

Notes of a meeting held with staff and governors at Pontypridd High School

Monday 12th November at 3:30 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
Andrea Richards (AR), Head of 21st Century Schools
Nicola Goodman (NG), Senior 21st Century Schools Officer
Emma Griffiths (EG), 21st Century Schools
Catrin Edwards (CE), Head Of Service Transformation and Data Systems
Sarah Corcoran (SC), Senior Challenge Adviser
Bethan Davies (BD), Human Resources
63 members of school staff and governors

Introductions from Council officers.

Esther Thomas (ET) credited the school council for their input into an earlier meeting held with them and asked that the Headteacher further extend the Council's thanks to them.

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.

Proposal to remove the 6th form

Q. You are proposing two centres of excellence – one at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School and one at Coleg y Cymoedd. What is meant by the term 'Centre of Excellence'?

A. The more appropriate term to use would be '6th Form Centre'. Similar to that in Treorchy where there is a dedicated part of the school for post 16 learners. The aim is to deliver a wide range of subjects in one place hence removing the need for pupils to travel between schools as this is not viable. Neither is the current

breadth of subjects being delivered in individual schools viable. Some LAs do not have 6th forms at all, just tertiary colleges. RCT do not want to do that, but the 6th form numbers are not viable for every school to have a 6th form.

Q. What are the reasons for choosing Bryncelynnog and Coleg y Cymoedd rather than Pontypridd High School?

A. The numbers at Bryncelynnog are more viable. Also, the outcomes are good. Needs of pupils are the main consideration. The staff would be in one location. Bryncelynnog has the highest standards – highest number of pupils – highest pupil retention.

Comment from school - Disagreement expressed with several comments made – quality of provision – data in document not evidenced – standards. Therefore the arguments/points made fail badly.

Q. The document refers to £10million being spent at Bryncelynnog. How will this be spent – one single building or a number of improvements around the school?

A. The LA would look at the school and their needs to meet the new curriculum going forward. The LA would work in collaboration with school staff/governors/students as part of the consultation process.

Q. Would it not be better to carry this out before?

A. Options will be discussed and the proposal designed around the best options - this will form part of the consultation process – the LA cannot pre-empt decisions and has no pre-determined solutions.

Q. If the proposal is not successful could the funding be spent elsewhere?

A. Changes have been made to proposals in the past following consultation – nothing is set in stone.

Q. Evidence in the document is not supporting Bryncelynnog as the 6th form centre of excellence. Pupils would need to travel long distances to attend Bryncelynnog. Is this plan/proposal being considered due to news that 2,000 houses are planned for construction in the area?

A. These houses are not driving this particular proposal.

Q. Why choose Bryncelynnog as they are already in partnership with Y Pant? Why was this not considered when Y Pant building works were carried out? How does Y Pant feel now that they will be involved with a Centre of Excellence? Why is Y Pant not part of this consultation considering they already have a partnership with Bryncelynnog and let Pontypridd pupils stay in the Pontypridd area? Would this not be a better solution rather than make pupils travel?

A. Y Pant can only accommodate pupils within their catchment area.

The Local Development Plan identifies strategic sites in the area, but many have been identified for many years with nothing happening. The Cwm Coke works site is contaminated and needs a lot of Welsh Government investment.

Y Pant can be extended by 200 pupils in the future, if needed, for in catchment demand. The LA need to manage school places across all of RCT and the whole picture has been looked at in relation to these current proposals.

Q. *What happens to the link between Bryncelynnog and Y Pant? Will pupils in Bryncelynnog have to travel to Y Pant for some of their lessons?*

A. Given the numbers, they should not have to travel, as Y Pant has a viable 6th form on its own. It is a possibility though. The school will continue to work with Y Pant and further strengthen links and shared opportunities.

Q. *Has a feasibility study been carried out to consider building a 6th Form Centre in Pontypridd? Couldn't the £10 million be invested in this?*

A. This is a consultation period. The feasibility study would be carried out after the consultation and feed into the final report for Cabinet. There is no available land in Pontypridd and designing a new 6th Form Centre would be very expensive and not sustainable.

Q. *The tone of the document appears to be promoting one school over another – it is not in favour of Pontypridd High School and is giving the wider impression that things are better elsewhere.*

Page 10 of the consultation document refers to the 6th forms at Pontypridd High School and Hawthorn High School as being less than 250 and with relatively poor educational performance – this is strongly contested.

Misleading statement referencing Pontypridd High School and Hawthorn High School as being in the third/fourth quartiles in some instances; the same applies to Bryncelynnog in 8 out of 18 instances, yet this is not highlighted.

