



Proposal to bring together Helenswood Academy and William Parker Academy - Frequently Asked Questions

This document was originally published on 18 September 2018. *This updated version was published on 28 September 2018 to include questions raised at consultation meetings.*

THE CONSULTATION

What is the consultation about?

This document explains the changes we are proposing and how you can respond to this consultation, which closes on 30 October 2018. The consultation is seeking your views on the following:

1. The proposal to bring together Helenswood Academy and William Parker Academy as a co-educational school with a strong emphasis on the performing arts and sports, and a sixth form, from September 2019. The school would operate across the Helenswood Lower School site (Years 7 and 8) and the William Parker site (Years 9 to 13).
2. The proposal to change William Parker's admissions arrangements from September 2019 which would allow girls to be admitted to the school and increase its published admissions number to 360 for Year 7 admissions. The proposed new admissions policy is available on <http://hastingsconsultation.org>
3. If these two proposals are approved, whether the school's name should be Ark St Helen's Academy. This proposed name reflects the importance of the school's location, its Church of England ethos and its historic relationship to Helenswood.

How can I respond to the consultation?

We want to hear from you. You can respond in any of the following ways:

1. Use the online form on the website <http://hastingsconsultation.org> or email hastingsconsultation@arkonline.org
2. Write to:
Hastings Consultation, William Parker Academy, Parkstone Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 2NT.
3. Drop off written responses to the Reception of either William Parker or Helenswood.
4. Attend one of the consultation meetings (details on <http://hastingsconsultation.org>).

Why is Ark proposing these changes?

We are very proud of the progress that our schools are making. Helenswood is now the top performing secondary school in Hastings. GCSE results at both Helenswood and William Parker are up this year, and our joint sixth form has just seen its best-ever results. We are committed to building on this progress and working with you to achieve further improvement.

We want to provide the best possible educational opportunities for the students that we serve. However, both Helenswood and William Parker need to address challenging financial issues. The schools are under subscribed and require significant investment in their buildings, which are currently spread across three sites. This is not sustainable, and continuing to operate under these financial constraints will make it increasingly difficult to provide the standard of education we want for our students. We believe the best way to secure a successful and sustainable future for both secondary schools is to bring them together, building on their long history in Hastings and using the existing strengths and expertise across the two schools.

Moving ahead with the proposal has many advantages. The school would:

- Offer a rich curriculum with new opportunities for all students in Hastings — a co-educational school would mean that all students would have access to the sports heritage of William Parker, and the performing arts heritage of Helenswood
- Be better resourced as we would be able to concentrate on two sites rather than three. As part of this proposal, Ark is committing to invest a further £6m across the two sites, leading to the following improvements:
 - Continued investment in sports and arts facilities across the two sites
 - The creation of a dedicated sixth form space
 - New toilets and changing facilities for boys and girls at both sites
 - Significant refurbishment across both sites, including new reception areas to provide a more welcoming environment for our staff, parents, students and visitors
- Have a dedicated lower school site working closely with the three Ark primary schools to ensure a smooth transition from primary to secondary

Has this decision already been taken?

No, this is our proposal for the future of the schools. All views given in response to the consultation will be taken fully into account. The Department for Education will make the final decision.

What is the legal or technical process?

Technically, bringing the two schools together requires Helenswood to close and changes in the funding agreement for William Parker, enabling us to operate a co-educational school across two sites.

What would happen if the schools aren't brought together?

Continuing to operate two under subscribed schools is not an option. If the schools aren't brought together it will be harder to continue to maintain the progress that both schools have achieved, and to safeguard them into the future. If this proposal does not go ahead we would need to work with the Department for Education and East Sussex County Council on an alternative plan in an attempt to make the schools viable.

What would stop the Department for Education approving Ark's proposal?

There are a number of factors that the Department for Education must take into consideration when making their decision – including responses received as part of this consultation.

What is the date of the Department for Education's decision? What's the timeline?

