

Appendix 5

The governors of Robertsbridge Community College have requested an increase in the PAN of the College from 130-145. Although there is no requirement to consult on increasing the PAN, in view of the likely impact on neighbouring schools and academies the County Council has chosen to do so.

***Responses to potentially raising the PAN at Robertsbridge Community College from 130 to 145 in September 2019**

*except an exchange between the interim Head of Robertsbridge CC and the LA, which is recorded separately.

30 comments were received. The results are as follows:

In favour – 11 (36.7%)

Against – 16 (53.3%)

Unable to give a firm opinion or have mixed views – 3 (10%)

Comments in favour

- 1) I am in favour of the proposal to increase the PAN for the College to 145 (from 130). The College is successful, has a waiting list and has the capacity to take more students than 130. As such I think it appropriate for the PAN to be increased to 145 or more (which I believe is already the case in some years).
- 2) I would like to express my opinion on the increase of headcount at Robertsbridge Community College from 130 to 145.

Living out of catchment area, I do not feel I should have to move home to get my child in the school of choice. My son is in year 7, we live in Hastings and a bus to this school comes past this house every school day. I requested Robertsbridge as his first choice in year 6 and unfortunately he not get in. We chose not to appeal at that time but have stayed on the waiting list since the outset.

We are currently number 1 however have now chosen to appeal. When looking round all the schools last year, we felt that Robertsbridge was the best fit for him. However as it turns out, there really was no choice involved. We were allocated an under head count school as it was nearer. We felt and still feel frustrated that the 'carrot was offered' when in fact in our situation we never would have got in to our school of choice.

Increasing the numbers to 145 children per year would actually mean people like us would get a choice in where we want to send our child to be educated up to GCSE level.

- 3) I am writing to you to express my support of the increase capacity of yearly intake from 130-145 students.

First, my son is on the waiting list for Robertsbridge and this increase would enable him to gain admission to the school.

Secondly and connected to my first reason, Robertsbridge is the only school in the area that is not an academy and with this comes many advantages. Being in the teaching profession for fifteen years I am totally against the academy model and would like my son to go to a community college.

Thirdly, we are a Buddhist family and the non denominational academies in the area do not teach Religious education and I this is something that greatly upsets

me. Robertsbridge however, teaches RS as a stand alone subject.
I very much hope my views will be considered when making your final decision regarding increasing Robertsbridge's yearly intake.

- 4) I write regarding the PAN for the above school. We live in Burwash, within the catchment area for Robertsbridge. I know that the size of Burwash Primary School is larger than ever and think that it would, therefore, be appropriate for Robertsbridge PAN to rise to 145pupils from the current 130.
- 5) As a parent of a child at Robertsbridge Community College I would like to add my support to the proposed increase in pupil numbers.

As a parent I obviously have some reservations regarding the potential increase in class sizes however, having read the published FGB minutes I feel that an increase is essential for the long term sustainability of the school.

Being a smaller Rural school Robertsbridge are potentially disadvantaged in some ways, with less income from initiatives such as pupil premium. It could be argued that there is less disadvantage, however rural communities are often impacted by less measurable challenges such as those that occur through poor mental health and rural isolation.

The school and Governing body are clearly working hard to ensure a thriving, sustainable and successful school and therefore as a parent I would urge East Sussex County Council to support the application to increase the PAN numbers from 130 to 145.

- 6) I support the increase of PAN as I know Robertsbridge is like St Richard's in having to have lots of appeals to accommodate parental preference. This total would reduce the number of appeals , give the school further stability and also provide more parents with their school of choice. It is a popular small school and it will remain so with this minor increase.
- 7) i think that raising the PAN number to 145 wouldn't be a bad thing as it is a good college & i think that more pupils could benefit from going to the college & although I like the college being a small college. I don't think that an extra 15 pupil would make to.much of a difference
- 8) Whilst I have no objection, in principle, I would want to be confident that the extra resources to absorb this change, would be adequately provisioned, however that may need to be.

