

Appendix 2A – Notes of Meeting with School Council of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School

Date	8 th January 2025
Time	13:30
Venue	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School

Attendance		
Name	Initials	Title
Lisa Howell	LH	Schools Business and School Organisation Manager
Sarah Corcoran	SC	Head of Achievement and Wellbeing
Bethan Gannon	BG	School Improvement Support Officer
25 members of the Mountain Ash Comprehensive School Council.		

1. Welcome and Introductions

SC and LH welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting. Introductions were made.

2. Consultation Overview

SC provided the meeting with an overview of the proposal being made and the consultation process to be followed, as set out in the Consultation Document.

3. School Council Questions

The School Council of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School were invited to ask questions and provide any feedback or comments on the proposals. The questions raised and comments made by the School Council, and responses provided, are summarised in the table that follows.

Number	Question/Comment	Response
1	Why does the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) want to shut the Mountain Ash Comprehensive School's sixth form?	<p>The reasons for the proposal are included within the Consultation Document.</p> <p>In all schools we look at the post-16 provision and want to make sure that the education offered is as good as it can be and that the best options for future pathways are provided.</p> <p>This just a proposal and we're here to find out what you think of it.</p>
2	What about the pupils that will struggle for transportation to Aberdare Community School?	We believe that all pupils who live in the Mountain Ash Community School catchment area would be entitled to free home to school transport.

3	On average Mountain Ash Comprehensive School does better than Aberdare Community School.	This is not true. Both schools are good schools.
4	There are good results and support at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School. Is the decision to close the sixth form only on the low numbers?	<p>There are many reasons the proposal has been brought forward. One of which is the low numbers of pupils in the sixth form. The low numbers have a financial impact and negatively affect the budget at the school.</p> <p>These reason for consulting on the proposal are all included in the Consultation Document.</p>
5	With regards to travel, transport from Penrhiwceibr will be stopped next year. Will this be the same if we had to travel to Aberdare Community School?	Given the distance, there will be free transport provided for pupils living in Penrhiwceibr travelling to Aberdare Community School.
6	You say Mountain Ash Comprehensive School only offer a small number of options compared to other schools. How many more options are the other schools offering?	<p>We don't have this information to hand but will include it in the Consultation Report.</p> <p>Post meeting note: Mountain Ash Comprehensive School are offering 13 subjects in year 12 and eight subjects in year 13. This is a low number, and the Welsh Government (WG) expect pupils to have access to 20 subjects for a sixth form to be viable.</p>
7	My opinion is that I don't think it's fair to just have a choice to go to Aberdare Community School or college. It's not fair that the option to continue our sixth form education at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has been taken away.	Thank you for sharing. This is understandable, and we note your concern.
8	How can we guarantee that there will be enough support for us at Aberdare Community School if there are more pupils there?	<p>Schools are funded per pupil, so there will be adequate support provided.</p> <p>There is plenty of space at ACS to accommodate all new pupils who wish to go there.</p>
9	Will there be a difference for pupils in terms of costs, like travel and uniform?	We've discussed travel already, but in terms of uniform, we are not sure if there is a difference in costs, however, there will be help and support available. To note, Mountain Ash Comprehensive School's sixth form uniform is different to the uniform in years seven to 11, so should you choose to continue your post-16 education at Mountain Ash

