

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

Wednesday 14th November at 3:30 pm

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

Present

Esther Thomas, Temporary Service Director for Access & Inclusion Services
Lisa Howell, Senior 21st Century Schools Officer
Martin Silezin, 14-19 Strategy Officer
Ellen Williams, Human Resources Advisor
Sophie Nicholls, Graduate Officer 21st Century Schools
Catrin Edwards, Head Of Service Transformation and Data Systems
24 members of school staff and governors

The headteacher opened the meeting.

Esther Thomas (ET) introduced the Council officers.

ET 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 post-16 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 3-16 '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.

ET 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.

ET 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. ET 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. We had an invitation to a meeting at Clydach Vale. At 3pm we were told the proposals. We were told that the proposals would be online the following morning but they were online that day and we didn't have enough time to tell staff. We would like RCT to listen and give us more time to tell those affected.

- A. The reason for that meeting was for people to be told so it wasn't a shock.
- Q. *We had some staff who found out on social media and they were obviously concerned for their jobs.***
- A. There was an embargo on the information and it wasn't supposed to be released. It was uploaded onto the website after the end of the working day.
- A. We take your point on board and it shouldn't have happened and we can only apologise for that error.
- Q. *What evidence is there that 3-16 schools are better and raise standards?***
- A. We have an all through school in Ysgol Llanhari that is working very well.
- Q. *Our worry is that there is no evidence for it now and we are worried because this school is already working well.***
- A. With the new curriculum the pupils will have opportunities to develop and create a continuum of learning.
- A. It is new but we are looking at giving opportunities for younger pupils to use facilities that aren't currently available for them. We want to push a continuum of learning that goes along with the new curriculum. We are managing our pupil numbers and this is how we are trying to manage it here. We don't have data yet on the new all through schools in the Rhondda as they are very new, however the schools have settled and progress is very positive.
- Q. *Are you also telling us that whatever the consultation says you will go ahead anyway.***
- A. No - we receive comments of objections and support, and this will all be measured and evaluated.
- Q. *But where is the data.***
- A. There is data in England but we didn't want to use this data because it is not like for like as the system is completely different.
- A. Speak to the Headteachers of the new schools in the Rhondda about their experiences.
- Q. *I have spoken to staff on the ground and I am not having good reports***
- A. That is different to what we are hearing from schools as we are having information about great transitions between years 6 and year 7 and can only work on fact.
- Q. *We are placing our children's future on a gamble with no empirical evidence.***

If that evidence exists we shouldn't have to chase it and it should be front and centre. It only appears as cost saving if that happens. I can't be in two places at once and I am a governor in Heol y Celyn. There isn't even an online web form for a 21st Century Schools proposal. This is one of the worst processes for people to respond to this that I have seen. I'm not certain we can have the best possible consultation with the public on this.

A. We follow the WG School Organisation Code in terms of what we do and how we consult. We do take your comments on board and you are welcome to email us.

Q. You have to scroll to the end of the consultation document to find the feedback form.

A. We can look to make the feedback proforma more obvious online.

Q. Parents won't be able to ask questions.

A. They will be able to in the event in January which will be a different and more interactive session for people to come and ask us their questions individually.

A. We have found that this is more helpful with parents as they may have specific concerns about safeguarding etc.

A. That is a public event for the community too.

Q. Can some be TUPE'd over to the new school rather than making them redundant? Why are we introducing a risk of losing good teachers?

A. We close a school and open a new school. The benefit of doing that is that it gives the opportunity for any staff to take early retirement or redundancy. If you amalgamate schools rather than closing them we cannot offer that opportunity.

Q. Why can't you amalgamate? Is there another way of doing it? I don't want to know if we don't have jobs in 4 years. Staff are going already.

A. A temporary governing body is set up - then a headteacher is appointed. Then the temporary governing body and headteacher set a new staffing structure and may ring fence the jobs on the new staffing structure to the staff in the current schools.

Q. You will still lose good staff who don't want to wait.

A. Some staff would leave anyway, to retire or look for promotion elsewhere, but the number of staff that have previously left due to other proposals are very very low.

Q. You will always get rumours and I have learned five or six people lost their

jobs.

A. We appreciate how stressful this is. However, once a temporary governing body and headteacher are appointed we can progress. The staff are fully consulted with right up until the new structure is put in place. There will be a lengthy document highlighting the processes for this and the job descriptions for the new structure. There is an opportunity for you and trade unions to feed back. By the time you make decisions you will be fully informed.

