

DROP-IN SESSIONS FOR PUPILS, STAFF AND PARENTS/CARERS HELD AT PONTLOTTYN PRIMARY SCHOOL 15th DECEMBER 2014

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Rhianon Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Bleddyn Hopkins – Assistant Director, 21st Century Schools

Keri Cole – Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion

Mark Williams – Manager, Building Consultancy

Julian Williams – Senior Officer, School Admissions & Exclusions

Drop-In Session with Staff

Q. I am going on maternity leave will I be kept in the loop?

A. Yes, the school should keep you advised of progress.

Q. Would the headship be advertised prior to Helen Leaman retiring?

A. That will be a decision for the new Governing Body.

Q. Will all staff appointments be made at the same time?

A. Again that will be a matter for the new Governing Body but the usual practice is for this process to be staggered over time.

Q. When will all the jobs be put in place?

A. The process would likely commence about a year prior to the school opening in January 2017.

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 positions will be filled, as appropriate, but it would be usual to have a mix of existing and new governors in such situations.

Q. Is it just the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher jobs that will be advertised?

A. We would imagine that the vast majority of permanent staff will be slotted in.

Q. Will the teaching staff be involved in the design as when we visited Cwm Ifor Primary we thought the classrooms were very small?

A. The design of Cwm Ifor was driven by school staff and is open plan. The Headteacher and staff will be involved. An option is to have open plan for Key Stage 1 and more formal size compliant classrooms for Key Stage 2.

Statement. As staff we are quite excited at the prospect of a new school.

A. It will be a better teaching environment, both inside and outside. The biggest differences we notice with new schools are the acoustics and energy efficiency.

Q. Will we have new resources and technology or would we transfer equipment from the school?

A. We would make some funding available for the new school, although it is likely that some existing equipment will transfer, especially if it is in good condition.

Q. How will the transition between the old and new schools take place?

A. We would let the school have 2 or 3 closure days at either/or the end of the Autumn Term and the start of the Spring Term.

Q. Will staff be expected to move equipment?

A. No, we will employ external contractors to do that.

Q. Will there be too many staff for the new school?

A. There will be less of a budget as only one lump sum is payable, although there will only one Headteacher instead of two. The detailed staffing structure will need to be considered by the governing body.

Q. If there is a reduction in staff when will we know?

A. That would be up to the new Governing Body but we would expect typically a term's notice.

Q. Will the new Primary school be under the control of Rhymney Comprehensive?

A. No, they will be separate. Maybe in the future we could look at a campus manager for 3-18 or we could look at federation, as is being proposed for Fochriw.

Q. What will happen to the cook as there are currently 2?

A. That will be for Caerphilly catering to decide. We have 2 years to manage the process and would look to avoid any compulsory redundancies, whenever possible.

Q. If the Deputy Headteacher of Abertysswg Primary got the Headship could she employ all Abertysswg staff?

A. The appointment of staff would be for the new governing body. We don't see any reasons why the number of permanent teaching staff should decrease, for example.

Q. Will staff be interviewed?

A. This will be a matter for the new governing body but it is likely a number of staff would merely be slotted in.

Q. Will there be a full-time nursery?

A. The Local Authority provides funding for part-time nursery so it would be up to the new governing body to decide whether it wishes to provide funding for full-time. We have proposed an Integrated Children's Centre which could provide wrap around care and Flying Start facilities. The best example of an Integrated Children's Centre is St James Primary in Caerphilly.

Q. Will we get input into the design?

A. Yes we would consult with staff, parents and children.

Q. How many teaching assistants in Abertysswg Primary are permanent?

A. We are not sure. We have spoken to the two Headteachers and they do not see an issue with the deployment of the teaching assistants.

Drop-In Session with Parents/Carers – 4 parents attended

Q. The Headteacher of a super school in Cardiff has been suspended so it can't be good educationally?

A. It is not planned as a super school. It is a new Primary school for 3-11 year olds on the Comprehensive School site.

Q. There will be a further distance to travel to school and the young children will have to walk past older children dealing drugs and causing anti-social behaviour?

A. The Local Authority would presently provide transport if the children reside more than a mile and a half from the proposed new school and it is their catchment school. We have undertaken an analysis and no one would be living further than a mile and a half. We have also planned safe routes. The alleged drug taking has been mentioned previously so the appropriate staff will be informed.

