

DROP-IN SESSIONS FOR PUPILS, STAFF AND PARENTS/CARERS HELD AT ABERTYSSWG PRIMARY SCHOOL 11th DECEMBER 2014

IN ATTENDANCE

Bleddyn Hopkins – Assistant Director, 21st Century Schools

Keri Cole – Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion

Andrea Davies – Advisor, Additional Learning Needs

Mark Williams – Manager, Building Consultancy

Julian Williams – Senior Officer, School Admissions & Exclusions

Drop-In Session with Staff

Q. What is the position with regard to staff?

A. When the Governing Body of the proposed new school is formed they will take account of the formula budget and appoint staff appropriately. Based on projected pupil numbers, there should not be a need to reduce the number of teaching staff.

Q. The Support Staff are the most worried about their jobs?

A. It is difficult to comment on personal circumstances. Some support staff are shared and the authority would look at various options, such as cross matching, redeployment, voluntary early redundancies etc.

Q. My post is Deputy Headteacher of Abertysswg Primary but I am seconded from Tiryberth Primary?

A. The Governing Body will need to consider the staffing structure, but the proposed new primary school would need a Deputy Headteacher.

Q. When will the proposed new school be ready?

A. The proposed date is January 2017. The temporary Governing Body will be formed early and will appoint staff well in advance of this date.

Q. Will the Governing Body be totally new or will it be made up of members of the two current Governing Bodies?

A. The new Governing Body will likely comprise a combination of new and existing governors.

Q. What is the position regarding teaching assistants?

A. That will be for the Governing Body to determine. The budget should not result in any reduction in permanent teaching assistants.

Q. The safe route cycle path at the lower end nearest to Abertysswg is a disgrace. It floods, it's overgrown and full of dog mess. What will be done about this?

A. We would look at these issues with the relevant officers.

Statement. We will lose the community if we go to the proposed new school. We use the church and the Post Office.

Q. What will happen to the existing building?

A. Concerns have been expressed regarding the potential future use of the present Abertysswg School site. The Council has committed to a planning development brief for the site which would involve consultation with the local community.

Q. How does Redeployment work? I wouldn't want to travel to Risca for example.

A. The Council would look at individual circumstances and take travelling times into account. You would also be able to state your preferred options if the situation arises, albeit there could be no guarantees.

Q. Will parents have input into the proposed new school?

A. We will wish to consult with a cross section of the community and have already met with the parent network. We would probably work with a group of representatives from both schools as well.

Q. Will we have to re-apply for our jobs?

A. When the Governing Body of the proposed new school is formed they will take account of the formula budget and appoint staff appropriately. Based on projected pupil numbers, there should not be a need to reduce teaching staff.

Statement. We may lose children to the Welsh school because they are provided with transport or we may gain children as there is possibly a housing development in our catchment area.

Q. If I am on Maternity leave when all this takes place will I be protected?

A. You will still be an employee so you will be given the same employment rights.

Q. Is the lower parking area that is shown on the possible site plan for staff parking as well?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you stop Secondary pupils walking through the proposed new primary school site to get to Rhymney Comprehensive?

A. They would not be walking through the Primary school site. Security access is something that will be considered.

Q. Will we as staff have input into the proposed new school?

A. Yes, at the design stage staff will be consulted. We would normally give a range of options and ask for views.

Q. What about other facilities? Will we lose Flying Start?

A. We are looking to provide an Integrated Children's Centre on the site. We would look to replicate what you already have.

Q. Will children from out of the catchment be accommodated at the proposed new school? What about siblings in the future?

A. The criteria for pupil entry are stated in the Council's admissions policy, which would apply. The capacity of the proposed new school is 270 with an admission number of 38 so children will be admitted up to this latter number in each year group in accordance with admission criteria.

Q. How is the capacity calculated?

A. It is calculated in accordance with Welsh Governments regulations. It is based primarily on the number and size of the general teaching areas in the school.

Q. I thought that you would build a school big enough to accommodate Fochriw children in 5 years time?

A. We have consulted with the residents of Fochriw and in excess of 85% of those who responded did not want to be part of this proposal. They raised valid reasons, including transport and adverse weather issues.

