

9th June 2017

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s)

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ryde Academy Local Governing Body, in response to the recent announcement and now live consultation process on the merger of Sandown Bay Academy with Ryde Academy.

Neither Ryde Academy governors nor Mrs Ballard were consulted about the AET proposal prior to the public announcement.

Governors believe that this proposed merger is **not** in the best interests of students, parents or the communities of either school.

We said this to AET at a meeting held soon after the announcement; this has been our only opportunity to engage with AET.

The reasons for our opposition are as follows:

- 1 Ryde Academy does not have capacity for students from both schools; the new school building will accommodate a maximum of 1500. Ryde Academy already has over 1,000 students with a forecast of 1200 by September 2018. Expansion is likely to continue in line with agreed and planned housing developments in Ryde.

These factors were all paramount in the final planning approval in 2016 for the new Ryde Academy school building, where consideration was also given to sufficient road accessibility, transport infrastructure, as well as adequate sports and play facilities – an issue raised by Sport England. The agreed capacity of 1500 students for the new school build was therefore the maximum that could be allowed given external and environmental constraints.

- 2 The 1500 students in the new Ryde Academy school building are Key Stages 3-4 only (Years 7 to 11); post-16 students are not included. As you will be aware, post-16 students have a separate campus in the old Haylands primary school site. This was hard fought for by Ryde Academy governors, with the full support of Cllr Ian Stephens. The Haylands site allows Ryde Academy to offer a fully inclusive post-16 curriculum, which is further enhanced through our collaboration with Sandown Bay Academy for sixth form provision. This arrangement has also worked well for the local community by keeping a much needed resource in use that is supported by local groups and activities, and has kept through traffic to a minimum for local residents. Any proposal to alter this facility will therefore have a negative impact on both Ryde Academy post-16 students, and the local community.
- 3 Both Sandown and Ryde communities need local schools. Ryde Academy has and continues to develop strong links with the community; students need a sense of identity, a school linked with their community – through local activities, essential links with primary schools, and community representation including local councillors. Governing bodies should represent local communities, as the current Ryde Academy governing body does. These vital links will be lost to Sandown Bay Academy students if the proposed merger goes ahead.

- 4 Sandown Bay Academy roll has fallen recently, but current numbers are comparable with Ryde Academy. It is worth noting that Ryde Academy also had a falling roll, but this was turned around rapidly once good, strong leadership was in place.

In terms of viability, out of 3,268 secondary schools in England there are 1,405 schools with 501 to 1,000 pupils; only 320 schools in England have more than 1,500 pupils.

- 5 We are very concerned about the impact of this proposed merger on Ryde Academy's own journey to "Outstanding". Imposing additional significant management responsibilities on Mrs Ballard will inevitably affect Ryde Academy staff and students. The rapid and significant improvements to Ryde Academy since September 2015 were acknowledged in the November 2016 Ofsted report, which identified Mrs Ballard as "an inspirational leader", with an "ambitious vision". It is this leadership, ambition and vision that has moved our school forward and shaped a strong, new leadership team. This leadership must remain focussed on Ryde Academy alone to ensure that we meet our "Outstanding school" objective within the next two years. This ambition will **not** be achieved if Mrs Ballard is diverted from this role into a role she did not seek, nor was invited to apply for.
- 6 The proposed merger will inevitably bring considerable disruption, impacting on all students. Uncertainties around the physical environment, transport issues for Sandown students, teaching and support staff are bound to affect results.

We strongly urge all stakeholders – parents and carers of students at both academies and at local primary schools; residents of both local communities; neighbours of Ryde Academy where the increased student numbers will have an impact; all who are concerned about education in Sandown and Ryde – [to register concerns about AET's proposal by responding to the consultation](https://tinyurl.com/y9bss25c). The online link/address for the questionnaire is: <https://tinyurl.com/y9bss25c>
Paper copies are available.

Your voice matters – the final decision about this merger proposal is taken by the Department for Education (DfE), not AET. AET must present all consultation responses to the DfE so that an informed decision can be made.

The Isle of Wight Council has already made considerable efforts to influence this decision. Their objections need to be supported **by you**, the stakeholders, parents and carers of students.

The Ryde Academy Governing Body will respond to the consultation, stating in the strongest terms the negative impact that this proposed merger would have on both schools and their communities. As long as the local Governing Body remains in place at Ryde Academy, we will continue to support Mrs Ballard, the leadership team and our school.

We urge you all to do the same by responding to the consultation questionnaire.

Yours faithfully

Lesley Holmes
Chair of Governors
On behalf of the Local Governing Body at Ryde Academy