Q. *Have you seen standards drop in the time leading up to this as people 'jump ship'?*

A. No we haven't. The standards have remained but staff have left for a variety of reasons.

Q. *If we were to make a drastic change in school we would have to research this massively.*

Q. *Can't we use that money to improve existing schools.*

A. Not under the funding criteria.

A. There are also lessons that we will learn by the time this is implemented.

Q. *Will there be a cross of ages like a lower/middle/upper school.*

A. That is down to the school governors and headteacher. We want to give them the chance to use more specialised facilities.

Q. *Is there a training issue because I know a teacher in Porth who is now teaching in the primary level for a maths project.*

A. We don't know those circumstances to comment but the headteacher in Porth must think that this is going to have an impact on the pupils in a positive way.

Q. *The new Head will probably be a Head of a secondary school*

A. No it could be anyone and could end up being nationally advertised.

Q. *Of the leadership distribution in the Rhondda, how many are primary trained and how many are secondary trained?*

A. I don't have that data now.

A. In Tonyrefail, for example, the former deputy head of Tonyrefail Primary is a deputy leader in the new Tonyrefail 3-19.

A. I think numbers should be equitable but the governors would have to decide this to

ensure that there wasn't a gap.

Headteacher - we invested heavily in KS2 when I started as Head and realised that it was too late for our pupils and we have now invested heavily in nursery to ensure we build for the bottom up. I have a passion to say that when a Head is appointed they should have a passion to do the same and be aware of foundation phase.

Q. Would there be a full-time nursery?

A. It will be the same as it is now. RCT will fund 50% of the time in nursery and then it is down to the schools and governing body.

Q. How is the governing body formed?

A. The governing body members that exist on the three schools now will form the 3-16 temporary governing body. The LEA Appointments Panel appoints the LEA, parent teacher and staff representatives from the existing governing bodies of the schools. Once these appointments have been made, the temporary governing body will appoint the Community Governors.

Q. Catchment changes - Gwauncelyn numbers are more and we are losing two schools.

A. It is still parental choice. Gwauncelyn numbers are more but there would be no sixth form should the proposals proceed.

Q. Data on page 38 of the consultation document – 198 children in 2022, 259 in Heol y Celyn = 457; but in the bottom table it is 27 lower than that. Secondary school - if you remove the sixth form pupils then there are 26 children missing in the bottom table. I'm concerned because that affects surplus.

A. The first table is based on current status quo with no catchment changes. The bottom table is demonstrating the catchment changes made.

Q. Won't that be very disruptive if it's the same from years 1 to 6 but in year 7 there are 60 children coming into a new school who have already been there.

A. We have done a lot with transition. The associated schools are heavily involved in transition events to ensure that we minimise this effect and that they feel like it is as much their school as those pupils who were already there. These pupils would have had to transition anyway.

Q. But only half are coming in new rather than all starting new at the same time.

They are then invading the new school

- A. Invading isn't quite an appropriate word. That is why we try to create strong transition links.
- Q. ***Your document says that it is positive that there is a lack of transition for pupils in 3-16 schools - it doesn't seem fair for pupils from other schools.***
- Q. ***It's not true either because once they come here they will have to go to Bryncelynnog for sixth form which is another transition.***
- Q. ***The schools in the Rhondda all closed and started new. That isn't the case here because they will be here already. We will then have Heol y Celyn children moving here and with a new name/badge, it doesn't make those pupils feel welcome.***
- A. I completely agree that we need to ensure this is minimised. We will ensure that we have additional funding to fund some transition events to try and ensure everyone feels welcome.
- A. Headteacher - We work hard to make team Hawthorn and we wouldn't want everyone feeling it is Hawthorn with a new badge.
- Q. ***I am worried that the standards would drop because the two areas are so different.***
- Q. ***Can you set up the governing body three years in advance?***
- A. The main function of the temporary governing body is to appoint a headteacher and thereafter a new staffing structure. We would then be paying someone to appoint people for three years time. It has to be sensible. In terms of senior leadership concerns, we ask in interviews about the whole 3-16 school approach. Some excellent candidates fell short on this and then didn't get the jobs because they didn't look at the structure as a whole. They need to have a buy in from foundation phase.
- Q. ***It's easy for a secondary head to pop into primary schools and read in the news about the importance of foundation phase but I wouldn't be able to comment on the high school side with just popping into a high school for a few months.***
The three heads appointed in the Rhondda were secondary trained.
- Q. ***Page 37 of the consultation document alludes to parental choice being a***

reason for there being such a small surplus in Hawthorn relative to Heol y Celyn which is a great testament to this school. But on page 38 it seems to invert and says that it has 2.2% surplus and Hawthorn has 19.2%. There are links to parental choice and demographics which would hint that there is a much higher birth rate in the Heol y Celyn area.