Q. The Fochriw school building is similar to the Abertysswg school building?

A. Fochriw Primary has 4 classrooms all of which are fit for purpose size for 30 pupils plus teacher, i.e. larger than 55.8m², whereas Abertysswg Primary only has 1 out of 6 classrooms that is of a fit for purpose size.

Q. What is the situation with regards to the cooks?

A. Caerphilly catering would determine a staffing structure based on the new school/number of pupils. The Council would adopt its employment policies in allocation of staff.

Q. I am a casual worker and have been here for over 3 years. Would I be protected?

A. We would recommend any individual queries are checked with your respective Unions, regarding your Employment Rights.

Drop-In session with the Abertysswg Primary School Council (Year 2 to Year 6)

Q. Will we still have the same teachers?

A. Most, if not all, of the teaching staff should transfer to the new school. Some of you would have the same teachers but many of you will have new teachers as the school will have more children and you will have moved into different year groups.

Q. Why are you shutting our school down?

A. We are trying to give you a better school in which to be taught. The school council were shown pictures of 2 recent school builds (Cwm Ifor Primary and Greenhill Primary).

Q. The Comprehensive children smoke and take drugs?

A. You will be closely supervised in school and staff will look to keep you safe at all times.

Q. How many teachers will there be?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body. The proposed new school will have 9 classrooms, plus Nursery.

Q. Will the rugby pitch on the plan be for the Comprehensive and the Primary?

A. It will be mainly for the Comprehensive but the Headteacher of the Primary will arrange times for you to use it as well as other facilities like the hall and laboratories.

Q. Will we still have the same Headteacher?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body.

Q. What will the proposed new school be called?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body who may ask for ideas from the children.

Q. What will the current site be used for?

A. The Council will talk to residents about the future use of the site.

Q. What will happen to the nice things in the school such as the mural?

A. You could speak to your teacher and ask them if they can be taken to the proposed new school.

Q. Will we take the laptops as well?

A. Yes you can take them with you and you will probably have new ones.

Q. Will the whiteboards go with us?

A. It depends on how old they are and how easy it would be to remove them. You will probably take some and have new ones.

Q. What is the point of closing this school and opening a new one as you will be spending more money?

A. It is not about the money, it is about trying to provide you with a better learning environment.

Statement. All we have in the community is the school, a shop and the fish shop.

A. The proposed new school is not far away and is still in Abertysswg.

Q. Couldn't you just improve our school?

A. Your school is over 110 years old so it would be extremely difficult to adapt it to the standards that a new school can provide you with.

Q. Parents want children to go to a small school?

A. The proposed new school is of a medium size. We have a primary school in Oakdale that has over 600 children.

Q. What sacrifices will we have to make?

A. You will be expected to travel a bit further to school. That is the main difference but you would have a better school building for teaching and learning.

Q. Will we still have an after school club?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body.

Q. Will we still have the same children in the class?

A. Currently you have more than 1 year group in a class. In the proposed new school all the children in your class will likely be from the same year as you, so some children will be the same and some will be new.

Q. What will the school look like?

A. The school council were shown pictures of the 2 schools mentioned earlier as examples of what the proposed new school could look like.

Q. Will the teachers rush us with our work?

A. The teachers will treat you in the same way as they treat you at this school.

Q. Will we have to walk to school or will we have a bus?

A. You will have to walk.

Q. We have managed for 111 years so why change now?

A. We have the opportunity of providing you with a learning environment fit for the 21st Century.

Q. Will the school day be the same length?

A. The school day will be the same length, although the start and finish times may be different.

Q. What will the school badges look like?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body. They will probably ask the children for ideas.

Q. Will we still have school trips?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body but it need not be any different to what it is now.