The consultation process will last for six weeks – running from Tuesday 18th September until Tuesday 30th October. At the end of the consultation, a report will be submitted to the Department for Education who will make the final decision. We would hope to receive a decision in December.

Can you clarify what will be presented to the Department of Education?

There will be two documents submitted to the DfE. The first is the 'significant change' document which outlines the technical part of the proposal. The second is the consultation report which will also be published on the consultation website.

Why was 'Ark All Saints Academy' not considered for the new school, when it has links to the local church?

There is already an Ark All Saints Academy within the network. However, any alternative suggestions for the school name can be submitted as part of the consultation process.

How does the William Parker Foundation feel about Ark's proposal?

As you would expect, the Foundation is taking a keen interest in the proposals. At this stage the Foundation has not formally responded to the consultation but we are in continued discussion with them.

Is there a Plan B? Have other proposals been considered?

We have considered several options regarding the future of the two schools. As you may know, we had hoped to secure additional funding to enable us to consolidate Helenswood onto one site – as well as investing in the William Parker site. Unfortunately we weren't successful in securing this funding and if we were to invest the full £6m committed to this proposal into the Helenswood consolidation there would be nothing left to invest in William Parker.

We have also looked at consolidating the whole school onto the William Parker site as an 8FE co-educational school. However, in discussions with ESCC it was made clear that a 12FE school was what was required. This is how we have reached this current proposal to create a 12FE school across two sites.

ADMISSIONS**My child is already a student at Helenswood or William Parker. What are my options?**

We want all of our Helenswood and William Parker students to join the co-educational school. All students currently on roll at the two schools would be provided with a place at the co-educational school.

If they wish, parents can look for an alternative school for their child. The process is slightly different for students at each school because technically Helenswood would close.

If parents wish to look for an alternative school:

- For current William Parker students this would mean applying for an alternative place through the normal East Sussex County Council in-year admissions process.
- For current Helenswood students East Sussex County Council will run a process through which Helenswood students can apply to the co-educational school or another school in the County. Details of how this process will work will be available once a decision has been made on whether the proposal goes ahead.

My child is currently in Year 6. If we apply to Helenswood or William Parker what will happen to the application if this proposal is approved?

If this proposal is approved by the end of January 2019, East Sussex County Council will treat your application for Helenswood or William Parker as an application for the co-educational school. Parents who have already applied but now wish to amend their preferences can do so until 31 October 2018 (the closing date for applications) through the online application form.

Those parents who do not wish their application for Helenswood or William Parker to be treated as an application for the co-educational school should state this in the reason section of the online application, but should be aware that this will not prevent their child being offered a place there if it is not possible to offer a place at any of their other preferences. School places are allocated in accordance with the admissions criteria for the schools in question, and the Admissions and Transport team at the County Council will be happy to assist any parent who has any queries about the admissions process.

My child is currently in Year 6. How do I apply for a place at the co-educational school?

If you are interested in applying for a place at the proposed co-educational school, you should apply for a Year 7 place at Helenswood or William Parker. If this proposal is approved by the end of January 2019, East Sussex County Council will treat your application for one of these schools as an application for the co-educational school.

My child is currently in Year 6. What happens if I apply for a place at Helenswood or William Parker and the proposal is not approved?

If the proposal is not approved, East Sussex County Council will process your application for Helenswood or William Parker as the schools currently stand. Those parents who do not wish their application for Helenswood or William Parker to be treated as an application for the single sex schools should state this in the reason section of the online application, but should be aware that this will not prevent their child being offered a place there if it is not possible to offer a place at any of their other preferences.

Why are you consulting on the admissions policy?

We are required to consult on the admissions policy because we are proposing a “significant change” in William Parker’s admissions so that it becomes a co-educational school from September 2019, with 12 form entry (a published admissions number of 360 for Year 7). The proposed new admissions policy is available on <http://hastingsconsultation.org>

Will there be Open Days and taster sessions for students moving to the coeducational school and for new pupils joining in 2019?

Yes. There will be Open Days and taster sessions. We will advertise these on our websites and communicate dates to parents and students.

