

Notes of a meeting held with pupils at Heol y Celyn Primary School

Wednesday 14th November at 2:30 pm

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

Present

Gaynor Davies (GD), Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Andrea Richards (AR), Head of 21st Century Schools
Nicola Goodman (NG), Senior 21st Century Schools Officer
21 pupils of Heol y Celyn Primary School (combination of pupils from Welsh and English streams - Years 3/4/5/6)

Introductions

GD asked if the pupils understood what the proposals were and many did.

GD explained the reasons for the proposals as being - to ensure that all pupils would be in modern 21st century schools.

The changes planned to all schools as part of this proposal were outlined as:

- New sixth form in Bryncelynnog for over 400 learners (closing sixth forms in Pontypridd High, Hawthorn High and Cardinal Newman);
- Two new schools for pupils aged 3-16 at Pontypridd and Hawthorn;
- More Welsh medium school places at a brand new school on the Heol y Celyn site; Pupils from YGG Pont Sion Norton would also attend this school and it would be all Welsh medium;
- The catchment areas for some schools would change (i.e. which school you would be likely to go to depending on the street where you live could change for some pupils in the future);
- Pontypridd 3-16 School would be Pontypridd High School and Cilfynydd Primary School together;
- Hawthorn 3-16 School would be Hawthorn High, Heol y Celyn (English medium stream) and Hawthorn Primary School together;
- By 2022 it is proposed for there to be a brand new school building and external play areas on the Heol y Celyn site for Welsh medium pupils;
- English medium pupils from Heol y Celyn school could go to the 3-16 school in Hawthorn which is also having a lot of money spent on it;
- £12m investment at Hawthorn 3-16; plus £10.7m investment at the Heol y Celyn site.

Two short video clips were played showing new schools recently constructed as part of the 21st Century Schools Programme at Cwmaman and Tonyrefail.

GD explained that the purpose of the meeting with the pupils today was for the Council to hear and record what the pupils think about the proposals, as their views are very important to the Council.

To facilitate the discussion GD asked the pupils some initial questions:

Q. GD asked whether the pupils understood the proposals.

A. All pupils agreed that they did.

Q. GD asked whether the pupils thought the proposals were a good or a bad idea.

A. Positive responses from pupils

- Children in younger classes will get better facilities and better education.
- Younger brothers and sisters will go to an all Welsh school which will be better as they will be more like the pupils from other Welsh schools when they go to secondary school at Garth Olwg.

GD explained the Council's proposals to also change other schools into completely Welsh medium schools, as pupils are then fully immersed in the Welsh language.

A. Negative responses from pupils

- Will be sad to see the school go.
- Concerns regarding the closure of the special needs class in the school.

GD explained that the special class in the school was proposed to be relocated due to low numbers of pupils in the class. Another class would open in a place where the need was greater.

- Friends in English and Welsh departments help each other learn languages and they won't be able to do this in the new school.

GD recognised that was a very important point and explained that the new schools would be bigger (e.g. 480 plus nursery at the new Welsh school on the Heol y Celyn site), which would give more opportunity to make new friends; have more after school clubs etc.

AR asked what language was mainly spoken in the playground and the majority response given was English.

Questions were then asked by pupils:

Q. What will happen to the teachers in this school?

A. GD explained that teachers would be offered the chance to stay in the school (Welsh department), or teach elsewhere (such as Hawthorn), or they may want to leave.

Q. Where would the English department pupils go in Hawthorn?

A. AR explained that the proposal was that the pupils from the nursery class through to year 4 would be in the Hawthorn Primary School building and that the pupils in years 5 / 6 / 7 and 8 would be in another building.

Q. Will the Hawthorn High summer activities be affected?

A. AR explained that these could get better, as the external play areas at Hawthorn may also be improved.

Q. Would it be bad to mix teenagers with three year olds as the teenagers drink, swear and smoke?

A. GD explained that teenagers should not be smoking and drinking in school and a new school like this would not mix such small children with older children - they would have separate yards etc.

GD further explained that in the new Tonyrefail 3-19 school, the older pupils help the primary school aged pupils with their reading etc.

AR added that the pupils can use the secondary school facilities - for science; art; sports; etc.

GD commented that older children usually set an example to younger children in such a school environment and behave better when there are small children around.

Q. Concerned about the walk down to Hawthorn – risky and bad traffic.

A. GD explained that safety is a top priority for the Council.

AR explained that the whole area is surveyed to make sure that the route to school is safe (for example – speed bumps put outside the current school at Heol y Celyn). Many ideas from specialists will look as what is needed to ensure the walk is safe.

GD added that 97 children living in this area currently already choose to go Hawthorn.

Q. What about the traffic, as there will be lots of cars? Also, the ambulance station could be blocked off?

A. GD explained that it was not very far, so people could choose to walk. Safety is very important and people will take time to get used to the new arrangements and will work out what time to leave the house, their travel times, etc.

AR explained that turning circles will be created to keep the flow of traffic going whereby parents can drop children off, turn around and then go straight away.

AR also explained that the schools change start and end times so that the secondary age pupils and the primary age pupils start and end at different times. Breakfast clubs also mean that lots of pupils arrive earlier and the numbers of pupils are staggered. After school clubs also help, as different pupils leave at different times (rather than all pupils leaving at the same time).

Q. *If the schools are being knocked down, where will the pupils go to school?*

A. The Heol y Celyn building will stay in place and the new school building will be built near the existing building, so the pupils will be able to see the new building grow.

Q. *Concerns regarding sister starting in school with other pupils that she does not know.*

A. GD explained that lots of events are held to ensure that pupils get to know each other in advance by doing joint activities etc.

Q. *What happens to the houses in the area?*

A. GD commented that these would stay.

AR added that new families often move to go to new school and that prices sometimes go up when a new school is built nearby.

Q. *If the sixth form goes from Hawthorn, will other groups in the school extend? What happens to the sixth form?*

A. GD explained that sixth form pupils could go either to Coleg Y Cymoedd or Bryncelynnog School. The rest of the school would be used for all of the other year groups.

Q. *Why can't we keep the school as it is?*

A. GD explained that the Council want to provide better schools with better facilities and better play areas.

Q. *If parents are separated it will be more difficult to get to Hawthorn - dad needs to get to work and the traffic in Hawthorn will be worse.*

A. Management of the traffic will be looked at as part of the plans.

All pupils were thanked for their questions and the meeting closed at 3:30pm