We currently have our third child undergoing their education there since 2010 and have been very happy in general, but have noted the periods when resources have been stretched, particularly in terms of staffing, that pupil experiences and education suffer. More children cannot be squeezed into existing, without impact, so I believe a proposal for change cannot be made without publicised assurance of the management plan. I also feel that this should take into account the needs of **local** children. We live in a neighbouring village, less than three miles away and only 25 metres further from Robertsbridge than Claverham, yet were not freely able to choose Robertsbridge as our school of choice, despite the fact that the their primary education in another local village has historically been a feeder school for RCC. Since recent local primary school

closures, this situation has only become more evident and in the case of our village, thus splinters the community with its arbitrary division. I therefore feel it would be unfair, if by increasing the PAN, this did not make local 'choice' fairer. Part of the reason RCC is so oversubscribed is that it currently has such a good public perceived reputation, currently exceeding that of its neighbours, which naturally increases the desire for children from far and wide to be educated there. Maybe a look at school opportunities more local to a large percentage of the wider applicants would be a more long-term, sustainable measure?

- 9) I would very much welcome the idea to raise the current planned admission number to 145.

I wanted desperately for my son to attend this school, appealed and failed. He is visiting a different school now, but is still on the Waiting list. My daughter is now also on the Waiting list as she is unhappy in her current school.

For those reasons I am in favour of raising the admission number, I also don't see that just 15 children more in a year would make a significant difference to the learning/class environment.

- 10) Regarding planned admission number for robertsbridge community college I would like to say that I would like it to be increased to 145 as my son would like to go to robertsbridge very much.
- 11) I am a parent of a child in year 11 at Robertsbridge Community College, I have also been present in some governors meetings in the past as I was their clerk to governors for a while. I support the increase in PAN for sustainability/financial reasons and also for the parents who are keen to gain a place in RCC but unable to. I would support an increase to 150 for maximum financial benefit, or 145 if this is more suitable, to allow for in-year admissions.

Comments against

- 1) In my view the Planned Admission Number (PAN) for Robertsbridge Community College should remain at 130 and not be increased.

In my view a significant reason why more people wish to attend the school is due to a lack of quality school places in Hastings. This is largely due to the presence of Ark Academies in the town, i.e. ARK Academy William Parker and ARK Helenswood Academy and their failure to meet the needs of many children attending the schools. Shifting this problem by increasing the PAN at a successful school like Robertsbridge Community College will not address the underlying issues in Hastings and place undue pressure on the school and its current pupils.

- 2) We would like the Planned Admission Number to remain at 130. We think that the school is a nice size and should remain so.

- 3) I would like to give my opinion on the proposal to increase the PAN at Robertsbridge Community College to 145 from the current 130.

Having spoken to my son who is currently in Year 9 at Robertsbridge Community College I am opposed to any increase in the PAN at this current time due to the lack of space in the college buildings. My son has said that the school buildings are very congested, with the corridors very difficult to walk through when classes are changing.

The school has already had to put measures in place so that not all classes enter in to the corridor when the bells ring as there is no space for everyone.

This is also the case at lunch time when there is very little space and food queues are very long. A PAN increase of 15 would mean an extra 75 pupils in five years time. I do not see that the college buildings can accommodate this increase without considerable investment in new college buildings and in the current climate this appears very unlikely.

- 4) I received a letter last week from Robertsbridge Community College about ESCC's proposal to increase the planned admission number at the school. We have two daughters there, currently in years 8 and 10, who are both doing well, as despite significant challenges Robertsbridge is a good school with good teachers and excellent pastoral care.

My immediate reaction to the letter was to feel for the children who want to attend at the moment but can't get in. Schools as small and familial as Robertsbridge are thin on the ground, especially at secondary level. So my immediate feeling was that as long as the extra cohort could be comfortably accommodated, then that would be OK. However, I decided to ask my children what they thought of the proposal and their instant reaction was instructive.

They were insistent that the school is already crowded, that it was normal to be jostled or even knocked over in the corridors and that, for core subjects, there is simply no extra space in the classrooms to accommodate the two or three more students per class that an increase of 15 per year group would entail.

My eldest, who will hardly be affected by the measure, suggested that the only way to accommodate that number of extra students would be to build more classrooms. Otherwise, she said, it simply couldn't be done safely or without harming the general standard of education that is the reason the school has become so popular. She also said that class sizes have gone up since she'd arrived at the school, and this had had a noticeable effect in some lessons.

