

Democratic Services: Scrutiny Committee 15th, October, 2020

Written Submission to the Scrutiny Committee from the Senior Leadership Team

Cowbridge Comprehensive School

We write to express our collective views regarding the proposal for extending Cowbridge Comprehensive School to a 3-19 All-age school. We are highly enthusiastic and excited by this proposal and believe that it will bring enormous educational opportunities and benefits for the future. This model, for a separate primary within the community and on the current comprehensive school site, is the preferred option of our Senior Leadership Team, as it prevents the conflict of amalgamation.

We summarise the opportunities, strengths and benefits as follows:

An all age school will provide a genuine and authentic environment for creative strategies, solutions and approaches, to secure excellent educational outcomes, leading to a continuum of education for pupils from nursery to 18 years of age.

This model offers exciting, collaborative opportunities for secondary teachers to learn and share innovative practice from primary phase teachers, afforded by the same management and setting. It offers imaginative and efficient ways to identify the best ways to teach and learn together, in the best interests of all learners, particularly vulnerable pupils, those with additional learning needs and pupils entitled to free school meals.

All age pupils and all staff will benefit from a highly skilled, innovative senior team of leaders, with expertise across all domains of education and business. Additionally, teachers at CCS have excellent capacity to teach, specialist domains, within the primary sector to significantly raise standards, alongside the expertise of primary colleagues.

Enhanced opportunities for primary and specialist subject teachers at secondary level to realise the new 'Successful Futures' Curriculum for Wales in an authentic, joined-up way. Our curriculum practice, already identified as sector leading, would become extended across all phases and stages of education. This presents huge benefits for both staff and children.

The continuous professional learning opportunities for staff at the comprehensive school are already multi-faceted, wide-ranging and global. We learn from the best worldwide and it would be hugely beneficial for primary staff to have access to this extensive network for learning and teaching, judged excellent by the Inspectorate. These would become even more efficient, effective and resourceful as a result of extra funding and collaboration of resources

Primary phase staff would have access to our enhanced and extensive wellbeing services and strategies which are highly valued by current secondary staff, and otherwise unaffordable in smaller organisations.

Genuine and authentic cross-phase work would benefit all staff to improve the educational skills and standards of achievement of all pupils

The transition and preparation for each stage of education will be more authentic and streamlined and no stand still/ regression observed, in transfer from primary to secondary phase, which, is a current feature and existence.

The current interventions at KS3 could be decreased, resources redistributed to areas of need, as the strategic and in depth, well-resourced intervention pre KS3, would target underachievement early on and in line with the curriculum continuum.

All staff able to better understand each dimension and age/ stage of educational provision, and, collaborate accordingly, for the benefit of every child

Pupils pre-11 would be able to access easily, the extensive resources and facilities already available, including peer mentoring of exemplary older children, trained as per current, by external experts annually.

Access for all pupils to expert and enhanced wellbeing services internal and external to the school currently part of the whole school Strategic Wellbeing plan

All age pupils will benefit from the enhanced educational provision, resources and services gained from having access to the current innovative 'Dream Big, Dream Bigger' plan and associated income generation, to secure best resources for education

The model presents efficient, effective use of economies of scale to include, minimising and eliminating any duplication of services ('back office', admin, catering, site services, census returns, ICT provision and services) Critically and importantly, this leaves teachers and leaders within the primary sector of the school, able to fully concentrate their expertise on teaching and learning for excellence, rather than the diversions, which, primary headteachers are currently subjected to.

Avoid duplication of standard charges for services e.g. electricity, gas, ICT, reprographics all payable once rather than duplicated across separate organisations

Maximised funding flexibility to generate excellent resources, provision and staffing across all phases of education achieved via robust, rigorous and sustainable strategic financial planning, aligned to the vision and improvement area priorities.

Proactive strategic maintenance programme and capital development programme currently operated exclusively with the Comprehensive will ensure sustainable delivery for excellence into the future in all aspects of the school's work

Pupils on roll will automatically transfer and therefore eliminates need to apply and any associated uncertainty surrounding admissions. This means avoiding unnecessary admin for LA staff with streamlining admissions.

