To Parents/Carers, Staff and others at Portal House and St Margaret’s-at-Cliffe Schools and to Residents local to the schools.

Proposed changes to Portal House School

We are writing to update you on our plans for Portal House School.

You may know that we have been trying to provide Portal House School with fit for purpose accommodation for some years. We are therefore very pleased to bring you our proposals to rebuild the school on its existing site. This letter gives you some detail about the proposal and includes an invitation to a meeting on 8 October.

We are acquiring a piece of land from the Bay Trust to the South of the schools’ site. This will be used as additional playing field and informal green space and will ease pressure on the current playing field which is shared with St Margaret’s-at-Cliffe Primary School. Both schools will be able to have their own dedicated fields.

We plan to rebuild Portal House School on the approximate footprint of the main building, to provide the high quality learning environment its students deserve. This will mean that we can then remove most of the existing permanent and all of the temporary accommodation currently on the site, which will enable us to improve the parking and existing play areas used by Portal House School.

At this stage we are still developing the detail of the building proposal, and the strategy for how we can best advance this with two operating schools on site. However, we currently propose a 2 phase approach. Phase 1 is to isolate and demolish the main school building and construct the new school more or less where the existing building stands. We anticipate replacing the existing three storey building with one of similar height. During Phase 1, Portal House School will continue to operate out of its residual buildings, with the science mobile temporarily being relocated next to the teaching block/gym. For this short period the school will lose some curriculum facilities but through appropriate management action the school is confident it can continue to provide effectively for its students. We envisage construction traffic coming into and out of the construction site via the existing entrance to Portal House School. School based traffic (i.e. staff, pupils and visitors) will utilise the entrance to St Margaret-at-Cliffe Primary School, which is also the current exit for Portal House School. Parking places are proposed adjacent to the entrance road in order to move parked vehicles off the entrance road.

Phase 2 will see Portal House move into its new building. At this point the temporary buildings and the teaching block will be removed, car parking and play areas constructed and landscaping works completed. We will improve the site security of Portal House School with appropriate site sensitive fencing. This will also benefit St Margaret’s-at-Cliffe PS on the sides which bound Portal House School. In our design work we will seek to incorporate solutions that bring added benefit to St Margaret’s-at-Cliffe PS where this is cost effective to do so and is not detrimental to the Portal House project.
In order to meet the forecast need for further SEN places for children with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Needs (BESN) we will increase the size of the school from 60 to 80 places. This growth will be accommodated in the new building. A lot of the space in the present main Portal House building cannot be utilised as it is unsuitable. The new building will be more space efficient, allowing us to accommodate slightly more pupils. The expansion of the school will help ensure that pupils with BESN can attend educational provision more local to their homes. We recognise that parents want their children educated as close to home as possible, reducing journey times and cost.

We appreciate that during construction, there may be some disruption to the local community as construction traffic and deliveries come onto site, but the contractors will take every effort to keep disruption to a minimum. We will be working closely with both schools to ensure that disruption to pupils and staff is minimised and safety maximised. During the time that any part of the site is being built on, that part will be a secure area and staff, pupils, parents and visitors will have no access to the works at all.

As details of the design solutions are developed these will be shared with parents and the local community. As the proposal is for a new building a planning application will need to be submitted and in these cases KCC arranges a meeting for local residents, parents and other interested parties before the planning application is submitted.

We would therefore like to invite you to a meeting at Portal House School where representatives from the design team, the school and KCC will be there to talk to you about the proposed design of the new building and the educational aspects of the proposal, such as the increase in the designated number of students.

The meeting is on 8 October and will be a drop-in event. There are two time slots: 4pm for staff and parents, and 5.30pm for local residents.

Views, Comments and Questions
We hope you will feel able to support the new plans and look forward to receiving your views and comments.
For the building plans, comments and questions will be collated at the meeting on 8 October. For the educational aspects of the proposal, you can:
- Email us at school.consultations@kent.gov.uk
- Write to David Adams, Area Education Officer, South Kent Office, Kroner House, Eurogate Business Park, Ashford, TN24 8XU. (You can hand the letter into the school.)

If you are intending to contact us with your views on the educational aspects of the proposal may we ask that you please do this by 17 October. We will pass all comments and views received to our Cabinet Member who will make a decision on whether we should proceed with this proposal. If he decides to proceed we will publish a Public Notice on 6 November, which will run for 4 weeks and provide you with another opportunity to submit any comments.

Do you want to find out more about what we are putting in place for SEN children? We have produced a Strategy that sets out our plans for children with SEN and Disabilities (SEND). The SEND Strategy shows how we will be creating 121 additional SEN places for children with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Needs. It is available on the website at: http://www.kelsi.org.uk/pupil_support_and_wellbeing/targeted_support/sen_and_disabilities/send_strategy.aspx