THE CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL

Why will the schools be brought together in September 2019 rather than 2020?

We are excited about the vision for the co-educational school and we believe that operating it from September 2019 would provide much needed certainty for the schools and the local community.

Why is the school going to be a church school? What does that mean?

The school would be a Church of England school in line with the requirement to continue running a Church school on the William Parker site. William Parker has a long history as a Church school with an admissions policy that has welcomed, without preference, students of all faiths and none. This inclusive policy will continue.

The school will have an inclusive Christian ethos based on the universal values of equality, kindness and compassion alongside high expectations and an ambition for every child to succeed. All English schools are required to offer social, moral and religious education. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious education and from acts of collective worship if they choose. This applies equally to faith and non-faith based schools.

How will the history and traditions of William Parker and Helenswood be preserved?

William Parker school traces its origin to the bequest of the rector of All Saints' parish, Reverend William Parker, in 1619. We are proud of the rich history of our school, which has been through many changes over the years. We will be celebrating the 400th anniversary with an exciting timetable of events from summer 2019. We are working closely with the trustees of the William Parker Foundation in organising these celebrations, which will culminate in a commemorative service in November 2019, led by Bishop of Chichester at All Saints Church followed by an evening event at the school for past and current pupils. We hope that these events will also be celebrating the bringing together of William Parker and Helenswood and the beginning of a new phase.

William Parker is renowned for its sporting heritage and Helenswood has a long history in the performing arts. We want to ensure that these strengths are accessible and open to all students from September 2019. Sport and the performing arts will be sustained and improved through better facilities and as part of the enrichment programme planned for students. We hope to work closely with local arts and sports community groups, to preserve and expand on the opportunities traditionally associated with both schools.

Who would be the Headteacher of the school from September 2019?

The coeducational school will operate across two sites, led by the existing Executive Principal and Principal.

How will the school be governed? Who will be on the governing body?

The school would be governed by a local governing body. We hope that this will draw upon the membership of the existing governing bodies of both schools, and if the proposal goes ahead we will discuss this with the existing members.

What will happen to Year 10 and Year 11 students already studying for their GCSEs?

Students will continue to study the GCSE and A level courses that they have chosen. We will ensure that the proposed changes do not disrupt the education currently being provided to our students. Current students' results and wider education remains a priority.

How will the Sixth Form be affected?

Building upon its strong outcomes in 2018, the Sixth Form will continue to operate its successful co-educational model, and will benefit from a significant investment, to create a dedicated modern facility. Students will continue to access the teaching expertise of both Helenswood and William Parker staff and will be offered a range of academic and vocational subjects to support them into the next stage of their education or the first steps of their career.

Does the proposal remain viable if the intake remains at 8FE?

There has been extensive research conducted with East Sussex County Council, which demonstrates that pupil numbers in the area are increasing. Across the two schools, Year 7 numbers in 2018 are already above 9FE – and we must plan for the future.

Would class sizes be reduced?

Class sizes are expected to remain in line with current sizes.

How will the SEND provision be handled? Will there be special needs facilities'?

We will work closely with both SEND departments to support pupils as part of the transition. We will continue to provide the necessary support and personalised interventions for our SEND students.

How will the relationship with Teach First be managed moving forward?

Both schools have established relationships with Teach First and we will continue to support this relationship under our co-educational proposal.

Will departments be provided with more money to spend on resources?

The school budget would be set by school leaders and will support the priorities for the school. The department budget formula will continue to be directly linked to the number of students studying each subject.

We've worked hard at Helenswood to get a 'good' Ofsted – how will we ensure that results don't dip when we bring the schools together?

Both schools have worked incredibly hard to make the improvements that we've seen recently. Helenswood is now the top performing school in Hastings, and GCSE results at William Parker are in line with the other Hastings schools. This summer, William Parker's results saw a significant improvement, against a national dip. Both schools are on an exciting improvement journey and we believe that bringing them together would enable us to harness the best practice and expertise at both to create one excellent school.

