

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

Monday 12th November at 3:30 pm

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

RCT Council officers present:

Chris Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Bernard Whittingham, Head of Secondary School Achievement
Lisa Howell, 21st Century Team Officer
Sophie Nicholls, Graduate Officer 21st Century Schools
Ellen Williams, Human Resources Advisor
47 members of school staff and governors

Gaynor Davies (GD) referred to the excellent participation of the school council during the earlier meeting with them.

GD 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 post16 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 3-6 '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.

GD 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.

GD 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. GD 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.

Q. *What does sixth form centre of excellence actually mean?*

A. There are unsustainable numbers forecast for this sixth form. The ultimate goal is to give pupils a wide range of curriculum choices. This is currently unavailable here and is financially unsustainable.

Q. *The sixth form pupils took that as meaning that all of the A-Levels would be at Bryncelynnog and all of the vocational courses at Coleg Y Cymoedd.*

A. That is not the case. Both will be likely to offer A-Level and vocational courses.

Q. The consultation document says that Bryncelynnog have better results at A*-C than the Welsh National Average. That is not the case for the academic years 2015/16 or 2016/17.

A. Bryncelynnog are consistently improving and performing well. The 2018 data shows Bryncelynnog performing better than Pontypridd High, Hawthorn High and Cardinal Newman.

Q. Wouldn't you expect that for their free school meals numbers?

A. I agree that the factors and indicators for KS5 data are difficult, but Estyn don't compare free school meal numbers at 6th form, and only 36% of pupils returned to sixth form here.

The budget here is in a large deficit and the school has a large catalogue of backlog maintenance. We need to consider this and sixth form numbers on roll to see where is best to set up this sixth form provision.

This will provide opportunities for all young people in terms of subject choice and is fair, as budgets are then also spent more equitably between pupils in years 7-11.

Q. You can't say that all will be able to go to Bryncelynnog because not all pupils will be able to afford to travel. Will they have a choice or will you pay for transport to wherever they choose rather than just to the closest provision? It is a huge catchment and pupils from Ynysybwl will have to leave so early to get to Bryncelynnog.

A. There is also a huge cost for us currently as we pay to transport pupils from one school to another for A-Levels as they work with other schools in the consortium.

Q. Why not build one in Pontypridd and one in Bryncelynnog?

A. The data isn't there to warrant doing that. The demand isn't there to create a sustainable sixth form.

Q. Put a sixth form centre in Pontypridd. There are more numbers in that area than in Beddau.

A. Coleg Y Cymoedd have a sixth form provision for the Pontypridd area for 300+ pupils. I asked Headteachers to look at the sixth form provision when I was Director of Education and nothing has improved a great deal. The school is £400,000 in deficit which is money effectively being borrowed from the Council to fund a financially unviable sixth form with only 36% of pupils returning.

Q. Cardinal Newman moved their sixth form to Coleg Y Cymoedd (CYC) and it didn't work.

A. Data for 2018 shows that they are doing very well.

- Q. *But we can't see that data. We have tried to improve links with CYC. The consultation document says that classes with under 5 pupils are as high as 28 when in reality there are only 8. I am distressed by this data. Travelling to Bryncelynnog is difficult and there is no direct transport link to here. We have no data from CYC to advise our pupils to go there.***
- A. We aren't criticising the effort you have put into this. The deficit has a detrimental impact to the KS3 and KS4 pupils too. CYC outcomes have improved so much this year and data will be ratified shortly. Children are already voting with their feet because you are constrained by the budget to offer a wider range of subjects.
- Q. *We always budget for the number of pupils that pass the level 2 threshold and I don't register the figure of only 36% of pupils staying. I don't think that the direct comparison between us and Bryncelynnog is helpful. Calling them an improving school and not us makes it difficult for pupils to decide where to go.***
- Q. *Carrying a deficit for 8 years we have fought to deliver a strong education using that deficit. We haven't spent carelessly. We are a leaner machine now. We shouldn't be lumped together with worse schools financially. The consultation document is painting a different picture.***
- A. You may have decreased the deficit previously but it has grown again in the last few years and this is linked to the fewer number of pupils staying for sixth form. There is more choice here but they are already choosing to go elsewhere.
- A. Staff - We have high aspirations to offer whatever pupils want, but pupils are leaving to do other things, not other A-Levels elsewhere.
- Q. *If there is no sixth form in Pontypridd, you will remove the aspirations for pupils to do A-Levels because they want to stay with supportive teachers. We will lose sixth form teachers and will be a category 3:2 school because we are already a category 3 school but will then be without the sixth form. Putting a sixth form in Bryncelynnog where they have less pupils, it is not true that they will be able to do it in a more financially viable way up there. We are being treated differently to Mountain Ash who are a category 1 school. We are treated differently to the Cynon and Rhondda valleys. From a political point of view there is a huge argument to maintain a sixth form LEA provision in the Pontypridd area regardless of which school it is in.***
- A. Young people will have a choice to pick CYC and Bryncelynnog and have the choice of many subjects and career pathways.

