial rooms. What don’t we need under BSF-Lite? The “Red House” and the Newington Playing Fields which could be capitalised to contribute to the total construction costs.

If the revised BSF-Lite schemes are approved by the DfE, hopefully before the parliamentary summer recess, work could start in the next academic year and is expected to take no more

than three years. During the construction phase, as originally planned, to minimise disruption to GCSE and A Level exam classes, the older students, boys & girls, will be 'de-canted' from the Chatham site and be based at Clarendon – just as envisaged under the “Urban Campus” plan from this September. The anticipated target completion date would be September 2014.

The Merger: Next Steps

The outcomes of the recent online survey of those students & their/parents carers who would be directly affected are interesting. The default no response position was made clear in advance – a nil reply would be interpreted as passive assent, having no particular concerns at this time. Only about 10% of potential respondents did log their votes or make a comment (80 parents/carers out of a possible 787 households). Of these, a majority (81%) understood why governors and the senior management team believe merger is necessary & beneficial, but a smaller majority (70%) agreed that they personally felt merger was necessary. The views of students were similar, albeit from a much bigger number of respondents (610 from a possible 847, or 72% of the Years 7-10 cohorts): 83% of them understood why the governors and senior management team believe merger is necessary, and 74% of them agreed that they personally felt it was necessary. These figures and the various comments from the survey will be included as an annexe in the outline business case which we will send off to the DfE for their initial reaction. We think that there is sufficient support to now take the merger proposal forward to the next stage - a formal consultation with all the stakeholders, including primary parents/carers, however that is still up to the DfE to decide.

I don't dismiss the strength of feeling or sincerity of those who logged their views opposing this proposed merger – either because it isn't what they signed up for when they originally chose the school for their son/daughter, or because they passionately believe in the paramount benefits of a gender-segregated education at Years 7-11. That view came through loud and clear from between 30 and 40 of the parents/carers who responded to the online survey: it will all go to the Secretary of State and he (or his Ministers) *will* get to read what people put. He will also undoubtedly take into account what may happen with BSF-Lite. If that goes ahead as per the recently suggested timetable then I am sure he would recognise the reasonableness of synchronising the start date of any formal merger with the opening of the co-located school (ie estimated Sept 2014). In that event it would have the benefit that all the students who joined Chatham & Clarendon before the decision to request consideration of merger was made (in May 2010), would have left the main school, and be in the mixed Sixth Form or at university/work, by the time a formally merged school starts.

So the latest news on BSF will inform the business case application to begin consulting on merger, both strengthening the argument but also having an impact on the proposed timing. With Year 7-11 boys & girls sharing the buildings on the Chatham House site, operating as one integrated school is the only sensible long-term way forward. That does mean operating a co-ed environment, pastoral system and ethos, but it does not mean completely integrated mixed teaching. Our promise to provide a significant proportion of single-sex teaching, “the best of both worlds” strategy, will be maintained for as long as it can be afforded.

Agreement on supply of new Federation school uniform (with effect from September 2011)

The process of bringing in a Federation Academy uniform has followed the relevant DfE guidance, including seeking and responding to the views of stakeholders, as well as due diligence in the procurement process to secure best value for parents/carers. In direct response to views expressed by some parents/carers at the Federation Question Time events in Term 3, (i) the option of retaining a predominantly green uniform at both Key Stage 3/Lower School and Key Stage 4/Upper School was included in the online survey, and (ii) parents were specifically invited to have their say too. Again only about 10% of eligible parents/carers responded, nil returns being considered as passive assent/no particular concerns. A majority of respondents, 77% or 51 individuals, voted for a predominantly green uniform for Years 7-8-9, and a smaller majority, 58% - or 36 individuals, voted for a predominantly green uniform for Years 10-11.

By contrast the students were noticeably more keen on having black as a significant uniform colour, reflecting their views and suggestions via the School Council during Terms 1 & 2, when we were considering what changes might be made to unite the federation. Once it was

put to the vote 59% (354 students) wanted to keep green as the dominant colour for the Lower School uniform, and 84% (501 students) wanted the predominantly black look for their Upper School uniform. At the outset of the process we emphasised that because they are the ones who have to wear it (and because the school rather than parents/carers are paying for it) we would give students the decisive say, assuming a clear preference could be seen. Accordingly the Lower School uniform will be green blazer, green pullover, & for the girls -green skirts. And for Years 10 & 11, the Upper School uniform will be black fitted jackets, black pullovers, black skirts for the girls. As now, girls will be permitted to wear black trousers, only the boys will be expected to wear the green House ties, and our existing policy on items of clothing which have a particular cultural or religious significance will be respected.