Would next year's Y11 students from Helenswood be able to transition to the William Parker site over the summer to avoid losing time in September?

If this proposal is approved, we will work with students, staff and parents to develop robust plans that will ensure a smooth transition. This will include a series of activities during the summer term that would bring the boys and girls together – and allow time for any students moving site to get to know their new environment. We would welcome thoughts and ideas from students, staff and parents on this as part of this consultation.

How do you plan to minimise the risk to Year 11 students? Could the transition to co-ed be phased?

During the consultation meetings parents have raised some concerns with us around continuity of education for students – particularly those in Year 11. School leaders are currently looking in detail at how the curriculum in a co-educational school would be structured and, where possible, will endeavour to keep Year 11 students in their single sex classes, particularly in the core subjects. We recognise the anxieties of parents and are doing all we can to address these.

I understand that the behaviour is very different in each school – how are you going to manage that?

The behaviour is not as different as many people perceive and I would urge staff and parents to visit both sites during a normal school day. We are already working very hard to ensure that school policies, procedures and routines are aligned across the schools – and this includes behaviour.

Why is it Helenswood closing and not William Parker?

Legally it would be harder to close William Parker because of its religious character – and because parts of the land at the William Parker site are owned by the William Parker Foundation, and the Diocese of Chichester.

However, both Helenswood and William Parker have a long history in Hastings and we want the co-educational school to draw upon the traditions and expertise of both.

What would be the maximum number of pupils per class?

The standard size is 30 students but most classes are smaller. We do create smaller classes for students needing more intense support.

What would happen to the Place2Be Service?

We will protect this counselling service – we have a very strong relationship with them and students at both sites will be able to access their services

My daughter's passion is Dance – what will the facilities be at the William Parker site?

We want to invest in the dance studio at William Parker, as well as the theatre, to ensure that both school sites have high quality facilities for dance and the performing arts.

What's going to happen with drama?

Drama will remain on the curriculum. Drama isn't currently offered at Helenswood but would be available to boys and girls in the co-educational school.

SITES

Which site would students be based at?

The proposal is to operate a 'lower school' for Year 7 and 8 students on the Helenswood Lower School site, and an 'upper school' and sixth form (Years 9 to 13) on the William Parker site. This will enable us to provide specialist teaching, facilities and support for the Year 7 and 8 pupils, working closely with our primary schools to ensure continuity of curriculum and a smooth transition into secondary. At the same time, the Upper School will provide outstanding facilities for the Year 9 to 11 students as well as a dedicated sixth form space.

Why will there be two sites? Wouldn't it be better to operate from a single site?

In addition to the opportunity to create a dedicated Lower School, we need to retain two sites to accommodate the pupil places required by East Sussex County Council to fulfil their statutory duties. It would not be possible to accommodate a 12 form entry school on one site without significant new construction.

Who will decide what happens to the Helenswood upper school site?

The deeds and the freehold to the Helenswood upper school site remain with East Sussex County Council and not Ark. Should the proposal be approved, Ark's funding agreement for Helenswood with the Department for Education would be terminated and the upper school land and buildings would revert to the Council.

Will staff and students have to travel between the two sites?

We recognise the implications and issues travelling between sites can present for staff and will be designing the curriculum and staffing plan to enable an overall reduction in the need for travel between sites.

Does the current land covenant state that only boys can be educated on the current William Parker site?

The covenant states that the site is for the education of the youth of Hastings – it does not specify boys.

Will there be more parking available at Helenswood?

We are looking in detail at plans for the capital investment across the two sites should the proposal be approved. Parking will be considered as part of this.

There is a perception that other academies have managed to invest more in their school buildings. Is this true?

Since William Parker and Helenswood joined the Ark network, Helenswood and William Parker have received £4.9m of SCA (Schools Conditions Allocation) funding which equates to 30% of the total SCA funding that Ark has been allocated for all schools in the network (currently 38) – more than any other school in the network. Maintaining older buildings is significantly more expensive than new ones which is part of the reason for proposing to move from three sites to two. Three to four years ago in the sector there was significantly more money to invest in new buildings but at the moment there isn't a capital project from the Department of Education. We will apply for additional funding if and when it comes available again but we need to invest now to provide our students and staff with the facilities and environment that they deserve.

