

**Notes of a meeting held with the staff and governors
of Cilfynydd Primary School**

Monday 19th November 2018 at 4:00 pm

**Meeting to discuss the Council's proposals to reorganise school provision in
the Pontypridd area**

Present

Esther Thomas (ET), Temporary Service Director for Access & Inclusion Services

Lisa Howell (LH), Senior 21st Century Schools Officer

Tim Britton (TB), Senior Challenge Advisor

Sophie Nicholls (SN), Graduate Officer 21st Century Schools

Catrin Edwards (CE), Head Of Service Transformation And Data Systems

Ellen Williams (EW), Human Resources Advisor

Richard Evans (RE), Director of Human Resources

25 members of schools staff/governors

Esther Thomas (ET) welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the proposal, the reasons for the proposal, the purpose of the meeting, the consultation process, the timescales relating to the consultation process and the proposals themselves, should they be implemented.

Should the proposals be implemented, the Council seeks to:

- Develop post 16 education at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School, Beddau and Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw;
- Create two new 3-16 schools in Pontypridd and Hawthorn;
- Improve and increase Welsh Medium primary provision by building a new school on the former site at Heol y Celyn, which will incorporate the former provisions at both Heol y Celyn and YGG Pont Sion Norton;
- Amend the catchment areas of Pontypridd High, Hawthorn High and the 6th form catchment of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive Schools, to better meet and match the demand for school places;

These changes will be achieved by:

- Closing the sixth forms of Hawthorn High School, Pontypridd High School and Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School and transferring the post 16 provision to Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School or Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw. For those students who opt for a Roman Catholic education, sixth form provision will be available at St David's College, Cardiff;
- Closing Pontypridd High School and Cilfynydd Primary School and creating a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current Pontypridd High School;
- Closing Hawthorn High School, Hawthorn Primary School and Heol y Celyn School and creating a new 3-16 'all through' school on the site of the current

Hawthorn High and Hawthorn Primary Schools. The local authority designated ALN specialist class located in Hawthorn High School will also transfer to the new school;

- Closing Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pont Sion Norton and opening a new Welsh Medium Primary School to be constructed on the site of the current Heol y Celyn Primary School. The pupils educated through the Welsh Medium at Heol y Celyn will transfer to the new school and the Heol y Celyn pupils educated through the English Medium will transfer to the new 3 – 16 school at Hawthorn.

Amending the catchment areas for pupils aged 11-16 of the three LA maintained Secondary schools by:

- Transferring the Graig area of Pontypridd which is part of the catchment area of Maesycoed Primary School to the new 3-16 school for Pontypridd (currently Hawthorn)
- Transferring the catchment area of Coedpenmaen Primary School to the new 3-16 school for Pontypridd (currently Hawthorn)
- Transferring the catchment area of Gwauncelyn Primary School to the new 3-16 school for Hawthorn (currently Bryncelynnog)

It is proposed that all changes will be in place by September 2022.

ET referred to the detailed information contained within the consultation document which had been circulated and the consultation response pro-forma contained therein (further copies of both were available at the meeting) and referred to page 5 of the consultation document which outlines how people can make comments.

ET explained that the questions/comments/responses would be recorded for inclusion in the consultation report, which would be fed back to Cabinet in early 2019, as would the feedback from pupils. ET stressed that this was a period of consultation and should the proposals proceed to the next stage (statutory notice), objections would be received and recorded at that stage.

The meeting was then opened for questions.

