

Notes of a meeting held with students at Coleg Y Cymoedd (CYC)
Monday 26th November 2018 at 10:30 am

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

Present

Gaynor Davies (GD), Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Andrea Richards (AR), Head of 21st Century Schools
Lisa Howell (LH), Senior 21st Century Schools Officer
Sophie Nicholls (SN), Graduate Officer 21st Century Schools
23 students who previously attended Pontypridd High, Hawthorn High or Cardinal Newman.

Introductions

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

GD explained that officers are here today to ask in particular why the students chose college over school and what has been their experience here.

Feedback

Pupil – School wasn't a positive experience. Teachers wouldn't listen to us but they do in College.

Q. GD - What is the pastoral care like here?

A. Student – Very good. They help me with my course and are always available to support me if I am struggling with a piece of coursework. They also listen and help if I have any worries and any personal problems I'm having.

Student – It depends on the teachers. There were some at school that were great but some that were not. I chose to come here because I could do a BTEC here but in Pontypridd High it was an exam. I wanted to do music and business and there wasn't enough take up of music in school. I think it would be a really good idea to have a big sixth form in Bryncelynog because you will have more choice there as it will be funded, but you could still come here for BTEC.

Q. GD – What about A Levels?

A. Student – I spoke to my friends at Pontypridd High and they said that the teachers are spread too thinly as they are working with years 7-11 as well as sixth form and they don't have the time to commit and support especially if they are having problems with their coursework.

Student – I think a big sixth form is a brilliant idea. I went to sixth form in Hawthorn High and the support and technology there was awful. It's much

better here and I can undertake in particular the computer course I specifically require to go to University.

Student – The consortium is a shambles. Teachers are stretched and we could tell they were stressed. Post 16 wasn't a focus. It is a focus here and we get more attention. I had one teacher in Hawthorn High and one teacher in Pontypridd High. I had less support split over two sites and the teachers didn't talk to each other so we would have the same lessons twice.

Q. GD – What was it like meeting the new people here?

A. Student – I prefer it here. We all did our own thing after GCSE and I have made loads of friends here and met my girlfriend. It's great preparation for university.

Student – I found it hard to start because I had five close friends from Pontypridd High but I now know so many more people with different viewpoints and have lots more new friends.

Q. GD – What do you think the big differences are between sixth form in school and here?

A. Student – You can express yourself how you want to here and are accepted for that.

Student – We are treated like adults and we are trusted more here. We can go home to study and I am doing more learning independently rather than being forced to stay in school.

Q. GD – Are there any negatives to taking the sixth form out of the schools?

A. Student – It will be hard for the people who live far away from the school.

GD – We will offer transport to those living more than two miles away.

Student – Yes we get transport here too but it can be difficult on occasions. We get public buses can be unreliable. Some of the buses are school buses but they are often late because they have already been to drop off at one school.

GD – We need to get the transport right for these pupils then.

Student – Yes.

Q. GD – Do you think the level of your course is right for you?

A. Student – Our A level chemistry teacher spent a lot of time with us to make sure we were happy to do the level of work and what the options were. In school we were just told "do this course, it will be fine". At the college open day I spoke to people about one subject for 25minutes and they supported me to undertake the correct course for my future options for University.

Student – In Hawthorn they don't speak about college at all. They just say the best thing is sixth form but they don't ask and know what we need. They just say you're in sixth form and you're an adult so grow up if you have issues.

Student – The relationships here are fab. They are always there for you to make sure you are good at home too.

Student – Pontypridd High brought us here to the college to see what was on offer.

Q. AR – Do you think you have benefitted from coming here?

A. Student – yes and we are undertaking the courses we want.

Q. GD – How many of you wouldn't have been able to do your current course had you stayed in school? Can we have a show of hands?

A. 13 out of 23 pupils.

Student – In Hawthorn I could do IT but not computer science. They said for me to go off and research it. I can't do that I need to be taught and I need it for the university course I want to do.

Q. GD – Is there a clear pathway shown to you here?

A. Student – Yes if you have a target they will tell you all the different options to reach it.

Student – The tutors are really supportive and they sort any problems. They help you learn from your mistakes here instead of just disciplining you.

Q. AR – Do you get advice on work experience here?

A. Student – I can go abroad for two weeks on my business course, and we also have university lecturers who come in to teach us from time to time.

Student – I have add-ons here too. I can learn extra things if I want to and put the time into it.

Q. GD – If we are looking at investing in schools, how best can we get pupils' input?

A. Student – Do interesting events and make it worth them coming to give input.

Student – Show off the equipment and technology.

Q. LH – Do you think the learning environment is important to you?

A. Student – Yes, Hawthorn High is a prison. There are fences all around it. There is so much freedom here to go home if we need to.

Q. GD – What do you think about the learning environment at the college?

A. Student – They trust us to leave and come back and we trust them to support us.

GD – What impact does that have on your learning?

Student – I know that I am responsible for my own learning and I feel more like an adult. You lose your drive to do well if you are trapped in school and there is no room for you. Not everyone learns the same.

GD – So sixth form rooms are full in school?

Student – Yes, rooms are full and then you are told off for wandering or you have to ask for a key to a spare room if there is one. In the college there are lots of excellent places to self study.

Q. GD – Does anyone regret coming here?

A. Student – No.

Student – No, I met so many friends here and I am not bullied here. In school you have to sort it out yourself and fight because teachers don't do anything.

Student – If you are bullied here they sort it out. Everyone is different here but we all respect each other and we are tolerant of each other.

Student – The PE boys in school were the favourites and they could get away with bullying.

Q. LH – Is there any vandalism here?

A. Student – Everyone respects their environment here. Everything is clean and tidy here. In school the driers and toilet doors were hanging off the walls, we had no nice areas to study and the college has lovely areas that we feel safe and secure in.

Q. Student – With the 3-16 schools would they stay on the same site? I really enjoyed moving up to high school.

A. GD – We are trying to limit the transition for pupils who can find it hard. The playgrounds will be separate but the older pupils could help with the younger pupils and the younger pupils could use the specialist facilities that are only usually available for high school pupils.

Q. Student – It would be good if the schools just showed all of the options to you instead of only looking at sixth form.

A. GD – Yes we need to show a variety of options.

Student – I went to Cardinal Newman when it was split, but it wasn't the friendliest of splits. I was really worried I wouldn't get enough support but I get

so much support here. I even get email responses off teachers on the weekends when I have asked them a question to help me with my coursework.

Student – There is way more access to extra-curricular activities here. I do the knitting nanas club. There is also a huge LGBT support group here too. In my first lesson here my teacher said that the most important thing we can do is respect each other and that she would happily have a lengthy debate with anyone who disagreed with that. I know that maybe there aren't enough funds to create the same type of support groups in Pontypridd High, but people weren't confident enough to come out in school. Some of my friends changed their names here and staff would help here and adapt what they called them to make it suitable for them.

Q. AR – Do you think sixth form in schools is old fashioned?

A. Student – Yes in a way because you are trapped and so many teachers left Pontypridd High because they are stressed and too busy trying to teach year 7-11 too. The 3-16 is okay but I loved meeting new people when I went to high school and made that transition. There was a lot of bullying in my primary so I was glad to meet new people.

GD – There will still be some other pupils joining in year 7, but we are trying to minimise the number of transitions generally.

GD thanked all for their inputs.
The meeting closed.