Maximised procurement efficiency achieved through enhanced bargaining/ negotiation as a result of large-scale purchases.

The 'business aspects' of the school managed by an integrated team of experts to ensure the best provision for health & safety, strategic financial planning, organisational day to day financial procedures, HR, catering, ICT, Cleaning, site management

More stable and sustainable budget for the medium and long term.

Ability to cope better with breakdown in services as a result of wear, tear as budget will be more flexible to proactively and reactively managing maintenance and repair

All staff and pupils able to access innovative, new technology and improve significantly the efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of these services in the new world presented by the pandemic of 2020, leading to improved standards for all sectors of education, learning from each other, together.

Summary

We are enthused that the Local Authority is proposing this model and of the enormous potential for creating an All-age school of excellence, where all staff from all sectors can learn together in the best interests of all pupils.

We believe that the recent challenges presented by the pandemic of 2020, and the foreseeable diminished funds for the future, validates this model as an important priority for achieving an efficient, sustainable and prosperous school for the future.

Written Representation to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Meeting on Thursday, 15th October at 5pm

Agenda Item 4: Update on the Proposal to Increase the Number of Primary School Places in Cowbridge to Meet Increased Demand as a Result of Recent and Proposed Housing Developments.

Issues and Concerns

Whilst I welcome that Y Bont Faen is to stay open, I have concerns about the impact of this new proposal on the provision of English medium primary school education in Cowbridge and on the resources and facilities at Cowbridge Comprehensive School, namely:

1. Y Bont Faen currently has a repairs/maintenance backlog of over £537,100. The Consultation document at p.31 states that currently 7 primary schools have higher levels of backlog maintenance compared to Y Bont Faen. The Vale Council only puts aside £600,000 a year for repairs. It is likely to be many years before Y Bont Faen receives any substantial investment towards repair of the school building.
2. No mention is made in the Consultation document as to how Y Bont Faen is to accommodate the projected increase in pupil numbers above its 210 capacity from 2020 to 2026 (see p17).
3. The excessive costs associated with the new school, from costing £5m to build, only having single form entry, estimated running costs of £276,000 in the first year for a Reception class of 25 pupils and a time lag of 7 year before it becomes fully operational (see p33).
4. The extra/duplicate costs associated with running two English medium primary schools in a town the size of Cowbridge. The Consultation document fails to address the issue of the additional education costs which will be incurred by the Vale Council, due to duplications in staffing roles, such as Head Teacher, Senior Management Teams, ALNCOs etc.
5. The concerns highlighted in the previous consultation, regarding traffic congestion at the Comprehensive school site, the negative impact of the proposal on existing Comprehensive School facilities and resources (i.e. the extensive loss of sporting fields and outside space at breaktime for the current 1530 pupils) and the failure to present any cogent empirical evidence supporting the benefits of an All Through School, remain valid.

6. The new Consultation does not address or offer any solutions to remedy the “poor condition” (see p31) of the Y Bont Faen school building. Yet one of the cardinal aims of the 21st Century Schools Programme is to improve the poor condition of school buildings in the Vale. By putting forward this new proposal, the Vale Council is “shirking” its responsibility to come up with a workable proposal, which provides 21st Century School facilities, educational resources and benefits to **all** English medium primary school children in Cowbridge.
7. The Vale Council has failed to properly investigate alternative sites for the expansion of Y Bont Faen Primary School, as suggested in the original consultation responses i.e. the Cowbridge Market or the Police Fields, both of which are owned by the Vale Council and would not incur any compulsory purchase costs (see p.40).
8. Given the slow progress of the Darren Farm Development, a rapid decision which fails to properly consider all options is irresponsible (see p30).
9. Finally, on the issue of transparency and due process, the parents of Cowbridge Comprehensive School would not have received any notice of the re-launched Consultation and new end date, had I not raised the issue with 21st Century Schools on the 7th October. On being advised that the school had sent a Parent Mail message about the re-launched Consultation on the 9th September, a message I didn't receive, I put a post on Cowbridge Hub to see if any other parents had failed to receive the Parent Mail notice. As a result of my findings, on the 12th October, 21st Century Schools extended the deadline of the Consultation to the 23rd November.