		Comprehensive School you would need a new uniform.
10	Can you tell us how much the sixth form numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School have decreased?	Going back ten years, the returning numbers of pupils has decreased by 60.0% and now under 30.0% are returning.
11	Have you taken into consideration that Covid-19 could have had an effect on the sixth form numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School?	<p>Mountain Ash Comprehensive School will have that information as to why there is a decline in sixth form numbers and whether that would be because of Covid-19 or not.</p> <p>In terms of Covid-19, there isn't any evidence yet stating that it has had an immediate impact on what pupils are doing now but the number of pupils going to apprenticeship schemes have increased.</p>
12	Comment: Heard from friends and family that staff aren't as supportive at Aberdare Community School compared to Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.	We note your opinion, but this is not the case and other students have a very different experience.
13	Have you looked at how this will affect the community?	<p>Yes, the impact on the community has been considered.</p> <p>A Community Impact Assessment for the proposal has been prepared. and you can read this on the council website on the consultation page. .</p>
14	Pupils are worried about mental health issues as Mountain Ash Comprehensive School is a safe space for them and they know their teachers.	<p>This was brought up by the staff at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and everyone feels the impact of change differently.</p> <p>Those who suffer with anxiety will feel stress more than others. Should the proposal proceed, effective transition will be crucial in managing any change. Where this has happened before the transition process has been well managed and support where needed will be given to all pupils.</p>
15	Comment: Worried that more pupils won't carry on with education because of the changes. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School pupils want to get a career and concerned that pupils will end up in dead end jobs simply because their option of staying at	This is understandable, and we note your concern. We really hope that this won't happen and both schools will do all they can to support students with the changes.

	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School was taken away.	
16	Will closing the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School limit our options.	<p>No. Larger sixth forms have more potential for economies of scale and financial efficiencies. Larger sixth forms enable a broad and balanced post-16 education to pupils that better meets the needs of individual pupils and as such could improve pupil outcomes.</p> <p>Transferring sixth form pupils from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to Aberdare Community School would create more social interaction opportunities that have a positive impact on pupil wellbeing.</p>
17	The teachers that mainly teach sixth form, what will happen to their jobs.	<p>A meeting with staff has already taken place and this was discussed.</p> <p>Staff will be supported when going through this process by colleagues in our Human Resources team.</p>
18	For pupils that have additional learning needs (ALN), change can cause a lot of stress for them. How will they be supported?	<p>Please be assured that all pupils that need it will be supported.</p> <p><u>The ALN Code for Wales (2021)</u> recommends that school settings adopt a graduated response to meeting the ALN of children and young people.</p> <p>This responsibility will be met regardless of which school a young person attends.</p>
19	The pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School have built relationships with their teachers and are concerned going to Aberdare Community School will make them feel like outsiders.	We have had examples of other sixth forms that have closed previously and some of the pupils have positive things to say and they didn't feel like outsiders. It would be good to get those pupils who have been through the same change to discuss this with you.
20	Comment: Being in year 10 and speaking with classmates, a lot of them are saying they want to stay at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.	Thank you for sharing this. This is understandable. We know that change can be hard for some people however support where needed will be provided.
21	When we moved from year six to year seven there was no transition at all.	This was during Covid-19 and transition was difficult when we were unable to mix but we are not in a global pandemic anymore and it would be completely different.

22	How will Aberdare Community School adjust with additional pupils?	There is capacity at Aberdare Community School to accommodate all pupils who wish to go there.
23	Pupils will have a slower and harder start because they have to adapt to different ways of learning with new technology.	<p>This will be accommodated, and it will be beneficial as pupils will be able to use both technologies.</p> <p>Having experience of different technologies is a positive experience, so don't view that change as a negative.</p>
24	Aberdare Community School pupils will have a close relationship with their teachers whereas Mountain Ash Comprehensive School pupils won't have those relationships.	Again, this could be a skill building opportunity for you as you enter adulthood and gain more experience of forming relationships with other people.
25	Comment: Some pupils who attend other settings for lessons still come back to their teacher at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to get support from them.	Pastoral support is available in all schools. It's great to hear that the staff at MACS are so well thought of by you all, but those relationships can be built with the staff at ACS.
26	What is your opinion whether it should be closed?	<p>We are here to find out your opinions so that we can have all the information.</p> <p>We use the factual information in our consultation information but what it doesn't include is what you all think and you are the heart of the school so your opinions really matter. This is why you have to put your comments in writing, in the same way as parents/carers and staff.</p>

4. Closing Remarks

The school council members were encouraged to engage in the consultation process through completing the online survey or putting comments in writing to schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk.

All attendees were thanked for participating in the meeting.

Meeting closed at 14:45.