Q. *Where is the academic research to show that an all through school is actually a good idea? There is not any in the English language and I cannot see any evidence of this happening in other countries. They stick to the primary/middle/high school model. There were 13 out of 2300 schools in Wales that were all through schools but we have no evidence of this being a good idea. Scottish head teachers do not agree with this as younger pupils can be bullied by older pupils and teenage issues being issues for younger pupils. Can you comment please?*

A. We have one all through school in Llanhari but that was a decision taken for different reasons due to the new comprehensive school in Maesteg. Llanhari School is now growing from the bottom. We have recently created three new 3-16 schools in the Rhondda with Porth, Nantgwyn and Tonyrefail. There is no longitude data that says this model is a good idea. We have not seen any issues

with bullying in Llanhari. One of the key things for us is the safeguarding of young people and we make sure that when we build 3-16 schools that safeguarding is the highest priority. We would want them to use the same facilities e.g. Science labs, games areas, specialist rooms for DT etc. but they would be under supervision. There is no evidence yet however that this is a better model.

Q. What is the process for staff who are already here?

A. The process will be the same as the previous schools. Providing this proposal is accepted there will be a temporary governing body comprising governors of this school and Pontypridd High about two years before the new school opens. They would then appoint a head teacher and then together, the temporary governing body and headteacher would create a staffing structure. It is difficult to anticipate what this will look like but in the schools we have just opened, there are year groups but no primary or secondary phase. We ask the governing body to ring fence the application process for current staff in the first instance, which, based on what we have already done would likely involve an interview. No roles would be advertised externally unless a role could not be filled internally. Another element is that technically all staff are in a redundancy situation. If there are staff who want to take redundancy or early retirement, they are able to do so. They would not put themselves through a recruitment process, redundancy would happen first.

Q. The school is the centre of the village and is accessible for everyone. The new site is quite a long way from the top of the village. There are a few issues such as road safety. How are you going to get the pupils to the school? I can foresee there being queues of traffic going to the school.

A. We appreciate your concerns about this and safety is paramount in this process.

A. We will undertake a safe routes analysis for this project, which is going to be funded by a separate budget. We will have to create a safe route for pupils.

Q. There is only one bridge, which is stepped, and if parents have buggies etc. they may not be able to get their (possibly four) children to school safely.

A. We have done some extensive traffic calming in some areas where the new schools are. We can create crossings and speed humps etc. to minimise risk. For example in Porth we found that within a few weeks of the school opening, we were having complaints from residents. They have now staggered the school day to make sure that the pupils are not all being dropped off at the same time. This is working much better and the changes were made very quickly. Until the new school is in operation, there may be issues that we cannot foresee, but any issues will be addressed.

Q. I guess there will be schools that are three or four years down the line that we could learn from and take on any advice that they have.

A. Yes, we would like to get one of the Headteachers to attend our open evenings to answer some of your questions too. It is helpful for you to see how it works and to speak to people who deal with this every day.

Q. The leader of the Council has said to me that there will not be any experts appointed to survey this. There is literature that shows that, due to the proximity to the road there are difficulties for pupils with asthma, heart issues and even cognition. If we were building a school in 1980 we would not know this, but now we do and maybe we would not build a school there?

A. We are going to undertake environmental testing of the site to provide assurances.

S/G comment - Can we have an independent expert to conduct this survey and advise that it is a safe idea to do this?

A. There is a school there already.

Q. Maybe they would say that we should not do that. Are the Council afraid of what the result may be of that survey?

A. The Council conducts regular monitoring of air quality and as previously mentioned there is a study ongoing on the A470.

Q. This is a school and we lost many pupils to Coedpenmaen. We take many children from out of catchment and I was wondering are there any plans to make it more viable to operate on this site for the 21st Century or was the funding specifically for 3-16?

A. No it was not specific to 3-16 but if we look at this site there are hardly any outdoor spaces for the these pupils to play in.

A. There are 149 pupil here and it is reception to year 6 pupils that receive more funding.

Q. If there was some money spent here, I think we could make this school fit for the 21st Century. Was there any consideration given to close any other schools in the locality that have buildings in a bad state?

Staff/governor comment - If there are parents that are 50/50 about Welsh medium, they often send their children to Cilfynydd.

A. The majority of pupils who attend Pont Sion Norton do not live in Cilfynydd.

Staff/governor comment - Even if half of them came here, we would not have a surplus.

