

17th December

Re: Consultees in relation to - Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close the Sixth Form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School

Dear Cabinet Members,

I have been instructed by this Council's Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to convey the comments and observations of Members in relation to **Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close the Sixth Form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School**, and for the comments to be included in the public consultation before its consideration by Cabinet at its meeting.

The Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to act as consultees and gave their feedback and comments in respect of the proposal at its meeting on the 10th December 2024. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the report presented by the Director of Education and Inclusion Services.

The full discussions of the committee in respect of this item of business can be viewed [here](#).

In summary, the following points were discussed in relation to Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close the Sixth Form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School.

- A Member noted that the report highlighted significant funding shortfalls at both Mountain Ash CS and Aberdare CS for Post 16 education and sought clarification on how the proposal would result in a more financially sustainable Post 16 provision.
- A Member sought clarification how the Council would ensure accessibility for students with disabilities or other special educational needs.
- A Member stated, in regard to the curriculum, that while the proposal sought to expand access to a broader curriculum, there was a concern on the impact of a larger centralised sixth form on how this would impact smaller, more niche courses that maybe available at Mountain Ash CS, but not at Aberdare CS e.g., Engineering, and asked if this consolidation would limit some learners' subject choices.
- A Member sought clarification around what support structure e.g., counselling, academic support, etc., would be in place for the current year 12 and 13 students during the transition period, especially for those who might experience difficulty adapting to the changes.

- A Member recognised, from the data that on balance there had been a dramatic drop in pupil numbers, so young people were already voting with their feet.
- A Member observed that the other choice was Coleg Y Cymoedd and sought clarification of capacity and whether young people had opportunities to visit, so they had a genuine choice.
- A Member acknowledged the figures for Mountain Ash CS and Aberdare CS had been provided in the report but felt a useful comparator would be to see how many young people were undertaking A-Levels at St John's School and requested this be included in the final report to Cabinet.
- A Member also requested that destination figures be provided in the final report to Cabinet, for context, as she had concerns about sustainability moving forward, and wanted reassurance that by making the changes, sixth form education within the area was going to be sustainable across two schools working in conjunction, rather than the three.
- A Member sought reassurance that appropriate consultees were included in the consultation including, RhAG (Rhieni ar gyfer Addysg Gymraeg / Parents for Welsh Education), recognising the opportunity for Welsh Language Immersion, should the proposal go ahead.
- A Member sought reassurance that on the Aberdare CS site, there would be enough additional parking for staff who may transfer and that there was adequate space for home to school transport to be dropping off the young people.
- A Member acknowledged that Aberdare CS was a new 21st century school and sought reassurance that there was enough canteen space to accommodate additional students, and that queuing would not be an issue.
- A Member sought reassurance that there would be enough teaching space and sixth form breakout space for young people to spend time with their peers e.g., a common room/working spaces.
- A Member sought clarification that if the proposal went ahead, how would staffing be managed for those year 13's currently studying A-Levels in Mountain Ash CS.
- A Member sought clarification, as mentioned on page 29 of the report in relation to the funding allocation per pupil, noting this was going to change.
- A Member raised concern about what steps were being taken to address the existing maintenance backlog of £1.4 million and what impact this would have on the future of Mountain Ash CS, acknowledging that whilst the report stated that Mountain Ash CS would continue to provide secondary education for pupils, were there any plans to develop the school to enhance its appeal, and overall education offer, recognising that some parents may consider starting

their children earlier in Aberdare CS or St John's instead, if there was no sixth form, with home to school transport guaranteed for faith schools.

- A Member raised concerns about sixth form viability and the declining rates in RCT sixth forms in general, recognising that although there was a declining birth rate it was not commensurate, whilst acknowledging that young people had a choice.
- A Member noted the report mentioned the possibility of staff transferring over to Aberdare CS, from Mountain Ash CS, should that opportunity be available, but felt it was Important for the committee to note, that many teachers would choose a school on the basis it has a sixth form, as many teachers want to ensure that they retain their expertise teaching level 3 learners, and that it was an important part of their continued professional development.
- A Member, in relation to Curriculum for Wales (CfW), sought clarification around the offer approved by Qualifications Wales at level 3, and asked if Officers were confident that schools were able to offer this and if there was confidence that Aberdare CS would be able to continue to offer that range should the pupils from Mountain Ash CS transfer there.
- Members highlighted their concern and sought clarification and reassurance around home to transport, including the potential increased costs which are unknown at consultation stage.

Yours sincerely



Christian Hanagan
Service Director Democratic Services and Communication