As a parent of Cowbridge Comprehensive School and a governor and parent of Y Bont Faen Primary School, I cannot support the proposal for the reasons given above.

Frances Blomeley
Parent of Cowbridge Comprehensive School
Governor and Parent of Y Bont Faen Primary School

Written Submissions

To : The Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee Meeting of 15th October 2020

Regarding : Agenda Item 4 : UPDATE ON THE PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN COWBRIDGE TO MEET THE INCREASED DEMAND AS A RESULT OF RECENT AND PROPOSED HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

1. Introduction

On 9 March 2020, the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Cabinet authorised the Director of Learning & Skills to undertake consultation on a revised proposal to increase the number of primary school places in Cowbridge.

The Consultation Document issued by the Council in support of the above, proposes to meet the increased demand for English medium primary education in Cowbridge from September 2022 by :

- Changing the age range of Cowbridge Comprehensive School from 11 - 19 to 3 - 19;
- Increasing the capacity of Cowbridge Comprehensive School from to 1,586 places to 1,796 places to accommodate 210 English medium primary school places with an additional 48 part-time nursery places; and
- Constructing a new school building on the Cowbridge Comprehensive School site to accommodate the primary and nursery places.

The Committee are respectfully requested to **reject** these proposals at this early stage.

2. Grounds for this request

2.1. Local Feeling

(p.11 of the Consultation Document)

The Consultation Document has been issued as the result of an overwhelmingly negative response to a previous Consultation Document issued in November 2019, which proposed :

- the closure of Y Bont Faen Primary School,
- changing the age range of Cowbridge Comprehensive School from 11 – 19 to 3 – 19; and
- the construction of a new school building on the Cowbridge Comprehensive School site to accommodate the primary and nursery phases

Over 67% of the responses to the above proposals opposed them. Foremost amongst the Key Concerns expressed by the respondents (as recorded by a Vale of Glamorgan Cabinet meeting of 9th March 2020) were :

- insufficient evidence that amalgamating the schools would improve education for the children,
- the negative effect on pastoral care and pupil safety, and
- the loss of specialist primary school knowledge in the new amalgamated school.

Unfortunately, the new Consultation Document fails to resolve these concerns.

2.2. Capacity **(p. 16 - 17 of the Consultation Document)**

It is stated that the expansion of Cowbridge Comprehensive School is required because of projected increases in primary school pupils of 132 by 2026, and 185 by 2028. However, these numbers will only be reached **if** all of the 475 homes in the Darren Farm development are built and sold, **and** if the additional housing developments in the Council's Local Development Plan for 2011 – 2026 are also built and sold. The projected increase in primary school pupils of 185 by 2028 may therefore never be reached.

The Consultation Document provides for the construction of a new primary school with 210 pupil places. That school will be available from 2022, when there will at best be 25 pupils in it. In three years' time, with luck it will be half full. In six years' time, with luck it will have reached its projected maximum, making it 88% full. This does not seem a particularly efficient use of resources.

2.3. All-through Schools **(p.12 – 14 of the Consultation Document)**

As stated in para. **2.1**, above, a major concern in the responses to the previous consultation document was the unsupported assumption that an amalgamated (or 'all-through' school) school for 3 – 19 year olds would, '...offer greater potential for improving the levels of achievement for all pupils'.

Considerable space is given in the present Consultation Document to heavily promote the alleged advantages of all-through schools. However, the document fails to provide one shred of independent evidence to substantiate the claims made. It is stated that the Council, '...considers there to be a number of benefits associated with the all through school model'. These benefits are often to do with administrative and managerial efficiency, and where they do deal with the welfare of children, tend to be vague, amorphous and completely lacking in any hard evidence.