A. ET - You are then assuming that parents aren't choosing Welsh medium

Staff/governor comment - We had a community meeting on Thursday and the overwhelming response from people there said that if their children had to catch a bus for Welsh medium then they would change to English to be able to walk to school.

Staff/governor comment - I am concerned about them walking to school. Cars come through at 70mph even though it is a 30mph road. If there is a camera or surveyor there then people will slow down and it will not be accurate. A young girl was injured recently, which I am sure you would know about.

A. All work would be done before the school opens. We often drop the speed limit to be around 20mph near schools and we put physical barriers in place such as speed humps etc.

Q. What happens at night when the A470 is closed and the traffic comes through Cilfynydd? Sometimes there are huge vehicles that come through here. There is no alternative diversion so I do not think that we can say that there will be a speed hump on that road because I have done research and this is unlikely to happen.

A. We do not know what the recommendations will be for traffic calming. Currently there are no primary school age pupils crossing that road every day, so that will change and the highways team need to make sure that the road is safe and used appropriately.

Q. Would you have the traffic report before the Cabinet meeting regarding the proposal in January?

A. No, but there will also be a planning consultation and if the plans were not appropriate then it would fail at the planning stage on this issue. The planning process will help shape this. We have previously had planning open evenings, and the traffic management comes under here. Although it is obviously linked, they are separate processes.

Q. You know you said that if staff wanted a job and could apply; does that happen for LSAs and dinner staff?

A. Yes, it is for all staff. It will be a new structure and the difficulty is trying to look ahead when we do not know the future structure.

A. We also look wider so if there are no vacancies in these new schools we can look at vacancies elsewhere. We try our best to ensure you all have jobs.

Q. Can you clarify in terms of leadership roles how it is ring-fenced? I know that headship roles have to go external.

A. Assistant Headteacher level and below are ring-fenced for existing staff in the first instance, but Headteachers posts are advertised externally.

Q. Is the closure of Cilfynydd linked directly to Pontypridd High pupils leaving after sixth form?

A. The proposals are linked, but we know there is already surplus capacity at Pontypridd High School and Cilfynydd Primary School.

Q. How much information will we get about the plans before the January meeting? Will the site be split?

A. There may be a need for a small new block or extension or remodelling. This is very early and we want to try to assure you that it will work. We have changed the layouts of schools following consultation before. We have listened and learned about this and we want to have your views too.

Staff/governor comment - There would be around 150 primary age pupils but almost 800 comprehensive pupils.

A. We look at the flow of the school and see where we can create good outdoor facilities and make sure it flows.

Q. Is there a possible name yet?

A. Tonyrefail stayed the same but Tonypandy changed its name to Nantgwyn. Governors put proposals forward and Cabinet make the final decision.

A. We are currently doing this with Garth Olwg and the decision has just been made to retain the name as Garth Olwg.

Q. If someone wanted to go through interview and they were unsuccessful, would they still get redundancy?

A. Yes of course. You can ask for figures and not proceed, or apply and if you are unsuccessful then you still get the redundancy option.

Q. What support would be in place in terms of staff wellbeing during the process?

A. We have a people development team who could work with the staff, or if people just want to talk on a welfare aspect, we could link with occupational health. Colleagues from HR will come out, spend time with the staff and address all concerns. If we do this right now it may be a 'what if' scenario and give examples from other schools, but we will work with you through the whole process.

Q - The packing up of the school, will we get time to do this?

A. Yes, we have closure days and there will be no lifting and carrying by staff as we employ a company to do this. We ask the school to declutter beforehand and we hire skips too. The Data Team will help in terms of disposing of information etc.

Staff/governor comment - We want to make sure the children do not suffer and we do not want staff welfare to impact on them. We have a fantastic school and we do not want their welfare to suffer because of this process. We feel like we have been chosen because of surplus places and the building condition.