A. We use the birth rates for this too and some of these are estimates as obviously many of these children aren't born yet.

Q. All of that information should be here because it's information that we don't know. I feel strongly that you need an outsider to come and scrutinise this before it is published.

A. You have asked the question and we can provide that data.

Q. What about the parents who won't ask that question and then think that they don't understand.

Q. My wife and I are strongly in favour of Welsh language provision, but that doesn't seem to be factored into the figures. It might be but I can't see that. If they live in Hawthorn and want Welsh language then they have to send them to Heol y Celyn.

A. A Welsh language survey is used to see where the demand is and we use this to make these decisions.

Q. I haven't been asked that question.

A. Every household where we know that there has been a birth is sent one every two years. But responses are very low.

Q. If responses are low then that is an issue as it may not be representative anyway.

Q. What consideration has been made in terms of road safety? We are working on a three year plan currently.

A. We work closely with Highways on this and I know you have been working with Sustrans on this. What we have done on all our projects is to provide a safe route for pupils coming to the new school. A traffic impact assessment is undertaken to look at all the routes – in Porth for example, zebra crossings, table tops etc. were put in place to provide traffic calming.

Q. There will be more traffic - will that be considered?

A. RCT have always made a commitment to fund this ourselves as 21st Century Schools funding only covers expenditure within the school boundary.

Q. What if it can't be done.

A. We will make it work. We have highway engineers to do this. We would have to undertake a planning consultation if this proposal proceeds. Planning have strict regulations which must be followed.

Q. Why can't you do the planning first?

A. We can't do that because we don't know if the proposal will progress yet. The statutory consultation process has to conclude first. We spend some money commencing initial investigations at risk, such as desktop feasibility studies but we will need to do more work on this in detail should the proposal proceed. We have to look at the whole site.

Q. So you could put up a statutory notice without any provision for traffic? If that was the case we would put an objection in?

A. But that is a planning objection rather than a school organisation objection. The roads are not directly relevant to this consultation.

Q. Can you have a proposal for the roads in January? The community will care about this.

A. We can't give too much information because people will think we are making the decision in advance of the outcome of the consultation.

Q. Children should walk anyway. The volume of traffic will affect the Hawthorn area generally. I understand that they are different issues in terms of the process but we cannot separate them. We are currently strangled at this point in time with the traffic so we need to think about this.

A. We have opened new entrances to Porth for example and that is also an option.

A. We are thinking about this alongside our consultation process and by all means make your comments on this now.

Q. In a consultation period we want as much information as possible to address people's fears. Even if you were to show some possible solutions and not strict plans then we need to have some information.

Q. Whose idea is it to create a through school? If this funding wasn't in place I wonder if this would be happening and I don't see how we would benefit other than facilities?

A. Officers have researched this.

Q. What consideration is made to demolition and noise?

A. This is a high priority. We did this in Y Pant. Safety is paramount and we minimise this by working with the construction companies and the school to keep disruption to a minimum. Construction programmes are planned where possible to ensure the noisiest work is undertaken in the holidays etc.

Q. *Is there a timescale for construction? It's a concern as a parent.*

A. Average timescales are 18 months to 2 years. We often work on live school sites – for example, the new science block in Treorchy; Treorchy primary had an extension block too. Contractors speak to pupils in assemblies to engage them in the construction processes. Any children with additional learning needs who need consideration - the contractor will work around their timetable.

Q. *Is there data on the how they were impacted?*

A. There weren't issues. We have discussions with children and staff about the whole process and the safety of the children are paramount.

Q. *It says in the document that there is no possibility of extending this building. Why as there is plenty of space? So would the extended primary school provision be in two buildings?*

A. It could.

Q. *I'm not sure how that would work because it feels like we are just stealing a few rooms from them.*

A. We will come and look again with surveyors in respect of the final plans. We won't disregard anything when looking at the best solution. The £12m in the budget may end up increasing once we have done our surveys. The whole programme is £168m. If we think this school needs more funding we can ask Welsh Government to revise this. Plans will also be shared with staff to get their opinions.