Therefore, having taken these soundings from two people who know the school a lot better than me, I have to say that it does seem that, unless there is an increase in the amount of buildings the school has at its disposal and/or the number of teachers on the payroll to take on the extra class per year that the increased PAN would more or less involve, I can't see this move being anything other than detrimental to the school and the students it currently serves. It would surely be better to try to persuade those in charge of the other schools in the area, which I presume are not so well regarded, to raise their own game. I only wish that more of them fell under direct local authority control.

- 5) In response to your letter dated 16th January 2018, regarding the consultation of increasing the planned admission numbers from 130 to 145. We would be against this if it means bigger class sizes and not an extra class. Although you are only talking about an extra 15 pupils, over the 5 year period this is an increase of 75 pupils. Is the school big enough to take this increase, due to the amount of available classrooms and facilities.

If you are thinking about increasing the size of the school, why don't you look into have a sixth form facility.

- 6) I am a parent of a child in Year 8 at Robertsbridge Community College. We are very aware of the increased demand for places at the school, since several of our son's peers in other schools are on the waiting list to join Robertsbridge. The cause of this seems to be consistent under-achievement by the Academies, especially in the areas of discipline and staff retention. We feel that these are the true causes for the over-subscription at Robertsbridge, and need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

If the consensus is that Robertsbridge should increase numbers, then we can only support that if the school's resources - already sorely-tested - are increased appropriately. If not, the result will be another failing school in the borough.

- 7) I have grave concerns regarding this proposal. Robertsbridge is a small rural school with a fairly large intake from surrounding areas, where I send 2 of my children. This school does not have the space to accommodate further pupils and would put the school under strain. This could be detrimental to the students already attending and also to the staff. This would mean teachers trying to stretch themselves with larger classes. Ultimately this could have an affect on grades. I hope this proposal is not deemed worthy.
- 8) I feel that the small size of the school is the main reason why we chose it, so I would be concerned about the impact of this increase. It may only be 15 extra a year but after 5 years that would be 75 more pupils in the school... I feel the size of the school is adequate for the area that it needs to serve, proved by the fact that pupils attend from much further away than we live (it's our closest school at 6 miles away).

However, we have not been informed of the school's view on this, whether perhaps the increase in funding this would bring would mean improvements could be made to the school that it could not afford otherwise, whether the school is big enough in class size or number of teachers... we could really benefit from more information about the potential impacts (negative and positive) rather than just a proposed PAN number.

- 9) I writing to you to express my opposition to the proposed plan to increase the PAN for Robertsbridge Community College. This is mainly based on the fact that the building is not big enough for any expansion in number of students, the school would lose the family feel as it has at the moment as with more students come more problems with behaviour. Also it would put more strain on resources, which with all the government cuts would mean even less provision for current student.

It is nice to have smaller secondary school in the area which suit more to certain children rather than the big, over-populated Academies.

Rather than increasing number of PAN in Robertsbridge, make sure there is enough funding, resources and good quality staff in the other schools allowing them to concentrate more on behaviour, teaching etc, achieving the same qualities as Robertsbridge, so parents do not need to look for schools outside their area.

Maybe increasing the number of schools as the number of children is growing might be a good idea rather than trying to squeeze them all in the buildings which will not expand.

- 10) As the Head Teacher of Chailey School I do not believe this increase in PAN is necessary if there are no increases in student numbers in the community area. It sets an example for other schools to follow and may have a detrimental affect on school budgets at a time when they are already stretched.
- 11) I refer to the consultation for increasing PAN at Robertsbridge Community College. It is my opinion that the PAN should **not** increase from 130.

Working on the assumption that 15 more pupils would join the school each year. After 5 years, it is my understanding the overall school roll would increase by 75 pupils. This increase of 75 is well in excess of 10% of the current number of pupils on roll.

As the school is presently fully subscribed, increasing class sizes is not appropriate. It will have a detrimental and dilutive impact on the quality of teaching. Further, the local infrastructure in Robertsbridge will not cope with getting an additional 75 pupils into and

out of the school on a daily basis – this is a rural school with an extensive catchment area, for which implications of transport, health and safety should not be ignored.

