

**Notes of a meeting held with staff and governors
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
Richard Evans (RE), Service Director for Human Resources
Andrea Richards (AR), Head of 21st Century Schools
Nicola Goodman (NG), Senior 21st Century Schools Officer
Kylie Lewis (KL), Governor Support Officer
30 members of school staff and governors
1 Trade Union representative

Introductions from Council officers.

Gaynor Davies (GD) expressed thanks for the pupils' involvement and their really good comments.

GD welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the proposals, the reasons for the proposal, the purpose of the meeting and the consultation process and 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.

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. *Current parents have already made enquiries to move their children from the English to the Welsh department due to the travel distance to Hawthorn. It is anticipated that more pupils will join the Welsh department in January 2019. What if this increase is beyond the capacity of the new school? It would be a shame if pupils local to the area needed to be transported to another school.*

A. GD explained that admissions criteria would be applied if the number of applications increased above the capacity of the new school.

Q. What is the capacity of the new Welsh medium school?

A. GD advised that there would be 480 in total, a further 100 spaces than is currently available. Capacity will be monitored closely; catchment areas may be reviewed regularly especially with new housing developments in the area. The Authority reviews and undertakes planning of school places on a regular basis, so any issues would be foreseen before they arose.

Q. Would Pont Sion Norton pupils have priority in relation to admissions?

A. GD stated the Authority's admissions criteria would apply. GD pointed out that some pupils within the Heol y Celyn catchment already attend out of catchment schools.

Q. How would the Authority address the traffic issues?

A. AR explained traffic assessments/observations would be undertaken at different times to monitor the traffic flow and make recommendations. The Authority will ensure safe routes for all pupils. Possible that safe pickup/drop off zones would be created. Example cited of £480,000 spent on the Rhondda schemes in relation to safe routes to schools. Planning insist on this also.

Q. How many Heol y Celyn catchment pupils attend Hawthorn Primary?

A. GD outlined that recent data shows that 97 pupils from the Heol y Celyn catchment attend Hawthorn Primary.

Q. What percentage of pupils from this area go to Hawthorn?

A. AR explained that 97 pupils would equate to approximately 40% of the Hawthorn school roll. Heol y Celyn catchment pupils also attend other schools e.g. Parc Lewis (42 pupils from the Heol y Celyn catchment); Cefn Primary (2 pupils from the Heol y Celyn catchment).

Comment from staff/governors - It is possibly due to pupils choosing other schools when Heol y Celyn was not very good and siblings are probably now going to the same 'other' school.

Q. The number of pupils starting at the school in the nursery is now increasing as the school is improving.

A. 23 admitted to Hawthorn and 35 admitted to Heol y Celyn.

Q. Although it would be good to have a brand new school, concerns are that we are losing a school which is part of the community and is bilingual. The splitting of the dual language provision is the biggest concern.

A. GD commented that some pupils had also expressed concerns regarding the possible loss of friendships, however, the new school will still be at the heart of the community. GD advised that the Authority's WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan) seeks to review bilingual schools in RCT. GD further added that some of the pupils had expressed that they were keen to attend an all Welsh

medium primary school as they felt that they would then be the same as their peers when they go to a fully Welsh medium secondary school.

Q. Can parents view a 3-16 school?

A. AR confirmed this is possible; on the RCT website there are fly-through videos for parents to view. Pupils have viewed some examples of 21st Century School buildings and the feedback was very positive. Examples will also be shown at the public consultation events in January.

Q. Staff are very worried about their jobs and their futures, especially in the English Department.

A. RE explained the temporary governing bodies would be involved in all appointments for the new schools. The Authority strongly recommends ring-fencing to give existing staff at the schools the first opportunity; any unfilled positions would then go out to external advert. RE acknowledged it is a worrying time for all staff members, however, the Authority has previous experience of school closures and has a good record of helping staff through this process with positive outcomes. Although he cannot promise that all staff will have a job. Some staff may wish to take the opportunity to retire or take redundancy; there are also opportunities for redeployment.

Q. What are the timescales for the proposals?

A. RE advised that if the proposal proceeds there is a two year process to be undertaken before the new school opens.

AR added that if the proposal proceeds, the new temporary governing body would be set up in September 2020 and would be made up of governors on the existing governing bodies of the affected schools. The temporary governing body would appoint the Headteacher and the school structure would then follow.

Q. In the consultation document there is an SEN Unit referenced for Hawthorn. Why is it located there and why is the Unit closing in Heol y Celyn?

A. GD outlined that there is another ongoing/separate consultation to review learning support classes in RCT and whether they are in the correct location throughout the RCT area. There are growing needs in certain areas of learning support. Complex needs provision has a lot of capacity and the number of pupils requiring this provision at Heol y Celyn has reduced over the years.

The Authority is also looking to reduce transition and put provision into the new 21st Century Schools which comply with the Equality Act. Example given of Porth Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4 provision; also Cwmaman Primary – one class is to open there as it is a brand new school and fully accessible.

In the future, there could be provision at Heol y Celyn, but there is no demand at the current time. Reviews of provision are undertaken every few years.

Q. Perhaps some parents would choose to send their children to the new Welsh school as it is closer to their homes, but their children would struggle to cope with the language.

A. GD outlined that every parent has the right to choose the medium of language for their child's education. Exposure at a young age means that children can progress with a language. If pupils experience challenges these would be identified and support provided.

Q. Some parents may, to the detriment of their child send their child to the wrong school.

A. GD stated it is parental choice and places have to be given if there is space in the school. Schools have to be inclusive and make the right decisions for pupils' best interests.

Q. Staff feel the new school will not be a community school due to the larger catchment area. Also, that it will not offer English medium education. Staff are upset about the loss of Heol y Celyn.

A. GD stressed it will be a community school and acknowledged that change is hard to cope with for some people especially as some staff have a long history with Heol y Celyn, however, the Authority wants to provide the best facilities possible for pupils of RCT.

Q. Some staff feel there will be segregation as they will only be using the Welsh language instead of mixing both languages.

A. GD advised that total immersion in the Welsh language is positive for pupils. The Authority feels that the proposals offer the best choice for the majority of pupils. Also, some of the pupils in the Welsh Department at Heol y Celyn had commented that being in a totally Welsh medium school would make them the same as their peers from other primary schools when they move onto their secondary school education at Garth Olwg.

Q. What happens if teachers start leaving Heol y Celyn?

A. GD explained that new schools are vibrant places to work and the aim is to attract teachers to the school, this will create a positive learning environment. The new larger schools will provide opportunities for teachers to work with different age ranges. It is hoped teachers will view this as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Q. Will the community have the opportunity to speak with the relevant officers?

A. NG outlined that an open evening for parents, staff and the community will be held on 22nd January 2019 from 3.00pm to 6.00pm at Hawthorn High regarding the proposed 3-16 school, and on 17th January 2019 in the Rhydyfelin Children's Centre in relation to the Welsh medium proposals. Officers from the Authority will be in attendance and there are various formats for providing feedback.

Q. *Will it be a drop-in session?*

A. AR confirmed and commented that it will be very informal.

GD thanked all for their attendance and inputs.

The meeting closed at 4:50pm.