At the meeting of the governors Resources Committee (21/3/11), after consideration of 4 quotes received from school uniform suppliers/providers it was decided to accept the quote from The Schoolwear Centre, Margate as it represented the best value tender, and to invite them to supply the new unique/Federation-badged items for September 2011. This agreement with Schoolwear Centre includes certain conditions:-

* The prices which the Federation will pay from Academy start-up grant to provide uniform items for all existing Key Stage 3/Lower School & Key Stage 4/Upper School students will not exceed those provided in the quote and there is no subsequent additional charge to the Federation; and that these items are to the standard/quality for durability and care specified by the Federation.

* These new Federation uniform unique items will be made available to existing and prospective parents/carers before the start of the new academic year and a full fitting service is included within the agreement.

* There will be no monopoly arrangement for the main school uniform, and other local uniform suppliers (ie Ernest Newson in Ramsgate & Barnums in Herne Bay), will also be able to access and sell these uniform items to incoming Year 7's. The Schoolwear Centre will share design details and technical information on the new badge so that other shops can source and sell the correct uniform items.

* The prices charged to the parents/carers of new Year 7 students joining the school (and any older students joining the Federation as casual mid-year admissions) for these particular new Federation blazers/fitted jackets by the Schoolwear Centre will be held at the 2010-11 level for the coming academic year 2011-12.

* Any existing 'branded' PE/Games kit bearing the old Clarendon badge/logo still held in stock by other local suppliers can continue to be sold to the parents/carers of older students who may need replacement items during the academic year 2011-12. A new federal PE/Games kit for boys and girls will be phased-in gradually for the new Year 7's, from 2011, provided by the existing supplier "Ambition" used by Chatham House.

* A re-badging service is offered to any parent/carer who would prefer to re-use an existing recently purchased Chatham or Clarendon blazer for a student in Years 7-8-9 in 2011-12 (or have the new badge embroidered on an existing green pullover), rather than accept a new equivalent garment paid for by the Federation. We will also investigate means of recycling any of the former separately badged blazers which parents/carers may wish to return - either so that they may be sent to educational charities working in the developing world, or directly for fabric recycling.

* Any parents/carers of incoming new Year 7s who may be experiencing difficulty with the price of the main badged uniform items will be able to access assistance from the Federation as per the existing policy.

Next steps: We are still in discussion with student representatives about the identity of the four Houses within a new integrated system – with views divided between keeping and 'twinning' the traditional House names or choosing (4) new fresh start House identities. Once some definite proposals have been formulated, they will be put to a vote of all students in Years 7-10. Meantime the students School Council has hammered out some sort of consensus view on the House colours: Red, Blue, Yellow/Gold, and Silver. The membership of Houses will be shown by the colour of the contrast stripes in the boys' House ties, in the CCGS logo embroidered onto all students' pullovers, and the student initials embroidered onto the new PE/Games kit.

To ensure that all the new badged items are ordered, manufactured and ready for the September start, staff from the Schoolwear Centre will be in school on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week measuring up the students for the correct size in blazers/jackets and pullovers. The company have emphasised that they will allow a margin for growth and if anyone does shoot up several inches in height between now and August, parents/carers will be able to exchange ordered items for a bigger size! Students' size & House membership details will be noted and each boy and girl currently in Years 7-10 will then be given a Federation uniform voucher to take home. This voucher will cover the cost of the unique badged blazers/jackets, pullovers and the girls' new-style skirts, and can be exchanged for the uniform items at the Schoolwear Centre from July into August. Students will be given the choice of selecting a long-sleeved pullover or the sleeveless variety.

School Transport Costs

Parents/carers should have received notification of a message from KCC, opening a formal consultation on proposed changes to school transport costs for compulsory school age students with effect from September 2012. Please look at this KCC proposal and read the small print carefully – the compromise position now adopted by the authority is not to disadvantage the students who are already in grammar and faith schools, but to “end the selective subsidy”/pass on a higher transport charge to the parents/carers of new students joining our schools from next September. Over time this would still discriminate against families who happen to live some distance from their nearest appropriate school, and will not help us in our efforts to recruit students into the Federation. If you share these concerns please respond to the KCC consultation, making your views known www.kent.gov.uk/transportconsultation the consultation closes on 6 May. Unfortunately there is gloomier news on the costs of transport for students from this September. Higher transport costs will apply with the Freedom Pass for bus transport being raised from £50 to £100.

David Smart
Chief Executive & Principal