- 12) As the parent of a Robertsbridge pupil, my foremost question would be whether an increase in pupil numbers would be accompanied by an increase in funding and other resources (e.g. recruitment of highly-skilled teachers)?

It seems that the school is already struggling with the resources allotted to it.

The building is dowdy, there is apparently no budget for text books – nor for school trips (even to local facilities like the Jerwood Gallery, or locations such as Dungeness, Romney Marsh – surely relevant to geography students?).

My son is in a number of classes where disruption is a problem and teachers are apparently not equipped or sufficiently trained to deal with it. I can't see that that situation would be ameliorated by an increase in numbers.

Robertsbridge is quite a good school (though possibly its reputation is exaggerated by very poor perceptions of some other local schools, especially in Hastings). But it isn't obvious that it can bear much greater strain - unless, as mentioned at the outset, accompanied by increased funding.

- 13) In our opinion we believe that the admission number should remain at 130.

Robertsbridge Community College is already oversubscribed. Looking back wasn't the number on roll just over 500+ back in 2002 and now its 600+ ? We currently have a son in Yr 9 and have 2 older sons that have already gone through the RCC. One reason we chose the school was because of its size.

- 14) I am writing oppose the increase in school numbers in each academic year.

There are multiple reasons for this - the school finds it challenging with their current roll numbers to communicate to parents in a timely manner when an issue or incident arises. Class sizes and support for pupils with SEN will be directly impacted. Research clearly shows us that bigger class sizes results in poorer academic results and a possible decrease in behavioural standards.

Staffing numbers won't necessarily increase with an increase of 75+ pupils in the school. To be absolutely clear I wish for the current PAN figure of 130 pupils per year group to remain as it is.

- 15) Given that my daughter says some of her classes do not have enough desks/ chairs for all the students who are currently at the school, i think it unwise to increase the intake numbers.

- 16) I am writing to express my opinion that the PAN at RCC should NOT be increased. One of the unique things and arguably one of its successes is its size. This is one of the main reasons that we selected the school for our daughter who is now in year 8 and applied for our other daughter for admission in September 2018. We are also concerned that this would put increased pressure on the teacher no staff. As a governor of a local primary school I am aware of the financial pressure that schools are under and whilst increased number means increased budget this does not necessarily mean sufficient funds to increase teacher numbers. We have just been informed that options choices for GCSEs have been reduced to 3 meaning they will only be taking 9 GCSEs - I took 11 and am concerned that this decision was made based on lack of resources and that this will reduce my daughters' chances/choices later on.

Unable to comment fully

- 1) As a parent of a child at Robertsbridge, i would like more information before giving a opinion on pupil increase A . is it all year groups or just new intake B. what impact on class sizes will that have C. will more staff be employed D. will more pupils mean more resources E. can the standards be guaranteed if teachers have more children to manage

- 2) We have 3 students at the college, with 2 in yr 10 and 1 in year 9; all 3 report that new students have arrived and been squashed into their classes, in some instances creating real overcrowding..the art teacher is having to make some GCSE students do their work on the floor. Whilst it is a reasonable idea if there are extra resources, enough physical classrooms and enough teachers, then it is more income for the school, but if this is entirely without additional resources, we would say that this is asking for trouble..and a drop in standards.

Gilliam Sheppard, as Education Secretary a long time back..said that class size doesn't matter..when the debate about 30 students in a classroom was raging...but Gilliam Sheppard only ever taught in a grammar school..where she was only dealing with high functioning, task orientated classes, with few challenging students...she had no idea what it was to try to teach an oversized class of students, struggling with concentration difficulties and in need of that extra bit of teacher attention. If you need to maintain a lower number in the classes which contain significant numbers of educationally challenged students, many with statements..as they were called...it cannot be right to squash in more students..this only leads to poor concentration, less motivation and behavioural issues..and hence lower achievement.

We suspect that an increase of 15 students actually means adding 3 more students in each class in one year group..if this means that teachers non contact time can be protected, etc..and they are guaranteed some time for preparation, then there should be guarantees put in place..if RCC teachers get over stretched and over stressed, then it may endanger the good reputation it has worked hard to achieve.

