

**Brighton & Hove City Council**

**For general release**

**Meeting:** Children Families & Schools Sub-Committee

**Date:** Monday 9 June 2003

**Report of:** Director of Children, Families and Schools

**Subject:** East Brighton College of Media Arts

**Wards Affected:** All

**1. Purpose of the Report**

To set out for Members the current situation at East Brighton College of Media Arts which is a cause for concern;

1.2 To set out the future prospects for the College;

1.3 To seek Members' direction on the appropriate course of action to address the concerns.

**2. Recommendations**

Members are recommended to:

2.1 Direct the Director of Children, Families and Schools to prepare a paper setting out options for the future of East Brighton College of Media Arts, as a basis for a public consultation.

2.2 To require the options paper to be approved by Members at the next meeting of this Sub-Committee on 08 September 2003.

**3. Background**

3.1 East Brighton College of Media Arts (usually referred to as COMART) opened as a 'Fresh Start' school in September 1999 under the government scheme for reforming failing schools. It replaced Marina High on the same site and with some of the former teaching and support staff. Marina High School was itself a re-branding of the former Stanley Deason High School.

3.2 Stanley Deason High School had been made subject to special measures in 1996 following a critical Ofsted inspection. Subsequently the school

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was again made subject to special measures following a further inspection in February 2000. A new Principal was appointed in 2001 and the school came out of special measures in 2002.

- 3.3 The college has enjoyed a high level of financial and practical support from both the DfES and the Local Authority. In addition to exceptional revenue support, the school is part of the capital development programme financed through PFI.
- 3.4 The DfES has recommended to the governors both an Associate Head and an acting Deputy Principal as vacancies arose. The Associate head has been the Acting Head since January 2003, when she started, during the Principal's sickness absence. She will continue in this role until the end of the academic year.
- 3.5 There have been some signs of improvement. In 2002, for admission to Year 7, there were 38 first preferences expressed within the timescale for expressing a preference. This year, 2003, there were 65 first preferences within timescale. There may be additions to this number as parents who have not made an option seek a place, as happened last year. Sixty pupils have been directed to COMART and 44 of their parents have appealed for a place at another school. The school budget for 2003/04 has been based on an assumption that 90 pupils will start in September. However, rolls are low and in total, falling. As the number of parents willing to seek or accept a place for their child at COMART have reduced, larger year groups in the upper school are replaced by smaller year groups moving through.
- 3.6 The sustainability of the unitary charge to Jarvis, under the PFI contract was predicated on a roll rising to 845 in 2008/2009. On the most optimistic current projections this would be nearer 425 – 450. Not only does this create problems in sustaining the unitary charge, it has consequences for staffing and curriculum. The school can not sustain a large enough staff to cover each curriculum area with specialist teachers. The breadth of the curriculum is reduced and teachers have to teach their second and third subjects. Funding for support staff is limited.
- 3.7 The college has been part of a number of initiatives including an Education Action Zone. EB4U provides earmarked funding for a number of projects. The college will be part of the new 'Excellence Cluster' and will receive funding and other support from the new Leadership Incentive Grant.
- 3.8 Interviews for a deputy Principal were held on 21 March. The candidate to whom the post was offered has, after consultation, declined the offer.

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- 3.9 Interviews were held for a new Principal on April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, following the early retirement of the present Principal after an extended period of sickness absence. No appointment was made.
- 3.10 Successful negotiations have taken place to secure the services of the head of the Alternative Centre for Education as Executive Head at CoMART for the 2003 /04 academic year. He will remain head of ACE. Additional responsibilities will be taken on by the Deputy Heads of ACE and additional staff have been appointed to support their teaching responsibilities. An acting deputy Principal for COMART is sought and there will be two internal appointments to leadership posts to secure a functioning management team for September.
- 3.11 Exciting curriculum arrangements have been made with Varndean School for enhancements to the Year 7 programme and to enable two Year 10 groups to follow the GNVQ ICT course, which leads to a four GCSE qualification. These students will also receive their English teaching at Varndean and the Head of English will advise the English department at COMART.

### 4. Issues

- 4.1 There is a group of key measure by which the performance of a secondary school is judged. These are used by Ofsted and by the Local Education Authority in determining where there are causes for concern.
- 4.2 There is a target level for pupil attendance and authorised and unauthorised absences must be recorded and reported. The absence recording systems at CoMART have not been well managed but it is believed that overall attendance has fallen below 80% in this academic year. There is a high level of unauthorised absence or truancy.
- 4.3 Permanent exclusions in the last reporting period were 3. This compares with 7 for Brighton and Hove Schools.
- 4.4 There are examination performance targets for each school in the Authority. These are usually expressed in terms of students achieving 5 A\* - C grade GCSE passes, 5 A\* - G GCSE passes. In 2002, CoMART students achieved 17% 5A\* - C passes and 68% 5A\*-G passes.