Q. Will it be a robot school just full of computers?

A. It will be a normal primary school with up to date technology to enhance learning.

Q. Will there be a need for traffic control by the viaduct?

A. This is the likely outcome we will need to pursue.

Q. The two communities are historically separate. Pontlottyn results are good so will the amalgamation bring standards down?

A. We don't see any reasons why standards should drop.

Q. We believe that every village should have a local school. Why don't you just spend the money on the current schools? Taking the school away will take the heart out of the community.

A. There are only limited adaptations that could be undertaken at the two existing schools.

Q. Will there be a sheltered walkway to the new school?

A. No that would be impracticable as it would be too far and could lead to more anti-social behaviour.

Q. My worry is about the river and the safety of the children?

A. The safe routes will be looked at to safeguard the safety of the children as that is paramount.

Q. What will the class sizes be for the new school?

A. No classes can exceed 30 children. There would be an advantage of classes at the new school as they will all probably have single year groups instead of the current situation where two or three year groups are in one class.

Statement. If you provide transport then we would be happy with the proposed new school. A sheet was shown with public transport costs per day with a local company.

The details were:

Fochriw

Taxi Car - £13.00 Return

Taxi Minibus - £19.80 Return

Stagecoach Bus - £3.60 Adult Return

Stagecoach Bus - £2.40 Child Return

Pontlloftyn

Taxi Car - £8.80 Return

Taxi Minibus - £15.60 Return

Stagecoach Bus - £2.50 Adult Return

Stagecoach Bus - £1.70 Child Return

Abertysswg

Taxi Car - £6.00 Return

Taxi Minibus - £9.00 Return

Stagecoach Bus - £1.80 Adult Return

Stagecoach Bus - £1.20 Child Return

A. We could not provide transport to you as this would be against policy.

Drop-In Session Ended

PONTLOTTYN PRIMARY SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY MEETING

15th DECEMBER 2014

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Rhianon Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning
Bleddyn Hopkins – Assistant Director, 21st Century Schools
Keri Cole – Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion
Julian Williams – Senior Officer, School Admissions & Exclusions

Q. Performance of both schools are clearly outlined in the consultation document, Pontlottyn rated as good and Abertysswg being adequate. I have an understanding that when two new schools unite as one, all accreditations cease and the wheel is re-invented. This is poor, as all hard work that has been put in place over the last 10 years will be redundant. Pontlottyn is proud of all the accreditations which can be viewed in the reception area. When I chose Pontlottyn school for my child's education, a lot of these accreditations were instrumental in the decision making process. How will future parents make this important decision about their child's education placement of there is no accreditation to aid the decision.

A. Both schools have a range of accreditations. It will be an interesting challenge for the new school to obtain new accreditations as the processes are important not just the plaque on the wall. Regarding new parents, the Headteacher can advise of the achievements of both former schools and the challenges that the new school will face.

Q. What are the Councils plans with leadership of the new school. As Abertysswg School has an acting Headteacher and Pontlottyn school's Headteacher is close to retirement age. Could the Council please clarify this?

A. A new Governing Body will be formed who will appoint the Headteacher and will structure the school based on the budget available.

Q. On page 13 of the Consultation document it states that 'nearly' all Abertysswg children behave well. How many children is 'Nearly'? As Pontlottyn school's behaviour is good I am concerned this will affect the children that want to learn. Could we have further information with regards to 'however' comments on page 13. Abertysswg school has a weak record of raising standards and recent initiatives are not fully established in the life and work of the school?

A. There is no problem with behaviour at Abertysswg. There have not been any permanent exclusions and very low number of fixed term exclusions. Estyn's definition of 'nearly' is 97%. Estyn's inspections are getting harder and there is a new Headteacher and management structure at the school. The Education Achievement Service has no concerns with Abertysswg school and the attendance rate has increased by 3% recently.

Q. Some parents' comments are based upon sharing entrances with older Rhymney Comprehensive students which concerns us as this can be very overpowering for younger children. There have also been accusations of anti-social behaviour within the recreational areas next to the Comprehensive school. Parents do not want their children to witness this behaviour?

A. As with a primary school, at the moment there is a separate area for Nursery children. In the same way, the primary site would be separate from the Comprehensive. We would liaise with the school to have the appropriate security in place. With regard to anti-social behaviour, having a primary school on the site should act as a deterrent.