Will the toilets be unisex?

We are looking in detail at plans for the capital investment across the two sites should the proposal be approved. However, we are not anticipating unisex toilets.

Will the new/refurbished facilities be ready for September 2019?

If the proposal is approved, we will work as quickly as possible to deliver as much work as we can ahead of September 2019. This would prioritise work such as changing rooms and toilets, and specialist facilities such as the dance studio - but some work may take slightly longer.

Can Year 11 students use the sixth form area at William Parker? There are lots of classrooms not being used and could be a good way to integrate students into the 6th form.

We are looking in detail at plans for the capital investment across the two sites should the proposal be approved. Year 11 students will be our priority.

STAFF**What does the creation of the coeducational school mean for staff?**

If the proposal to bring the schools together is approved, we would begin a consultation early in 2019 with staff on a proposed staffing structure for the school. While we expect the school to grow over time, for September 2019 we will need a staff structure that reflects the current pupil numbers and the new curriculum plan. Given the current pupil roll, there may be some redundancies, but we would work closely with the unions and aim to keep any redundancy to a minimum.

How will staff that have not worked in a co-educational school before be supported to teach in a mixed setting?

We strongly believe that great teaching is effective for all students. We will ensure that staff who have not worked in a co-educational school before will receive support and training.

Where individuals may be subject to redundancy; how flexible would the school be in allowing time off to attend interviews?

If the proposal goes ahead, and there is a need for restructuring, Ark will follow their 'Managing Change' Policy, which details Ark's commitments to allowing reasonable time off to attend interviews, training, etc. during an employee's notice period. Further information in relation to this would be provided at the point of staff consultation.

How soon are we going to know about our jobs? When would a staff consultation likely take place?

If the proposal to bring the two schools together is approved by the DfE in December, we would begin a consultation early in 2019 with staff on a proposed staffing structure for the co-educational school.

Would staff be able to apply for voluntary redundancy?

This would be discussed as part of the staff consultation process.

Will administrative staff receive additional support in the build up to September 2019 to ensure everything is ready for the new academic year?

If our proposal goes ahead, we will ensure that there are robust plans in place to ensure a smooth transition.

Will there be opportunities for redeployment?

Should we enter into staff consultation, we will discuss with staff the possibility of redeployment locally and within the wider Ark network.

When is it anticipated that staff consultation would end by?

The length of consultations varies depending on the particular circumstances. If the proposal is approved and, assuming that we are able to begin a consultation with staff in January, we would hope that it would conclude by Easter.

If staff members leave during this process and are not replaced, what will happen?

Both Helenswood and William Parker are fully staffed this year and we will do our absolute best to ensure that this continues whilst maximising the capacity and strengths across both schools for the benefit of the boys and the girls.

In my experience, pastoral staff go first. In your opinion will history repeat itself?

We need to ensure that the staffing structure is the right one for the students in our school – pastoral staff are a key part of this and pastoral roles will be integral to any staffing structure.

How will redundancies be decided? Will Helenswood staff be disadvantaged as they are members of the school that is closing rather than the one staying open?

If the proposal goes ahead, Ark commits that all staff across Ark Helenswood Academy and Ark William Parker Academy would be subject to a fair and transparent employee consultation process, where no school is at a disadvantage compared to the other. This would mean that staff across both schools will be treated as one body of staff, should the proposal be approved and the need for restructuring arise.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Will my child need a new uniform?

We plan to involve students in any uniform changes, and will phase these in sensibly and cost effectively. No parent will have to buy a new uniform for any current student as a result of the proposed changes.

Will the school day and lesson times change? If so, how?

We are yet to determine the exact timings of the school day, which will be linked to the proposed curriculum plan.

I'm concerned that bringing boys and girls together will affect behaviour. How will you deal with this?