A. The number of pupils is also taken into account. Both Pontypridd High School and Hawthorn High School have a combined 6th form of just under 250 pupils. Example given of pupils achieving A* and A grades = 21% at Bryncelynnog; compared to less than 8% at Pontypridd High School. Evidence shows the poor retention rate of Pontypridd High School's 6th form. It is about viable numbers going forward.

Q. *Many concerns strongly expressed by several school representatives that the data in the consultation document is inaccurate. Need to look at trends and take all indicators into account.*

A. The LA is not saying that Pontypridd High School is a poor school. Bryncelynnog is improving and has consistently better results.

Comment from school - Pontypridd High is also improving and references to 'consistently low' and 'worst in Wales' are strongly disputed. Third and fourth quartile positioning is the same for Bryncelynnog, yet Pontypridd High is emphasised. The document is factually incorrect – the data is correct, yet the analysis is wrong.

Q. The Cabinet report refers to Bryncelynnog as an improving school consistently performing above the Welsh average for A-Level provision. Where is the evidence Bryncelynnog is an improving school?

A. Results are going up. KS4 and KS5 data for 2018 evidence this statement.

Q. Pontypridd High School's results have also improved – these have not been mentioned. The wording has been used to mislead and data used is not factual.

A. The LA appreciates it is not easy to hear and appreciates that the school have been working hard. The data is correct.

Q. Conclusions made from the data are inaccurate. Data does not support the statements made. Decisions are not being justified. This document has already gone to parents/Cabinet Members with inaccurate data included. LA should have made sure information was correct before misleading Members' decisions.

A. A final decision has not been made. The only decision made is the decision to consult which is what this period is.

Q. What does the LA think of the provision in Coleg y Cymoedd now (after the £40 million new build)? They were in a partnership with Cardinal Newman and the school has now withdrawn from the agreement.

A. In terms of vocational pathways, the college is a good choice. They are an improving college and ESTYN have recognised this and they have invested in new A Level teachers.

Q. Does the Director of Education have any influence on Coleg y Cymoedd?

A. Coleg y Cymoedd have a different management structure but the LA is represented on the board and is aware that the college's results have improved this year.

Q. A-Level results would have included Cardinal Newman pupils.

A. This is not correct, as establishments can only report results against where the pupil is actually registered.

Q. What evidence can be produced to show that Coleg y Cymoedd results have improved?

A. An inspection has been carried out.

Q. Isn't the fact that Cardinal Newman has withdrawn after three years from Coleg y Cymoedd proof that this type of agreement does not work?

A. Pupils following vocational courses deserve the same opportunities/options. Not all LA's in Wales have 6th forms still forming part of their secondary schools. 6th

form provision is vocational as well as A-Level and the college offers a different pathway.

Q. *In Coleg y Cymoedd only 3% study for A-levels. This is not a Centre of Excellence. Pontypridd High School could be a Centre of Excellence. Concerns expressed regarding Coleg y Cymoedd not publishing results.*

A. The school does not have the pupil numbers to have a viable 6th form.

Q. *Children in college don't have the same level of support.*

A. The LA cannot comment for the college.

Comment from school - It shouldn't be an option in the document then.

Comment from LA - 67% of Year 11 pupils chose not to return to Pontypridd High School.

Q. *Pontypridd as an area has a high volume of traffic which could add an hour onto the day due to travelling.*

A. Some pupils (e.g. those in the Hawthorn area) would have a shorter distance to travel to Bryncelynog than if they had to travel to Pontypridd High.

The school summarised their concerns:

- Questions about the data analysis in the consultation document.
- Questions about standards in the college – Estyn report refers to the need for improvements in A-Levels.
- Questions regarding the 6th form numbers in the consultation document.
- What is a viable 6th form? Where does the 250 pupils figure come from?
- The consultation document states that the combined 6th forms of Pontypridd High School and Hawthorn High School are 245 pupils with 44 post-16 courses of under 5. Where did these figures come from? There are only 6 post-16 courses at Pontypridd High School with 5 pupils or less.

A. 6th form numbers are calculated from funding levels data, SIMS returns and timetables.

Comment from school - Consortium working is used to make classes viable.

A. Pontypridd High School is running at a £500,000 deficit which could increase by a further £100,000 next year.

Comment from school - No-one is disputing the need to review 6th form provision in Pontypridd. What is disputed are the options which have been put forward.

Q. Concerns expressed regarding the language used in the consultation document stating that pupils 'will transfer' to Bryncelynnog. What happens if students choose not to go to Bryncelynnog? In a survey carried out with 900 students only 4 said they would possibly go.

A. Pupils' decisions cannot be pre-determined, but similar discussions/conversations took place with Porth/Ferndale and Tonypany (Nant Gwyn) however it largely resulted in pupils choosing to go with the alternative proposals made.