The one piece of evidence referred to in the document (p.13) is 'research' undertaken by the National College for School Leadership. A lengthy list of 'findings'

of the purported benefits of all-through learning said to arise from this research is then set out. It is worth considering exactly what this research actually amounted to, in more detail :

- the research was conducted in collaboration with the Consortium of All-Through Schooling (CATS), a national group which **supports** the leadership of all-through learning;
- it appears to be some ten years old;
- the report produced describes itself as a 'small-scale research project' involving face-to-face interviews in 16 settings, 'most' of which were with '...the leader, a senior leader and a middle leader' – i.e., senior management;
- the report produced is a mere 16 pages long, one page of which is the front sheet, one the contents, two an executive summary, and two dealing with references;
- the report describes its findings as merely, '...opportunities for reflection.'

It should perhaps be of no surprise that the resulting ten-page document, prepared with an organisation promoting the leadership of all-through learning, which sought information only from a small group of leaders in all-through learning, produced a report which is very much in favour of all-through learning.

This 'evidence' therefore, is **NOT** an independent, in-depth, up-to-date, analysis of all-through learning as a system; nor, in fairness to those who created the document, does it pretend to be. It is utterly wrong to use this small, subjective and limited discussion document to produce a vast list of purported benefits.

It must be again emphasised that the benefits of an amalgamated or all-through school have still to be established, and are most definitely not established anywhere in this document. References in the Consultation Document as to such schools being 'popular' does beg the question, popular with whom?

2.4. School Buildings and Facilities (p.17 – 19 of the Consultation Document)

The proposals state that a new building to house the primary school unit will be built on the existing comprehensive school site

It is difficult to conceive of a greater waste of public money than the construction of a substantial primary school unit, which seeks to duplicate all of the facilities of an existing primary school unit 400 metres away, but which does so on a cramped, flood-affected area of land, adjoining a main road, which will serve to deprive an adjoining comprehensive school of some of its already limited land and facilities.

The suggestion that this ludicrous situation can be 'mitigated' by careful management of the shared, reduced, cramped site which will be created, may well be possible for the first 4 years of the scheme, when the primary school would appear to be virtually empty, but it will become more difficult if the expected pupil

numbers increase. If they don't, which is certainly a possibility, there could be the even more ridiculous situation of a brand new, near deserted school, standing next to a crowded comprehensive.

2.5. Impacts on other schools (P.30 - 32 of the Consultation Document)

It has been mentioned above that the Consultation Document requires the building of a second primary school, of equal capacity to Y Bont Faen Primary School, some 400 metres away, in a less convenient, more cramped and more limited site, at a cost of some £5 million pounds. The document also states that the Y Bont Faen site cannot be improved because an 'initial feasibility assessment' of the site decided that 'limited construction access' would mean accommodating the pupils elsewhere, and this would prove too expensive. This conclusion is reached without any indication of the research that has taken place into this important issue. Bearing in mind the original cost of the development was in excess of £7 million pounds, surely it could be asked that more investigation be made as to the actual cost of improving and extending the existing site, and the temporary accommodation of the pupils elsewhere. This especially the case, bearing in mind that for many years before the Consultation Document, the plan was to do just that, without any apparent issues.

If that is not to be, the Document does make the point that the revised 210 capacity primary school to be shoehorned into the Cowbridge Comprehensive site, will cost less than the originally planned larger version, at a saving of some £2.4 million pounds. The cost of repairing the neglected school buildings on the Y Bont Faen site is just over £500,000, which would still leave a saving of almost £2 million to be spent on other schools in the Vale; money which would not have been available had it not been for the protestations of the parents, children and people of Cowbridge.

Nevertheless, the Consultation Document makes it clear that, because other schools will be given priority in spending, Y Bont Faen school will continue to suffer the neglect and distress it has suffered for many years, falling into a more calamitous and expensive state of disrepair, while an identical primary school 400 metres away stands empty.

2.6. Human resources (P.33 of the Consultation Document)

It will again be the case that the newly built primary school on the Cowbridge Comprehensive School site will be governed by the existing governing body of Cowbridge Comprehensive School, which will be responsible for both the primary and secondary phases of the 3 – 19 all-through school. The skill, expertise and specialist knowledge required to effectively run a primary school, for 3 – 11 year-old children, will be completely absent from this new management body.