Q. From the top site they won't go to Bryncelynnog. Their parents won't pay for them to go. We need to encourage them not get in their way. After school these pupils can't get home, even from Hawthorn. We are giving them opportunities and if there is one barrier in their way they will use that as an excuse. 2018 statistics show that our most deprived pupils have improved.

A. There are sixth form provisions in the Hawthorn catchment area in CYC.

Q. Why can't we take pupils from Pontypridd and CYC here?

A. The distance between the sites are then the same for those travelling.

Q. No because there are no direct bus routes to Bryncelynnog. You could have a bespoke sixth form unit in Pontypridd for the whole area instead of for a small village.

A. Why would we build something new here when there is already something in place in Coleg Y Cymoedd?

Q. The teaching information isn't clearly available for CYC. I understand it is not sustainable at the moment but a smaller setting which they are used to rather than a large facility at CYC that some pupils can't cope with must be better. Locate the A-Level facility in Pontypridd.

A. It is not cost effective to do this and there is already an A-Level provision in CYC. It is not morally right to prop up a sixth form with funds that should be used for KS3 and 4. If the pupils meet eligibility criteria then they will get transport to the new sixth form. The wider curriculum offered might engage those that are maybe less motivated.

Q. Bryncelynnog is smaller than the combined sixth form figures of Cardinal Newman, Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High, and you are only moving it because a facility exists in CYC. We don't know the background, age of students etc. in CYC for safeguarding reasons, or have any control over their curriculum. How are they more financially sustainable?

A. As an LEA we don't decide the curriculum offered in CYC or in any other sixth form in RCT as the school governors decide this.

Q. Has wellbeing been considered if you ship them off to Beddau?

A. You are assuming that it would be detrimental to change the location of the sixth form provision. There are economies of scale with a large sixth form and there will be more staff to consider the wellbeing of pupils.

Q. *Kirsty Williams talks about the new through school approach to dealing with mental health wellbeing in schools. In addition, 75% of mental health problems start by the age of 24 according to the Joshua Foundation. We need to address this better in schools.*

A. Good transitioning would be key to ensuring that their wellbeing is the highest priority.

A. One traumatic move is between year 6 and year 7. By creating a 3-16 school they would benefit from continuity. There are costs and benefits of moving but at 16 it could be argued that pupils are more capable of dealing with the transition and it is useful for pupils who can prepare for the inevitable transition to higher education or the workplace.

Q. *Can you allow them to stay in Pontypridd?*

A. Receiving education across two sites can be unsettling. There is no continuity there if pupils are struggling with an issue. We are striving for continuity in post-16 and staff will be able to meet the emotional needs of pupils. Economies of scale will allow this to be done effectively in a larger setting. Some pupils will inevitably struggle with the transition but the support will be there to help them.

Q. *There is more and more pressure for staff to do the job of CAMHS etc. in schools. These Welsh Government proposals worry me as I think some children will fall through the gaps.*

A. I totally understand where you are coming from. School and education psychology support is given to schools based on pupil numbers. If there is a larger sixth form and a 3-16 school, all schools involved could have even more support due to the increased numbers.

Q. *Education psychology reports take time. If they are only in a school for two years that time has gone.*

A. Transition is key. We need to ensure transition for these pupils is a priority. There are also Additional Learning Needs reforms being consulted on at the moment and we have a duty of care to all pupils. Communication is key, especially when services are stretched.

Q. *We have a communication link with Pontypridd High too. If it takes over 8 months to reach an education psychologist or CAMHS that is a concern.*

Q. *Building a trusting relationship with pupils is key. They may achieve academically but their wellbeing needs to be of the utmost importance.*

Q. *I have a special needs child and the transition is just words. I have to deal with her emotions when she comes home from school.*

Q. *The college offers 28 A-Levels and 7 vocational courses. We have a large number of sixth form pupils who have 5 GCSEs who then have to do a level 2 course because they didn't have Maths and English, but they*

would have been able to access a level 3 course had they stayed in school. Will that happen in Bryncelynnog?

Q. Have you done a survey with pupils to see how many will go to the new sixth form? You could spend all that money and not have any pupils move there.