Ideally, probably everybody wants to keep the school small..as that is why many choose it, but if it means the school can function properly, then it is worth considering..but please please ensure that safe resourcing is put in place to protect both students AND staff.

- 3) I would like to respond to the proposed increase of student numbers at Robertsbridge Community College but find it hard to give an opinion when there is no related information.

I understand that the college is oversubscribed and am not in principle against the idea of increasing numbers but I wish to know if there has been any sort of assessment of the impact this would have to the college both in terms of teaching and general infrastructure.

Until this is provided I cannot see how this consultation will result in anything but uninformed opinion of little or no value.

The governors of the college have written a letter in response to the consultation which is attached on the following page.



Headteacher: Mr. D Downs BSc (Hons)

“Success through partnership”

24 January 2018

Ms J Miles
Head of Admissions and Transport
East Sussex County Council
St Anne’s Crescent
Lewes
East Sussex

Dear Jo

I am writing to formally respond to the consultation on Admissions for 2019/2020, as currently detailed on the ESCC website and, in particular give our views on the Robertsbridge Community College situation.

Whilst we appreciate that there was an addendum to the consultation to include Robertsbridge Community College, the Governors are disappointed to see the ESCC comment that “The County Council remains of the view that this increase is not necessary” and feel that this prejudices the outcome of the consultation. However I am taking this opportunity to respond on behalf of the Governing Body of Robertsbridge Community College.

As you are aware, Robertsbridge Community College has taken over its allocated public admission number (PAN) for the previous two years with agreement from ESCC Admissions. We were advised that this would continue, and that there was no need to formally increase our PAN to achieve this. This year we were limited to 130, and have a waiting list in most year groups. Up until Christmas, there were 40 students on the waiting list for Year 7 this year; since Christmas, 8 have renewed their applications to remain on there.

We therefore have two larger year groups of 147/148, which include the 145 plus in year admissions, as we can accommodate year groups of 150, eventually making the College 750 students. The additional numbers have been managed, and supported to ensure that the needs of larger cohorts are fully met. We now have a successful model to roll out across the College.

We have undertaken works to the College in recent years which include a new sports hall, library and two classrooms, plus the refurbishment of SEN, science and design technology workshops and food technology room which allow these rooms to take additional students, to the latest building bulletins and DfE recommendations, and therefore have the required general teaching and specialist facility accommodation already on site to accommodate the increased numbers specifically within the specialist facilities.

We are keen to ensure that parent wishes for admission to Robertsbridge Community College are taken into account and considered. We are a successful school, having had our best GCSE results ever for the last three years. As you will be aware a break-even point financially for a school is 800 students, so this will allow us to meet the current financial challenges, as well as meeting parental choice requirements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Marr', written in a cursive style.

Karen Marr
Chair of Governors
On behalf of the Governing Body

The County Council's view is that increasing the PAN from 130 to 145 is unnecessary at this time as the PAN is more than sufficient to accommodate demand from within the community area. Fewer than half of the children currently on roll at Robertsbridge Community College live within the area served by the college, indicating that the current PAN of 130 is ample provision for the local area. The majority of the remaining students live in Hastings, which is served by its own schools, some of which currently have spare capacity.

Given this, any additional admissions to Robertsbridge Community College would necessarily come from outside the area, and this is likely to have a negative impact on the schools in Hastings which in recent years have not filled to PAN. The risk is that should these schools attract fewer students, they will seek to reduce their capacities, leaving a potential shortfall of available school places in the Hastings area as numbers of children needing secondary school places increase.

Given the higher numbers currently on roll in primary school age groups in the area, this could in turn lead to a high-cost financial obligation on the County Council to provide home to school transport for those students unable to be accommodated in schools in the area where they live. The County Council does not consider this an efficient use of public money. There are also environmental and logistical concerns surrounding a requirement for children in an urban area to travel long distances to get to school.

The County Council also has concerns about the capacity of the college to admit students moving into the area, or needing to be placed in year under the Fair Access Protocol, if it were operating on a PAN of 145, as in practice this could lead to year group sizes in excess of 150.

For this reason the County Council would request that the Lead Member retain the current PAN of 130.