Q. Will we still have Maths tests?

A. Yes.

Q. How many teachers will be in the yard to look after the children at break times?

A. That will be up to the Headteacher.

Q. Where will we eat packed lunch?

A. The dining area will be big enough for school dinners and those having packed lunch.

Q. How far will the school be from here?

A. The school council were shown on the proposed site plan.

Q. Will we take our sports equipment with us?

A. Yes if it is good condition and you will probably have new sports equipment.

Q. The car park is close to houses so it will be noisy for residents?

A. The proposed car park isn't near any houses.

Q. At the moment, every morning, we choose what we want for dinner. Will that continue?

A. That will be up to the Governing Body. Caerphilly catering will continue to provide the meals.

Q. The school has pulled the community together. Losing it will pull the community apart?

A. The proposed new school is not far away and it is still in Abertysswg.

Q. Will we still have a school council?

A. Yes.

Q. We have spent a lot of money on the library recently and you're going to knock it down. It was a waste of money?

A. The library will still have to be used for the next 2 years and many of the books can transfer to the new school and possibly some of the furniture.

Drop-In Session with Parents/Carers – 6 parents attended

Q. Is Fochriw out of the equation?

A. Yes. We have consulted with the residents of Fochriw and in excess of 85% of those who responded did not want to be part of this proposal. They raised valid reasons, including transport and adverse weather issues.

Q. The safe route cycle path at the lower end nearest to Abertysswg is a disgrace. It floods, it's overgrown and full of dog mess and it's where the Comprehensive pupils smoke and take drugs. What will be done about this?

A. We will look to refer these matters to appropriate officers.

Statement. We do not think that parents from the top estate will send their children to school during periods of inclement weather.

A. It could be that the school try an initiative such as the walking bus which is run very successfully at other Primary schools.

Statement. I don't think that having all classes over 30 is good for the children.

A. At present there are up to 3 year groups in 1 class which does not make it easy for a teacher. At the proposed new school, most pupils can be accommodated in single year group classes. Classes should not be more than 30.

Statement. It's all down to money or the lack of it from Welsh Government.

A. The situation will be getting worse over the next few years with the budget cuts that have been announced.

Q. What about the school uniform? Parents will have to buy one for September 2016 and another for January 2017 when the children move to the new school.

A. This will be looked at by the Governing Body well in advance of the opening of the proposed new school.

Q. What will happen to the current building as we don't want an empty building with smashed windows at the start of the village.

A. Concerns have been expressed regarding the potential future use of the present Abertysswg School site. The Council would commit to a planning development brief for the site which would result in the community being consulted as to future use.

Statement. The lower car park should be much closer to the new school.

A. That is something that we are considering and has been raised previously.

Statement. Our main concerns are the location of the new school and the interaction with Comprehensive aged children.

A. We don't realistically have a choice with the location and security issues will be looked at regarding safe routes arrangements for the different aged pupils.

Drop-In Session Ended

ABERTYSSWG PRIMARY SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY MEETING
11th DECEMBER 2014

IN ATTENDANCE

Bleddyn Hopkins – Assistant Director, 21st Century Schools

Keri Cole – Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion

Julian Williams – Senior Officer, School Admissions & Exclusions

Q. Will the views of all interested parties be conveyed to Council Members?

A. A summary of the key issues will be included in the report to Members and notes of the actual meetings and copies of the response pro-forma will be available in the Members library.

Q. The perception of residents is that this proposal is taking place whether they like it or not?

A. We haven't said that but it's what people assume. There are statutory processes to follow before any final decision.

Q. Can we attend the Cabinet meeting to listen to the debate?

A. Yes, it will be a public meeting but we suggest you contact the Council (Committee Services) before hand as spaces may be limited.

Q. Will the 3 school meetings be itemised?

A. Yes, there will be notes of each meeting summarising the issues raised.

Q. How was the public meeting in Rhymney Comprehensive school advertised?

A. It is on page 5 of the Consultation Document. It was advertised on 13th November in the Western Mail of which we have a copy of the press cutting. It was also referred to in articles in the Caerphilly Observer, the Rhymney Valley Express and on the Caerphilly Council website.

Q. Don't you think that public notices should have been put up in the village?

A. It is not a requirement of Welsh Government to hold a public meeting but as an Authority we decided that it was best to do so and were advised by our communications department that advertising in the Western Mail was the best way to advertise it to achieve maximum coverage.