A. That would be difficult to gauge now because feelings and emotions about the scheme could change over time. Some parents who were adamant that their children wouldn't go to the new Nantgwyn school, but they are attending now.

Q. My child is 12 and he said he wouldn't go to Bryncelynnog because it is too far. That's one pupil less already.

A. After doing their chosen subjects they may or may not change their minds and decide to go where the better course is for them. If they are engrossed in a subject, the extra mile may be insignificant to them then.

Q. We need to bring more pupils to the Pontypridd area not fewer. Will they be too far away in Bryncelynnog to do their Saturday jobs in Pontypridd if there are fewer chain companies and less people there?

Q. There is a social inclusion issue here. The message you are giving is that Pontypridd isn't good enough to have a sixth form. The pupils have to travel. It should be in Pontypridd and equal to all. What about redundant buildings, could we turn Pont Sion Norton into a sixth form centre?

Q. Aberdare has a sixth form and it has a smaller population than Pontypridd, so does Beddau and Pontyclun. People are seething because they want an in-school option. Shut Y Pant or Treorchy and see how people feel. There are colleges up there too. Pupils stay to do A-Levels here because it is an educational establishment which runs on passion and hard work. The college doesn't do that.

A. With only 36% of pupils staying the vast majority are leaving and take up is low. There is a steady decline and you can't sustainably offer these subjects to one or two pupils. The quality of KS3 and 4 education is not as good because the money is being used to prop up KS5. It is a spiral. The work you have done has been a huge effort but it is not working. There is a sixth form in CYC and we couldn't invest in that area as Welsh Government wouldn't support it and it wouldn't be viable.

Q. But we are borrowing all of the money for it.

A. It is 50% funded by Welsh Government and 50% by us.

Q. We are borrowing more money to the detriment of Pontypridd. Do it in the Cynon Valley. The poor children up there aren't getting any investment.

A. There is a wider picture and £160m was spent on Band A and Band B is another £168m. We are continuously trying to improve our schools ambitiously. We

aren't trying to lay off teachers etc., we are trying to create the best education provision for pupil. We do listen and change based on people's views but we will never please everyone.

Q. How do the sixth form changes alter social mobility? With the 3-16 school they won't see pupils with aspirations to go to university because they haven't got these role models. It is difficult to establish these links with CYC.

A. In the past we have worked with the college to engage with the schools. This is much better now than it was. It can be a partnership for the young people rather than operate as competition.

A. This can happen with Bryncelynnog too by establishing long transition links.

Q. How much money does RCT pay for pupils to get to CYC?

A. Nothing. Welsh Government pays the transport costs.

Q. The consultation document says it only pays for the transport for post-16 to the nearest establishment that offers this.

A. This is stated to stop pupils for example going from Hawthorn to Treorchy. We have stated that we will give them a fair choice of sixth form provision and we will do so.

Q. I am struggling to cope with the projections. If a significant number choose CYC then £10m for a sixth form in Bryncelynnog is a waste if there aren't 420 pupils there. If the funding is going to do other things on site then we want to understand that better because I see they need that too.

A. Realigning the catchment areas is being done to cope with the housing developments in the area. We are still looking at options for the building alterations at the moment.

Q. How sustainable post 2022 is Hawthorn if we are trying to get pupils here from closer to Bryncelynnog, when we are being described as third / fourth quartile school and Bryncelynnog is being described as 'improving'. It will be difficult to get pupils here, especially if they will have to go back to Bryncelynnog for sixth form. It is not a fair comparison to take a school with 25% Free School Meals and compare them to Bryncelynnog with 14.5% when the Welsh average is 16.5%.

Q. Pupils at Gwauncelyn won't want to come to Hawthorn if they are going to then have to go back to Bryncelynnog for sixth form, especially when looking at pastoral needs. It's not about Hawthorn it's about continuity. Gwauncelyn have a two form entry so that's a huge number of pupils that could come here but probably won't.

A. Parents can choose to send their child to any school if there are spaces available in the year group. In Y Pant we still have a lot of pupils from Penygawsi attending. Until the year group is full, parents can choose.