Q. Pupil voice is being disregarded.

A. Pupils opinions are not disregarded, they all form part of the consultation and will be included in the consultation report.

Q. Do we know of the numbers in Tonyrefail School and has it made the proposal financially viable?

A. 50% of pupils from Ferndale's Year 11 chose to go to Tonyrefail's 6th form.

Comment: Bryncelynnog is anticipated to have a 6th form of 388 comprising:

- 105 pupils from Pontypridd High
- 178 pupils from Bryncelynnog
- 105 pupils from Hawthorn High

Proposal to relocate primary school

Q. Page 7 refers to a radically different education – what is meant by this?

A. Professor Donaldson's report refers to the ability for schools to share staff between phases and building up relationships with pupils at all key stages. Also, being better able to cater for more able and talented pupils.

Q. The provision of transition is challenging. Would any additional funding be available, particularly in relation to schools which are not part of the 3-16 school?

A. This is very much in the thinking of the 3-16 and 3-19 schools that have been established to date and would be supported and organised by the headteacher of the receiving school. Transition was looked at closely in relation to the Rhondda and Tonyrefail schools and transition events continue. During the setup of existing through schools, opportunities were looked at and funding provided to support.

Q. If the Year 7/8 block was used, would three new DT rooms be provided elsewhere?

A. The teaching environment is important. Remodelling works etc. would be investigated once a decision had been made. All areas of the buildings and the overall requirements of the school would be looked at, taking into account the removal of the 6th form and the space that would create.

Road safety measures

Q. Road safety measures are needed and consideration needs to be given to the number of cars accessing Pontypridd High School. The £4.7 million could end up being spent on a road programme, not on the school.

A. A full traffic impact assessment will be carried out and this is separately funded. Any road safety measures outside the school site would be separately funded.

Q. Are Coedpenmaen aware there will be no free transport provided to Pontypridd High if the catchment changes?

A. They would be aware and this would be the case (i.e. no free transport) if they live within 1.5 miles of Pontypridd High School.

Q. Is transport provided to Bryncelynnog, or just the nearest centre?

A. Transport would be provided to the nearest centre offering the subject choice, if the pupil lives over 2 miles away.

Q. Has any consideration been made to create a 6th form facility in Pontypridd town centre – suggestions made of possible locations including – the Old Girls Grammar School which is owned by the University and a large area of land behind the former Pontypridd lower school site at Tyfica Road. Only an office block type structure would be needed, no external play areas would be needed for the 6th form.

A. The former Girls Grammar School is part of the University and the site at Tyfica road is simply too small. We cannot build an office type structure as we need facilities to accommodate the curriculum and comply with Building Bulletin Guidelines for school facilities. This simply would not be an economical or physical option.

Human Resources

Q. What is the process for appointing staff?

A. Initially a temporary governing body would be appointed. Then a new headteacher would be appointed. It would be their responsibility to develop a staffing structure. There is a Managing Change document which outlines how the structure would be put in place. Trade Unions are also consulted with/involved. Decisions of the temporary governing body cannot be pre-determined, but the posts are most likely to be ring-fenced for staff in the existing affected schools. It would be a top-down appointment process starting with the senior leadership roles. Staff can apply for many jobs. Some staff may express an interest in leaving/ retiring etc. and figures can be provided on a without prejudice basis. Human Resources and Trade Unions would be available for advice. The best time to meet would be when the structure was out.

Q. What is the timeframe?

- A. Working back from 2022 – the temporary governing body would need to be set up from September 2020 – this would comprise of existing governors of Pontypridd High and Cilfynydd Primary Schools.

Protected salary arrangements discussed. These costs would be picked up by the LA, not the school. Protection would be one grade only and there is no protection on hours.

Q. During previous school re-organisations were some staff left without jobs?

- A. A small minority were offered re-deployment into other schools in RCT. RCT will make every effort to ensure every employee who wishes to remain employed gets the opportunity to remain, however that cannot be guaranteed.

Q. If not successful in retaining a post will redundancy be offered?

- A. If there is a compulsory redundancy situation, employees who are 55 years old or over would also get release of their pension (without detriment). Human Resources staff will be available for further discussions in the future.

Summary provided by the school:-

- Change recognised.
- Pontypridd High School is a good school with a lot to offer.
- The options for the 6th form are not accepted for the following reasons:-
 - Data analysis is wrong/misleading.
 - Geographical location/distance to Bryncelynnog does not work (the schools have tried to work together before).
 - The college is vocationally strong however the level of success at A-level is not known.
 - The primary school proposal is not objected to.
 - More discussions are required in relation to options in this area for 6th form provision, especially in the town of Pontypridd.

ET thanked all for their attendance and the meeting closed at 4:45pm.