Q. *If I apply for a job on the new site and don't get it. Would I still get a say on what will happen?*

A. We want to tap into your experience and the building plans would be put in place before the staffing structure.

Q. *What is the criteria to determine if this goes ahead? What weight do the objections carry/ road safety objections? Presumably those putting this forward have a say in the vote?*

A. You could attend that Cabinet meeting if you wanted to.

A. A consultation report is written at the end of the consultation period. Cabinet will consider all of the information and decide whether or not to proceed to the next

stage, namely the issuing of a statutory notice. If a decision to proceed is made, then objections could be made.

Q. Is there a recommendation by officers - e.g this should go ahead.

Q. Would we have an opportunity to put opinions forward in the meeting?

A. No we would have already had your comments and objections by then so Cabinet would decide based on that information which will be contained in the consultation report.

Q. Why was our school chosen? We have reduced capacity to make sure we have the appropriate environment for this school. We previously fought for an extension and failed. Why not merge Heol y Celyn with Parc Lewis?

A. The Local Authority must look at the whole picture for RCT. It's a complicated jigsaw and we look at all school stock. The post-16 provision at Hawthorn High isn't sustainable. We aren't picking on Hawthorn because it's doing badly. We are looking at managing all assets, places and geography. We have to look wider and we know how successful this school is.

Q. When I first saw the proposals I thought that going to one school for your whole education is beneficial. It seems to be two schools that share senior management team.

A. That is up to the school management and staff to make it feel like a 3-16 school.

Q. But if there are some classes over on the other site, the primary element won't interact if they are separate or you would have three year olds going over there in the rain.

A. It's interesting that you took that view. The parents for the Rhondda consultation wanted that segregation.

Q. My main concerns are that my personal aspiration for an integrated site is there but if the primary element is split over two sites then it isn't good for their health and safety or for their attainment.

Q. We don't have any concrete data on these schools but I am leaving here tonight thinking – 'all this disruption and what will change here?'. This stays as this school and they get a new block etc.

A. You don't know that yet. The solutions created on some other schools are very modern and work.

A. We wouldn't want them to be separate.

Q. Would we be at a disadvantage with a refurbishment?

- A. That is why architects are involved. They think creatively about how we do this.
- A. The quality of the refurbishments for example in the new YGG Tonyrefail are the same quality of a new build school.
- Q. *The feel of the school will inevitably go off the lay out. I think it will be good for the Donaldson curriculum, but it's getting the geography of the site right.***
- Q. *We are not all sat here against it but we would like an input and this is where we can ask these questions.***
- A. Yes and you need to ask.
- A. If you speak to the headteachers of the new schools, I'm sure they would say that they have had a huge input to this.
- Q. *Can one of the headteachers come?***
- A. We are hoping to bring some of the new headteachers to the public events, where possible. The headteacher of Ysgol Llanhari came to the previous public events but we now have more headteachers that could come and dispel some myths. The attainment data is too early to comment on but in terms of the running of the school we are hoping to have someone here.
- Q. *Timescale on seeing plans?***
- A. 2022 is the end date but we are hoping to be as flexible as possible between this to try and make the transition as soon as possible, should the proposal proceed. Working back from 2022 we would hopefully have a plan by the end of next year for the buildings.
- Q. *So current staff could have input on what they want?***
- A. Yes but we want to have a standard in accordance with Building Bulletins etc.
- Q. *When would transition start?***
- A. It is in tandem with the staffing structure. We ask that question in interviews because it is for the Headteacher to push on as early as possible with the transition work.
- Q. *If staff are made redundant how will they find out?***
- A. Cabinet is a public forum so anyone can turn up and listen to find out if the proposal is going ahead or not.
- A. If anyone has any issues please come and speak to HR - individual meetings can be arranged as required. There are opportunities for people to look at retirement

and redundancy if that's what they want, but there are other opportunities too. We can look for redeployment opportunities and often that is quite last minute but we will try and sort this out as soon as possible. On previous schemes, in relation to the staff who wanted a position, there were very few staff who didn't get a position.

Q. *Can we have those figures?*

A. Yes and we have the numbers of staff who have been promoted during this process too.

Headteacher - NASUWT have been out and it was a positive meeting for staff.

ET thanked everyone for attending and for their comments.

Meeting ends.