

# The Swanage School *newsletter*

Autumn Term 2011

*A secondary school founded by and for the community, combining local learning with a global outlook in one of England's finest natural environments*

## WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO THE NEW SCHOOL

It's a month since we heard that The Swanage School is through to the final pre-opening stage and it's been a whirl of activity. I want to thank everyone for their messages of support and offers of help – hours after the announcement we had hundreds of messages from people. They continue to arrive and are much appreciated.



The work from now until September 2013 will involve making plans for everything from the latest technology to locally sourced school lunches. We will be very busy but we'll keep you up to date through meetings, newsletters, our website and our Facebook page.

Here is a sample of what we've been up to so far. As ever, any ideas, suggestions or offers of help are welcome, and if you have any questions, please do get in touch.

Paul Angel, Chair of Governors



### **24** OCT **Meeting our new Project Advisers in London**

Our first task after the announcement was to travel up to London to meet our new advisers at the Department for Education. We met Agata Urbanowicz and Elridge Foster to discuss the management of the project – between them they have years of experience of establishing schools.

The experts said that they had been so impressed with our education plan we did not really need an education adviser. But we have access to one, plus highly skilled finance and legal teams who will help to ensure The Swanage School is set up smoothly and quickly.



### **3** NOV **Welcoming the DfE to Swanage**

The following week our advisers visited us in Swanage and we gave them a tour of our preferred site, the former Swanage Grammar School, joined by our Partnerships for Schools adviser. Partnerships for Schools is the capital funding arm of the Department for

Education and will be dealing with the school buildings from now on, overseeing the project and keeping budgets in check.

Before all of that they have to carry out site searches and feasibility studies, but they, like us, couldn't believe how lucky we were to have the offer of an existing school building.

### **9** NOV **Visiting Stour Valley School in Suffolk**

Two of our team travelled to Suffolk to spend the day at Stour Valley school, one of the first free schools to open this year. Local people campaigned for a school after their local authority decided to close their middle school (sound familiar?)

and the group worked hard to see their school open in just eight months.

We were incredibly impressed by the dedication of the staff and the positive and hard-working attitude of the children and were grateful for the offers of help and advice and for the time that the Headteacher and Chair of Governors were willing to spend with us.

As well as these events, the group has been to talk to Swanage Town Council and Purbeck District Council and we have held weekly meetings to discuss our immediate goals and long-term aims. There are more details on this overleaf...

# Countdown

The Swanage School will be a secondary for 420 pupils. In September 2013 it will take students in Years 7, 8 and 9, who will be leaving middle school that year. The school will be a human scale school.

## What is a human scale school?

We are working with the charity Human Scale Education (HSE) who campaign for schools that are smaller in size. Based on HSE principles, our school will:

- Ensure all students achieve their very best in academic, creative and practical studies
- Favour smaller classes and learning groups
- Understand that the emotional wellbeing of students and their attainment are linked and put relationships at the heart of the school
- Involve local people and groups in learning
- Make staff training and professional development a high priority
- Be democratic and value the ideas and involvement of students, staff and parents
- Work with successful human scale schools and colleges around the world
- Use buildings and surroundings to support these principles



## What do we need to do now?

There is a lot to do between now and 2013 and we will work to a timeline provided by the Department for Education.

### Site and buildings

We have the offer of a free building – the former grammar school – and our priority now is to take over the site, which will be subject to the usual rigorous planning requirements. We will work with PFS project managers who will suggest architects, get planning approval, manage bids from building contractors and oversee millions of pounds worth of investment from central government – all in consultation with the group.

### Curriculum

As well as offering a full National Curriculum, The Swanage School will develop a Local Curriculum, using the wonderful resources on our doorstep, and a Community Curriculum in which students give something back to the town, through volunteering and environmental

projects. All students will also complete an Extended Project to promote independent research and a love of learning.

Before we open we need to set up links with community groups, other schools and colleges, register with exam boards and get all the necessary equipment and materials on site.

### Recruitment

The single most important aspect. The first recruit will be the Headteacher, who we plan to appoint about a year before the school opens. He or she will then be involved in finding the qualified teachers and support staff who have the skills to deliver the curriculum and the school's human scale ethos.

In the first year we expect there to be about 18 teachers (including the Head and Assistant Head), growing to about 30 – all of them fully qualified – over the next two years. On top of this there will be support staff, admin and the rest of the team. We'll also hold elections for Governors and for members of the School Trust, which will be a cooperative.

### Information Technology

The school will need the right technology both for running the school and for teaching computer skills. We will ensure the requirements for a modern school are met with all systems and equipment in place.

### Communications

We will make sure that students, parents and residents are kept up to date and have access to all the information they need, through newsletters, meetings, a website and a prospectus.

### Finance and administration

Setting up a school is like setting up a business – there are lots of things behind the scenes like contracts, payroll, management information systems, funding agreements, insurance, data protection, and so on. All of these need to be organised at the right time. We will also have a budget to keep to, and that will need to be carefully monitored and managed.

### And there's more

We'll meet Dorset County Council who will be responsible for school transport and admissions procedures once we open. And there's also the small matter of choosing a uniform, school lunches, after-school clubs and much more...



## What this school means to me

*Jo Tatchell, Education Swanage*

At meetings with parents I've spoken of our dream becoming a reality and here we are – an opportunity for us to do something positive and special for our children and our area.

Our children...

- Having time to engage in the community
- Walking and cycling to school
- Challenged and nurtured intellectually and in all directions
- Learning from and respecting the local and wider environment
- Being part of a school where

they feel secure and confident

- Enjoying learning as part of a shared experience, in a school open to all for sports, culture and education at all ages
- Empowered to reach their potential
- Participating in innovative and creative learning styles
- Having a meaningful education – something they will proudly carry into adult life

Our children will make a difference to their education, their community and their future.



## Council support

Swanage Town Council has voted to support the establishment of a free school in Swanage and to authorise Town Council officers to work with Education Swanage as a priority, to explore what role the Council has in bringing The Swanage School to fruition.

Purbeck District Council has included the free school in the Core Strategy that will shape

planning in the area in the future and PDC officers have been charged with helping the school secure its site.

## How to get involved

Education Swanage welcome any offers of help. Call group secretary Amanda Rowley on 01929 481520 or email [info@educationswanage.co.uk](mailto:info@educationswanage.co.uk). You can also get in touch via Facebook and our website.

## A message from Dorset County Council

Congratulations on your successful application for the Free School in Swanage. You have fought hard and with conviction on behalf of your children. I look forward to a new and positive working relationship as your dreams become reality.

*Email from Toni Coombs,  
DCC Cabinet Member for Children's Services*