Our schools have high expectations for behaviour and aim to create distraction-free environments where students feel safe and happy and are able to be enthusiastic about learning. Good behaviour is taught, recognised and reinforced and poor behaviour is not tolerated. There are many co-educational schools in our network that have achieved a very high standard of behaviour, and we see no reason that this co-educational school wouldn't also have the highest standards of behaviour.

I am concerned about bullying. How will you deal with this?

We do not tolerate bullying in any school. Through school values we aim to embed a 'tell us' culture, and reinforce this by following up rapidly and firmly. Behaviour has improved in both William Parker and Helenswood. The co-educational school would provide an opportunity to make further progress in creating an environment where all students feel safe and happy.

The recent change to the William Parker main entrance increased traffic and parking for local residents. This proposal could increase pupil numbers. Has the impact on local traffic been considered?

We are aware that changes to the main entrance have caused problems with traffic and parking for residents. We apologise for this and want to restate our commitment to working in partnership with our neighbours. Over the summer, work began to increase the on-site parking at William Parker and provide dedicated drop-off and collection zones inside the school perimeter. The situation has already improved, and this work is due to be completed shortly. As student numbers increase, we will work with local councillors and residents to keep arrangements under review.

The Helenswood/William Parker site is much further away from where we live. Will transport be provided for students if they need it?

Both school sites are well served by local bus services. For example, Stagecoach buses drive into the Helenswood lower site to drop off and pick up students. We recognise that transport to and from school for our students is important. If parents have particular concerns or envisage difficulties with transport we would encourage them to come and talk to us.

Will the coeducational school have a house system?

Decisions around the pastoral and student support structures have not been finalised. We have already committed to engaging with both students and staff on these structures.

What will happen to my child's friendship groups if they are going to be taught in mixed classes?

Students will have lots of time to socialise with their existing friends outside lessons in a variety of social spaces around the school. Students will also be able to enjoy extra-curricular activities with their friends.

It's perceived that Ark as a network invest more money in the city schools to the detriment of coastal ones. Is this true?

This is not true. Over the last four years, Helenswood and William Parker have received £4.9m of SCA (Schools Conditions Allocation) funding which equates to 30% of the total SCA funding that Ark has been allocated for all schools in the network (currently 38) – more than any other school in the network. In addition to this the schools have received £2.2m of funding from donors, and in the first year of opening £1.5m of was received from the DfE, LA and Ark in order to support transition costs.

However, what is true is that schools in East Sussex are among the lowest funded in the country. This funding is determined by the DfE and ESCC, not Ark.

On companies house it states that on 31st August 2017 AWP has £680,000 deficit but Helenswood didn't have a deficit? Why is there now such a large deficit?

Low pupil numbers, increasing staff costs and deteriorating buildings have all contributed to the current financial position. At the end of August 2018 the schools had a £1m deficit covered by Ark, and Ark has committed to supporting an additional £2m deficit which is projected for 2018-19 in order that savings do not need to be implemented during this year of consultation.

What are the projected pupil numbers in Hastings in Year 7 moving forward? Will we fill the 360 Year 7 places bearing in mind the capacity of other local schools?

Pupil projection data from ESCC predicts that Year 7 numbers in Hastings will continue to increase over the next few years – from an expected 700 in the current year (18/19) to 819 in 23/24 – with a bulge year of 875 in 22/23.

We have worked very closely with ESCC in the development of this proposal to ensure that a 12FE school would be providing the number of places required in Hastings, while removing the current surplus.

How will transport work to and from the two sites?

We recognise that transport to and from school is important and we are meeting with Stagecoach as part of the consultation process to discuss the proposals and how this would impact on bus routes and timetables.

If parents have particular concerns or envisage difficulties with transport we would encourage you to detail these on a consultation response form so that we can raise issues directly with Stagecoach.

Where is the pupil premium money going?

All schools are required to publish details on their pupil premium spending on their websites and this is available for people to read. Please refer to the school websites for further information.