A. We will support staff through this and children should not see any impact from this.

Staff/governor comment - We have massive community links for harvest and Christmas services and I am not sure you would get the same kind of community interaction when it moves.

A. The other side of that is that there are more facilities in Pontypridd High e.g. the games areas and the ICT suites. The children we spoke to here said that there are currently no classes here in the evening and you could have an opportunity to do that. I realise that this is not in the heart of the community geographically but it is only a few minutes' walk to the High School and I cannot argue with that but it will be down to school management to ensure that this happens.

A. We try to build in community spaces where possible and Welsh Government insist on this. We design separate access for the community space too, so that it can be completely segregated from the pupils. For example, if we put a 3G pitch at a new school, then we would expect it to be open to the community.

Q. I saw in the document that the projections for pupil numbers are dropping off. What are the plans to increase pupil numbers in the primary phase? What hit us the hardest was losing our nursery. We lose children to other facilities due to that.

A. You may be able to attract people to run a childcare setting on the new site.

A. The new schools tend to be attractive for parents due to the new facilities. I understand that this is not guaranteed.

Q. I understand the proposal and our children deserve the best, but I would not want us to move and have a falling number on roll. We hope that it will increase but I wondered if there was a secret plan for this.

A. We get the birth rates, which are quite accurate, and these form the projections.

Q. Would you be looking at closing Trallwn Infants' school and moving it to Pontypridd?

A. That is not part of this proposal.

Staff/governor comment - So the infants then would go to Trallwng rather than going to Pontypridd High. I live here and I hear so many parents saying they will send them there instead.

A. We had the same issue in Porth and Tonyrefail where parents said they would not send their children there. The Headteacher opened up the school to expect 50 parents to turn up and more than 200 turned up. The additional facilities encourage so many to go once they are in place.

A. Through schools minimise transition for pupils too.

A. We have undertaken a lot of work for transition into year 7 for the other

primary schools that join the through schools to make it easier for all and this is ongoing.

Q. Following on about the future and numbers - The intergovernmental panel on climate change (the gold standard for climate change) on the 8th of October said that humanity has about a decade to make changes to stop humanity dying out. I do not see how generating extra traffic is in anyway consistent for our commitment to the Future Generations Act and other Acts.

A. We also have to make these buildings more energy efficient and we often add solar panels and rainwater harvesting to assist with environmental impacts. Due to the funding, we have to adhere to the BREEAM model. The contractors we use have to keep their carbon footprint to a minimum during the process too. The closure of inefficient buildings has a positive impact on environmental factors too. In terms of traffic with the proposed sixth form relocation, the emissions may even balance out as they often go from one school to another during the school day for their lessons. This will be reduced by them going to one site for the whole day.

Q. Is there a plan for this building?

ET - There are not as of yet. If the proposal is successful, the building will be handed over to Corporate Estates to manage and they would make recommendations to Elected Members.

Q. If there is a new school and there is closure of this school, how do the finances work? If we had a surplus and they had a deficit how would that work?

A. We work with the closing schools to see how best to manage it and the deficits are cleared and a new school budget would be created for the new school. All data is linked to the new school e.g. SIMS etc. We work closely with schools on this.

Q. Will there be any new buildings or just refurbishment?

A. We are not sure of the designs yet, these are progressed in partnership with staff, pupils and governors.

Staff/governor comment - Some parents do not think there is enough detail on this.

A. We undertook refurbishments on previous 21st Century Schools projects. The quality and the standard of the refurbished classes in YGG Tonyrefail and the new Tonyrefail through school are the same.

Q. If there is surplus capacity then other schools could join too?

A. LH - We are not looking to do that and if we were, now would be the time to look at that and we are not. We need to look at community use and change the designations of some of the classes to make best use of the school.

Staff/governor comment - As fantastic as the school may be it is the road safety and the safeguarding that we want to raise and note.