

Notes of a meeting held with the school council of Pontypridd High School

Monday 12th November 2018 at 2.00 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
Andrea Richards (AR), Head of 21st Century Schools
Nicola Goodman (NG), Senior 21st Century Schools Officer
Catrin Edwards, Head of Transformation and Data Systems
Emma Griffiths, 21st Century Schools
Members of the school council – 13 pupils (Years 7 to 12), plus 2 members of school staff

The Chair of the student council was introduced.

Introductions from Council officers.

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 and timescales relating to the consultation process and the proposals themselves, should they be implemented.

In relation to proposed catchment changes a number of pupils identified themselves as having attended Coedpenmaen or Maesycoed Primary schools, but choosing Pontypridd High School instead of Hawthorn High School for their secondary education.

The meeting was then opened for questions.

Q. *The proposals to reorganise schools are part of a programme called 21st Century schools. What does this actually mean?*

A. ET explained that the Welsh Government provide funding along with Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Council who match the amount to make improvements to schools. ET further explained that surplus places equals wasted money and added that the Council aims to reduce the number of secondary schools and small primary schools due to some of them being too small and/or in poor condition. The Council make decisions whilst looking at the bigger picture.

AR referred to the new curriculum for Wales and the need to 'future proof' schools to provide a suitable learning environment for the 21st Century.

Q. The programme costs £4.7m. Where does all of this money come from?

A. CE explained how local government borrow money, like a mortgage, and pay it back. Welsh Government provide 65% of the funding and the Council provide the other 35%.

Q. What do you mean by a Sixth Form Centre of Excellence?

A. ET advised that this is where there are a viable number of pupils wanting to study each subject, with a wide range of subjects available, the best facilities and staff able to teach up to A-Level. Some pupils are currently travelling during the school day to attend lessons in a neighbouring school which is not ideal.

The pupils identified that there are currently 104 pupils in years 12 and 13 and they have a choice of approximately 20 subjects, therefore, class sizes are small.

Q. Why has Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School been chosen as a Sixth Form Centre of Excellence from 2022 bearing in mind the geographical impact? Also, would there be a dedicated bus, or would pupils be given bus passes?

A. ET advised that Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School has a larger number of pupils with better results from A* to C.

AR added that pupil numbers will be considered and whether a dedicated bus or bus passes were provided would depend on pupil numbers. However, free transport would be provided to pupils living further than 2 miles away.

Q. Consultation document shows Pontypridd High School's results as 100% in one category.

A. CE provided an update on current results data and pupil numbers at Pontypridd High School compared to Bryncelynnog for post-16 pupils which show Bryncelynnog as having better performance levels.

ET reiterated that the LA are not implying that Pontypridd High's 6th form is not good, but there is a need to offer wider subject choices. Only 32% of pupils returned to Pontypridd High School's sixth form, compared to nearly 45% at Bryncelynnog.

Q. Has it been considered that pupils from Pontypridd High may be uncomfortable moving schools and meeting/mixing with new pupils?

A. CE advised that there would be a lot of transition work.

AR added that these activities would be similar to that of the Rhondda Schools which would help pupils in making new friends. The LA want

pupils to be happy in school. Pastoral care is very important and social activities as well as curriculum management is closely looked at.

Q. *Why isn't there a proposal for a 6th form in Pontypridd?*

A. ET explained that pupil numbers in Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High would not be viable to create a 6th form. 250 pupils as a minimum are required. Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High only have 245 combined on present numbers.

Q. *A setting in Pontypridd town centre may be more appealing to retain pupils in the 6th Form.*

A. ET explained that the post 16 funding is not enough to cover the costs of the courses and Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 funding has to be used to 'prop up' 6th form funding.

CE reiterated that Bryncelynnog were not running a deficit budget, however, emphasised that this proposal is not about money.

Q. *The consultation document says that A-level standards at Pontypridd High are poor. Can you tell us how you have come to this conclusion?*

A. CE referred to the All Wales Core Data Set and advised that most schools have high scores for A to E grades at A-Level. However, RCT would like all pupils to have a better opportunity to achieve A-C grades, as these are looked at more when pupils are striving for better universities.

The student council queried the Average Point Score.

CE confirmed that Pontypridd High was the highest. However, this is not a good comparator. AWPS is not a criteria used by Universities for University applications.

The student council commented that Pontypridd High scored more highly than Bryncelynnog on 6 out of 9 comparisons. On 7 out of 9 comparisons Bryncelynnog scored more highly.

ET commented that comparatives with Bryncelynnog is not like with like when Pontypridd provide more key skill courses.

Q. *What research have you done in terms of Pontypridd High School students wanting to go to Bryncelynnog if it became a Centre of Excellence? Would it surprise you to know that hardly anyone wants to go to there?*

A. ET reiterated that the LA are not saying that Pontypridd High is a bad school/6th form. The reason behind the proposal is to alleviate the need for students to travel during the school day which is not viable for the future.

AR suggested that students in Pontypridd High speak with pupils from Tonyrefail, Treorchy, Porth, etc. who have recently gone through a similar situation.

ET pointed out that some LA's have no schools with 6th forms, just tertiary colleges (e.g. Neath).

Q. *Some students always go to college for certain courses but not A-levels. What are the standards like at Coleg y Cymoedd for A-levels?*

A. ET agreed that Coleg y Cymoed are more focused on vocational courses, however, following this consultation/proposals they may offer more/wider selection of A-level courses.

Q. *Would class sizes be larger? Concerns that results may not improve if class sizes were larger.*

A. AR advised that it was hoped that class sizes would be larger and that there would be more post-16 subject choices offered in one location.

Q. *If 200 primary aged children are based on our site, where will they be taught?*

A. AR advised that the LA would work collaboratively with the school to determine what fits best. Options will be considered, for example, the use of the year 7-8 block, reshaping of areas of the site to suit, including separate external play area. Plus the school already has many surplus places.

NG and CE advised that the building was over 30% empty.

Q. *The document says 3-16 at Pontypridd High will take a 'radically different approach' to education. What do you mean by this?*

A. ET referred to the Donaldson Report and outlined the new curriculum – namely six areas of learning.

Q. *What happens in terms of our comments after this meeting?*

A. Minutes taken will form part of the consultation report given to RCT councillors. They will then make the decision whether or not to proceed to the next stage, which would be the publication of a statutory notice.

Q. *When will a final decision be made by the Council?*

A. If the decision to go ahead is made then statutory notices will be issued at the end of February/March 2019.

Objections will be received at this stage. Final decision would be made by elected members after viewing all documentation/evidence.

NG referred to the questionnaire in the consultation document which all were encouraged to complete.

ET thanked all for their attendance and inputs.

The meeting closed at 2:50pm.