

# Schools crisis over 'dumped' children

SECONDARY head teachers across Thanet have called for urgent government action to halt the number of looked-after children being "dumped" on schools across the district.

They say the situation has reached crisis point and they have told Kent education bosses they will not take any more of the youngsters.

Latest statistics show that Thanet is by far the highest recipient of vulnerable, needy and often deprived youngsters from outside Kent and elsewhere in the county.

Thanet has a total of 108 children from outside Kent and 201 from within the county – compared with neighbours Canterbury which has 45 children from within Kent and 35 from out of area; schools in Sevenoaks in West Kent take just nine in each category, while the Ashford rural sector has two from within Kent and five from outside the county.

## Undermining

Andy Somers is principal of Hartsdown Technology College at Margate and chairman of the Thanet Heads Group. In a letter on behalf of his concerned colleagues, Mr Somers has told Rosalind Turner, (managing director of Kent Children, Families and Education), Sarah Hohler (KCC cabinet member for Kent) and KCC leader Paul Carter that "enough is enough."

He said: "These are out of area children whose corporate parents are not based in Thanet. They are often transferred out of the London boroughs in Kent, causing us considerable financial and social problems, as well as further undermining our ability to meet the National Challenge benchmark set by the Government.

"The situation has reached crisis point. Neither the schools or social services are able to meet the needs of such high numbers. Meanwhile we note that KCC is still advertising for more foster carers in Thanet newspapers.

"Thanet head teachers have now taken the decision that we will not take any more out of area looked-after children – in effect, we refuse to cooperate with KCC in placing looked-after children."

Mr Somers said the head teachers "believe KCC does not have the authority to stop other authorities from placing children in Thanet and



Hartsdown Technology College principal Andy Somers

Picture: Terry Scott PD1139456

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that is why we are taking this matter into our own hands."

He said that the London boroughs receive considerably more finance to run their schools and should allocate their own money to care for looked-after children, instead of stretching the resources of schools like those in Thanet.

He said: "They see us as a soft target and use us as a dumping ground. It is hugely unfair on the children who have little time for social readjustment when they are uprooted and placed willy-nilly in a different setting. These are usually very vulnerable children who need a lot of care.

"Fewer looked-after children on the school role would clearly mean we could spend more time and resource on them – we have enjoyed some fantastic results at Hartsdown with looked-after children but the numbers are at breaking point for us to be as effective as we know we can be. And that is not fair to the children or to the dedicated professionals who work with them."

The Thanet heads want the Government to investigate the whole issue and introduce legislation that will focus on the individual needs of each looked after child to ensure the most effective form of education and social welfare.