- Q. We are grateful for the catchment changes, but I think the reality will be slightly different. We need to think about how they are perceived as parents are looking for schools to add value to their child. The subliminal message is that Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High aren't good enough.**
- A. That hasn't happened so far. The number of out of catchment pupils attending Treorchy has dropped.
- A. The primary section of Nantgwyn is now full. That number could have decreased as there is now no sixth form in Nantgwyn, but that hasn't happened.
- Q. The cause and effect are not directly linked. Painting a school doesn't mean it is better. We need to keep thinking how quickly these catchment changes will actually happen.**
- A. Again, transition is important to think about to improve this in the future.
- Q. You're going to put a 3-16 school here. In practical terms what does that mean?**
- A. There are currently options appraisals being undertaken by the Corporate Estates department but we need to think about what the staff, community and pupils want and what works on the site in terms of layout.
- Q. Is the ICT structure incorporated? What about the heating and lighting for all the buildings?**
- A. Porth 3-16 included new build elements and refurbishments. There are options we need to investigate. It may include demolitions, extensions and refurbishments. Where we can we try and go into older buildings and we do everything in consultation with the school. We do vast data analysis and costs are also based on our experiences elsewhere. Until we conduct surveys we don't know what we will find. It is a £168m budget for RCT and surveys help us decide how to split that money up.
- Q. The Governors of the school wrote to Andrea Richards in the summer with regards to the state of the main building. There are extensive drainage issues with the roof. The response I had from Andrea didn't include any details about the roof. Are you aware of these issues?**
- A. Yes we are and this will inform our surveys and the options we take.
- A. We did a study with Tonypandy and the final proposals were very different and much better than the original plans. Consultation is key.
- Q. For the exhibition in January, if I contact Andrea Richards, will I have an indication beforehand of what it will look like?**
- A. The plans will develop over time and change through the planning process which is a different consultation process again. That is where we finalise the building proposals. We are looking at changing education too.

- Q. *Is the roads reorganisation being spent as part of the £12m too?***
- A. Everything inside the school boundary is from the 21st Century Schools budget. Everything outside of that will be an external budget.
- Q. *I think you may need to think about separate points of access as School Lane can't cope.***
- A. Previous consultations did change the layout of the access. We will have to prioritise but we also have to try and look at the site holistically. Corporate Estates will conduct these feasibility studies but we will also be undertaking visits and working with you.
- Q. *We want to understand what we get for £12m.***
- Q. *Rhydyfelin is one of the most deprived areas and you are proposing to close Heol y Celyn. Is Welsh Medium right for Rhydyfelin after they have already had an infant school close?***
- A. There is no reason that the new school on the Heol y Celyn site can't provide an excellent education. Currently 40% of pupils from the Heol y Celyn catchment already attend Hawthorn. A new building on that site could increase investment there and create aspirations. There is a possibility for Welsh Medium child care provision to be available too. What we are proposing is beneficial to many.
- A. Only 50% of pupils on Free School Meals from the Heol y Celyn area actually attend Heol y Celyn. Many go to other schools including Hawthorn, YGG Evan James etc. and are already voting with their feet. The bilingual model doesn't work there at the moment and our WESP highlights our commitment to investing in single language schools.
- Q. *Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in schools. What will happen? Are there plans to extend these provisions?***
- A. The proposal to realign ALN provision in schools is currently on the Council's website. New schools are often well placed to provide these provisions. ALN provision will have reserved areas in schools should they need to be used in the future. These spaces will be fit for purpose and fully accessible. There is no need for a primary complex needs class in the area at the moment, but there may be in the future and we will reassess this as part of our wider plan every few years.
- Q. *If this is a 21st Century School we need to be mindful of pupils who may be transferring here and how we cater for them.***
- A. Current data says we don't need it now, but we designate space to try and accommodate that in future.
- Q. *Don't be afraid of saying good outcomes about Hawthorn. The language used around the school isn't fair and we need to change that.***

Q. What are the timescales for staff? Can the staff changes be done as early as possible? We don't want teachers thinking of redundancy so leaving early.

A. The decisions regarding the proposal are made first. Then, if the proposals proceed, the temporary governing body are appointed which will be a mixture of governors from affected schools. The Headteacher is then appointed and the rest of the school structure is put in place. A document will be issued to staff explaining the Headteacher and Governors' proposals for a new structure and you will be consulted on this.

Q. The information given to Governors should happen by when? How can a representation of three schools happen with two staff Governors and one support governor?

A. Aberdare Community School was created from three schools. Porth from four, and Nantgwyn from five. These all worked smoothly.

Q. What criteria do they use to make it an equitable decision?

A. Individuals can apply and the LEA will decide. Governors selected then choose community governors. They are making decisions about a new whole school, not three schools. There will be representation from all current governing bodies on the temporary governing body on it. There will be your representative for Hawthorn if you like.

Mark Cleverly – Members meet with unions for advice when the structure happens. I have been through this in Tonyrefail as a staff member and as a union representative. We can arrange a meeting to clear up any questions.

A. HR can also meet with staff on an individual basis if required.

GD thanked all for attending and sharing opinions.