The target set for 2003, was 20% 5A\* - C passes. On current projections, this is unlikely to be achieved.

- 4.5 Post-16 participation across East Brighton is relatively low. COMART pupils are less likely to progress to post -16 education and many do not complete courses which they start. The reasons for this are complex and do not only affect COMART. It remains a cause for concern in relation to the College.

- 4.6 In spite of the sterling efforts of the Acting Principal and Deputy Principal, the leadership and management of the school must be designated weak. There is no continuity or stability and in current circumstances, no vision for the future direction of the school.
- 4.7 Pupil behaviour is poor in spite of the best efforts of the acting management team. Internal truancy presents health and safety risks.
- 4.8 The quality of teaching and learning is variable. There is a high level of staff absence and therefore of the number of lessons taught by substitute teachers. There is difficulty in recruiting to the school at all levels and there are significant long term vacancies, including in core curriculum areas.
- 4.9 Given all the evidence set out in paragraph 4.2 – 4.8, it is reasonable to believe that the college would once again be made subject to Special Measures if inspected by Ofsted. If GCSE performance is as predicted by staff, this may well happen in the Autumn Term.

**5. Proposals for Action**

- 5.1 The Director of Children, Families and Schools will continue to make all necessary arrangements to secure the leadership and management of the school and the quality of curriculum provision for all students at CoMART.
- 5.2 The Director will prepare and evaluate options for the future provision of education for current CoMART pupils and potential CoMART students. These options will include continuing to provide education at the College, possibly as a differently organised secondary school or ceasing to maintain secondary education on this site..
- 5.3 The costs and benefits of any option to the pupils, staff and parents and guardians of current and potential pupils of CoMART, to the pupils, staff and parents / carers of other secondary schools in the city, to the Council as the maintaining Authority and to the Council as the partner in the contract with Jarvis Ltd, will be quantified. The options will be considered with officials of DfES as partners in the 'Fresh Start' initiative.
- 5.4 The options will be set out in a report to CFS Sub-Committee in September and approval sought for a consultation document to be sent to all stakeholders as the basis for wide public consultation.

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**Financial implications**

This report has extremely significant financial implications, which cannot be fully quantified at this stage. Issues include:

- termination of the PFI / amendments to the PFI contract
- revenue and capital costs arising from change of use
- revenue and capital impact on all other school budgets
- other costs to the LEA, for example, admissions, transport and support services

The financial implications of the various possible options will be considered as the options are analysed, and will be included in the report to be presented to the committee on 8 September.

***Finance Officer consulted: Peter Sargent Date: 28 May 2003***

**Legal implications**

At this stage there are limited legal implications, since the recommendation before committee is for a paper to be prepared containing options that could in due course be made open to wider consultation.

In order for the Committee to make an informed and reasonable decision following the preparation and consideration of any options paper regarding the future of the school, detailed legal and financial comments will be needed in the paper as to the implications of each option, including any contractual implications. Following the presentation of any paper developed as a result of this recommendation the proposed consultation exercise will be essential in providing interested parties with a fair hearing. When exercising its education functions, the Council must take into account that no person shall be denied the right to education, and respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching conforms with their own religious and philosophical convictions, in so far as this is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training, and the avoidance of unreasonable expenditure."

***Lawyer consulted: Natasha Watson Date 27 May 2003***

**Corporate/Citywide implications**

Whichever option is explored, there will be continuing additional demand on legal, financial and personnel services with the budgetary implications outlined in the report.

**Risk assessment**

The governors and heads of City secondary schools may refuse to support the chosen strategy and powers to direct are limited. Public opinion may be negative. The financial risks to the council have to be further quantified.

**Sustainability implications**

The pupil movement across the City from east to west adds to environmental pressures; this movement may increase as

**Equalities implications**

Improvement in the quality and appropriateness of education offered to the pupils currently opting for, or being

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a result of any of these options. Any option requires a reallocation of the constrained education budget; the present position is not readily sustainable.	directed to, COMART will increase equality of opportunity and outcome.
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### **Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder**

The present arrangements allow for high levels of truancy which is known to be associated with crime and disorder. Better pupil management and better learning outcomes will contribute to a reduction in crime and disorder.

### **Background papers**

#### **Contact Officers**

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