Q. Many elderly people feel very strongly about the proposal but wouldn't go to Rhymney Comprehensive School?

A. As the proposal concerned Abertysswg and Pontlottyn we thought it best to hold the public meeting in a neutral venue.

Q. This proposal is about the education of children. Abertysswg is in a deprived area which results in children being slow learners and putting them in larger classes will hinder their progress. What evidence have you got that amalgamation improves educational outcomes?

A. Where a child lives does not affect their ability to learn unless they have special educational needs. However there is a link between learning and the environment a child is taught in. Most of the points raised today have been about geography and distance and not on the environment that the children will be taught in if this proposal goes ahead. We believe that the size of the proposed school is just right as it is easier for teachers to teach single year groups rather than having to teach 3 year groups in 1 class. Whiterose Primary and St Gwladys Bargoed schools are good examples of successful amalgamations. The size of a school does not affect the ability to learn. Rhiw Syr Dafydd Primary in Oakdale has over 600 children and has just had an excellent Inspection. Leadership and Management is the key to success. Take Physical Education for an example it would be much better to have a flat yard and green areas for play and exercise. The 2 most important principles of Welsh Governments 21st century schools strategy are Raising Standards and improving school buildings. ESTYN has produced a report evidencing that standards have improved in new and amalgamated schools.

Q. How did Whiterose Primary School do?

A. They were in special measures but are out now and standards are improving. We undertook a 10 year analysis of St Gwladys Bargoed School and found significant improvements.

Q. With the current school there are links with the community and links with the church?

A. We don't see why this should stop. The proposed school is not far away and is situated in Abertysswg.

Q. I have to question the management structure of the new school. I was under the impression that it would be a 3 to 18 establishment run by the Headteacher of Rhymney Comprehensive School?

A. As you are aware this matter was raised at the Rhymney Comprehensive governing body meeting. We have sought the views of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning concerning this and she has assured us that there was no commitment to this. We have acknowledge that there are a range of options which we can consider with governors in the future.

Q. Rob Davies was interviewed as Headteacher of a 3 to 18 school?

A. That is clearly not the information we have been given. If you provide proof of that we will look into it further. We were not at the interview so cannot comment further at present.

Q. We have concerns about attendance, especially from the area of Greensway.

A. The school are developing good strategies to improve attendance levels.

Statement. The paths are not gritted, children will have to share paths with older children. The drop-off point at the lower end of the site needs to be closer to the proposed school.

A. Admittedly this is a complex safe route. The paths will have to be looked at.

Q. We report the number of lamps that are not working and months later nothing has changed?

A. We will advise Highways of your concerns.

Q. What can you do to improve the safe route?

A. With regard to the path at the lower end of the site there is the possibility of widening the path for vehicle access with a turning point nearer the proposed new school. We would not want vehicles on the school site. We would also look at having separate Primary and Secondary access points in that vicinity.

Q. Would emergency vehicles have access through the Comprehensive school site?

A. Yes, Emergency, Delivery and Disabled vehicles.

Q. Has approval been given for access off the new road?

A. We have met with a Highways officer and there has been preliminary approval.

Q. There is a lot of congestion outside Rhymney Comprehensive at present?

A. With this proposal we have the opportunity to look at congestion and take traffic off the main road.

Q. What about gritting?

A. That would be a matter for the school to consider. Many schools purchase this additional service

Statement. That would be a further cost to the school along with the rates.

A. Yes it would. Rates should not result in an additional burden as this is reflected in the formula budget. There would be savings with regard to energy costs and day to day building maintenance.

Statement. You are going to rip the heart out of the village.

Statement. We never asked for this.

Statement. We don't have anything north of the Rhymney bridge so why do we have to have this?

A. Members wanted to support this area which experiences high levels of social deprivation.

Statement. If you provide transport for everyone it would be a good proposal.

Statement (by Assistant Director). I am sensing a substantial amount of negativity to the proposal. Is it fair to say that we have done the best that we can in the circumstances? Would you be willing to vote on the proposal?

Statement (by Chair of Governors). It was confirmed the Council had done the best it could in the circumstances with the proposal. The Chair was happy to proceed to a vote but advised it should be noted that this isn't a full Governing Body.

A vote was taken and all 7 Governors voted against the proposal. The acting Headteacher abstained.

Meeting Ended