3. Conclusion

The original consultation document produced in November 2019, presented proposals which were unsupported by evidence, unjustified by argument, and clearly unpopular with local people – for perfectly understandable reasons.

The revised proposals have come up with an alternative which completely fails to deal with the concerns expressed in the previous consultation, is equally unsupported, and tends to rely on management-speak and declarations, rather than facts and evidence.

The concerns about all-through schools are dealt with by reference to a 10 year-old discussion document. The concerns about pupil safety are dealt with by leaving most of the children in a school which will be left to gradually disintegrate around them, while a handful are left to wander round a deserted building, within effectively a prison compound, next to a main road, with minimal outdoor natural or 'forest' facilities. The concerns about the absence of a team of specialist, experienced and trusted governors, managers and teaching staff to oversee the specific needs of the primary school age pupils in the new school unit, seem to have been completely ignored.

The new consultation document appears to have taken the worst possible alternative to the original proposals. With the greatest of respect to those putting them forward, whose honesty and integrity (if it needs saying) are not questioned, the proposals :

- Fail to make effective use of limited public finances;
- Reduce and limit the resources available to pupils attending the secondary school unit in Cowbridge Comprehensive school;
- Provide a poorer quality of care and education to children attending the primary school building on the Cowbridge Comprehensive School site;
- Provide a worsening physical environment for pupils attending the Y Bont Faen Primary School site;
- Undermine the Vale of Glamorgan Council's stated commitment to ensuring that all pupils within the Vale have every opportunity to attain the best possible outcomes.

As a long-time resident of Cowbridge, and the father of a former pupil of both Y Bont Faen and Cowbridge Comprehensive, I would respectfully ask the Committee to reject the proposals at this stage.

The original plan, in place for many years before the previous and present Consultation Documents, was to move the Welsh Primary School from its existing site, to the new school to be built at Darren Farm. Y Bont Faen primary school was then then to have been expanded to cope with increased numbers of pupils. Local people are finding it difficult to understand how these perfectly sensible, practical and feasible ideas were suddenly shelved, to be replaced by increasingly bizarre alternatives.

I would like to thank all members of the Committee for reading this document.

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Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Thursday 15th October, 2020

Agenda item 4. Update of the Proposal to Increase the Number of Primary School Places in Cowbridge to Meet the Increased Demand as a Result of Recent and Proposed Housing Developments - Cabinet: 9th March, 2020.

I would like to bring some of my concerns about this proposal to the attention of the Scrutiny Committee

- A system encouraging inequality would be created with the primary aged children of Cowbridge having the choice of a new 21st Century School or a School where there is a backlog of over £500,000 repairs/maintenance before ever attempting to meet the needs of a 21st Century School.
- A large amount of money will be spent on a school which will not be fully operational for 7 years while Y Bont Faen School will struggle with lack of sufficient space in a building which is not fit for purpose.
- Alternative sites, such as the Cattle Market or the Police Fields which could accommodate one larger primary school rather than dividing primary children between two sites, have not been properly investigated.
- The delay in building on the Darren Farm Development has made the need for a speedy decision unnecessary and gives time for more investigation of alternatives.
- There is divided opinion on the merits of all-through schools and the establishment of one in Cowbridge could prove to be detrimental to the education and well-being of our young children and a disaster financially for the Council.
- Much is made of the primary children being able to use the facilities of the comprehensive. It would be useful to know which facilities would be available and how that would work in practice. I am surprised that many facilities are not already being fully used by the Comprehensive.
- Traffic is a known problem at Cowbridge Comprehensive so an increase in pupils can only worsen the situation.

The primary age children of Cowbridge deserve to be educated in a nurturing and age appropriate environment of one standalone primary. Putting together all the money to be spent in building half what is needed and the money required to make Y Bont Faen Primary fit for purpose could make that a reality.

Carolyn Lyons

Community Governor

Y Bont Faen Primary School