Q. With regard to the new access bridge will pupils walk under or over the bridge? Rail tracks are extremely dangerous. Also in the winter months the steps will need to be gritted. Experience has shown that at present the routes currently used for the route to school are not maintained, examples of which are the link steps by Merchant Street and Farm Road which are extremely hazardous when ice arrives and the pathway down from Sunny View to Merchant Street is trip hazardous?

A. Referring to the site plan on page 17 of the Consultation document, the access bridge is the footbridge over the river and therefore not near the railway. Gritting will have to be considered by the school as part of a winter maintenance service.

Q. How will the Comprehensive and Primary school children be segregated, fencing, security etc. At present members of the public can easily gain access to the Comprehensive. I have known for primary schools in other cities to have lock down facilities at a push of a button and several security activations throughout the boundary. If the school is going to be state of the art, could we have state of the art security?

A. The Council will liaise with the school regarding the most appropriate security measures but we would not envisage the lock down arrangements you refer to.

Q. There are concerns about the safe route to school. As we have raised concerns about the safe route to our current school, this includes the Farm Road /Fochriw Road bend being very dangerous, lorries exceeding weight limit, cars breaking speed limit, narrow paths, lorries and cars mounting curbs, no 20 mile speed limit outside the school, unlike other schools. It will be further to walk to the new school for some of our pupils so further hazards?

A. We have arranged the site to avoid congestion and traffic on the Primary school site will be kept to a minimum. The site is a compromise between Abertysswg and Pontlottyn. The Headteacher will contact Highways regarding 20 mile speed limit signs and will receive the support of the Education Department.

Q. On page 20 of the consultation document it states that all pupils will be supervised closely at all times. With reference to the Comprehensive, I have to dispute this, there has been an instance of two students hitching lifts home last summer in school time, stopping a number of strange vehicles and even asking me if I had a vehicle to take them home. It transpired that the two students who were 11 years of age left school in the afternoon after a disagreement in the classroom. These students were not safeguarded in my opinion. This may be a one off that I came across but how do you control 800 students? Could the Council clarify what the procedures are for supervising and the wandering of students within school hours, such as lunch time, or being withdrawn from the classroom for behaviour reasons etc?

A. There are obviously safeguarding issues here that need to be addressed and these will be followed up. Schools are in charge of students when they are on the school grounds and if children do abscond then school management have to look into it and follow truancy procedures.

Q. On page 20 it states that up to date facilities will be used by communities but in what context? It sounds positive as we don't have a community centre. I have been known to frequent Rhymney Comprehensive for community activities and it has been noted that the lights outside leading down from the Abertysswg entrance are in a poor state and the sports hall has poor hygiene facilities, no soap, no hand driers, missing toilet seat, this gives a very poor impression of what the Comprehensive School has to offer. All problems have been noted and forwarded to the necessary departments for action?

A. An annual audit is undertaken of all schools to check facilities and regular hygiene inspections take place. This will be followed up with the school.

Q. Are there any future roads to be introduced in and around the school? As recent media reports state health issues with the environment air qualities.

A. Highways funding has been agreed for a feasibility study re the Heads of the Valley. It could happen longer term but nothing in the foreseeable future.

Q. Are there any plans to curb traffic at the entrance to Abertysswg?

A. Highways have looked at it and are not proposing anything with regard to the school. We will encourage parents to drop children off, or preferably walk using the safe route.

Q. Younger children can find the anti-social behaviour overpowering?

A. We were not aware of the anti-social behaviour until the parents meeting and the Cabinet Member for Education and lifelong Learning is going to follow it up.

Statement. Finally please take great consideration on any job losses, as all our teachers, teaching assistants, catering staff, dinner ladies, caretaker, each person involved in the school are highly valued members of a team, which has helped us strive to being a 'GOOD' rated school. We do not want our standards to be compromised in any way or morale to drop, as a result of the new school being developed.

A. Noted.

Statement. This is a fantastic opportunity but there are issues with traffic.

A. The main issues are the location of the proposed new school, traffic, increased distance and anti-social behaviour.

Statement by Assistant Director. Would you be willing to vote on the proposal?

Reply by Chair of Governors. Yes.

A vote was taken and all 9 Governors voted in favour of the proposal.

Meeting Ended