

A community vision for 21st Century education on the St Davids peninsula

On Saturday 28th February surrounded by the St David's Day celebrations on Cross Square, the schools for the future campaign kicked off by urging everyone to *have your say* and help create our own vision to counter the council plan to remove Ysgol Dewi Sant's 6th form, with huge implications for all the peninsula schools and the future of the whole community.



“What *St Davids schools for the future* is about is coming together as a community around an imaginative, realistic proposal for the future of education here on the peninsula,” said steering group chair, Paul Howe of St Nicholas. “The steering group is working hard to find out what works in other rural communities, the relevant facts of Welsh Government policy, and what ideas might give us the best education for our children and grandchildren. We need people to share what we’re learning and feed back their views.”

Shops, cafes, and business are signing up to be **Schools for the Future** news points. You can find out the latest on the fact finding work and the development of the proposal anywhere you see the news point sign.

Or you can get your personal copy of the latest news by signing up on the website www.schoolsfuture.co.uk

Once you’ve got the latest news, just tell 10 friends. If they tell 10 friends, and they tell 10 friends pretty soon everyone will know. Then we can all feed back our views through this chain of friends and have a crucial say in a community vision for our schools.

So go on, gossip for good, and tell 10 friends. You know you want to!



Why we're fighting for the future of our schools

Here on the St Davids peninsula we have a tradition of education that goes back to the early days of the Cathedral in the 12th century. This has been a community of education and learning since its very origins. No wonder that in January this year our community was outraged at a proposal from Pembrokeshire County Council to close St Davids' secondary school, Ysgol Dewi Sant, permanently.

The prediction of future falling student numbers and the certainty of budget cuts along with the need overall to raise educational standards in Pembrokeshire led to a Council plan to reform the schooling system, but to close one of its best performing schools at the heart of such an iconic community was not the way forward. The Peninsula community rose up.

On January 29th we made national news when Pembrokeshire County Council performed a last minute U-turn and dropped its plan to close the school. But its revised plan is for a school with no 6th form, bussing our students on a 30 mile round trip each day to a centralised 6th form unit at Pembrokeshire college.

At a packed community meeting following the U-turn it was clear that the people of the St Davids peninsula want something far more for their children. So the **St Davids schools for the future** campaign was born.

We have a steering group of some 20 people who are volunteering their time to research the politics and finance of the situation, to look for educational models elsewhere that we can learn from, to make contact with business and stakeholders on the Peninsula for their input, and to share what we find with the wider community and invite their views and support.

Education has been at the heart of our community for 9 centuries. From St Davids Day to May Day, during the council's statutory public consultation, we have 2 months to make sure that it not only stays, but grows.

So what's the plan?

Here's what the steering group has drawn up as the aspirations for our children and the aims of the **St Davids schools for the future** campaign.

We want a high quality and inspiring education rooted in the communities of the St Davids peninsula for students of all aptitudes and abilities to prepare them for life and work in Wales and beyond.

We want our children to be:

- educated and informed
- creative and resourceful
- flexible and confident
- happy, healthy, good citizens
- students with their roots in Pembrokeshire and their eyes on the world

Our campaign will be:

- inclusive and transparent
- informed and imaginative
- realistic and determined

We will:

- research, debate and agree a proposed plan to achieve sustainable 21st Century education for the people of the St Davids Peninsula.
- write a proposal that is imaginative, forward-looking, and based on a sound understanding of the financial and political constraints at a local, county and national level against which our plan will be judged.
- put that proposal to the community of St Davids for debate, amendment, and final agreement.
- submit the plan to PCC as part of the statutory public consultation by May1st 2015
- campaign locally and nationally and across the UK for the adoption of the plan.

Please support and comment on the plan at www.schoolsfuture.co.uk

write to us through any of the schools for the future news points.

email us at myvoice@schoolsfuture.co.uk

Peninsula schools in the big picture

In the week running up to the Schools for the Future launch a crucial report was released on the future of the education curriculum in Wales.

It matters to us because it shows us the way that government thinking is going, and we need to see our vision for the future of the peninsula schools in that light.

The author of the report, Professor Graham Donaldson, has already helped turn round the standards of rural education in Scotland and last year the Welsh Assembly commissioned him to set out a vision that would do the same for us. So he's worth listening to.

The highlights for us:

Donaldson says there's an increasing trend "to see a two-way relationship between the quality of education systems and the wider health of society and the economy." So the future of our schools is crucial to the future of our community.

Donaldson is putting digital skills at the heart of the curriculum. So we need to be thinking of creative ways of using computers and online learning in our plans.

He wants the new curriculum to be a flow of learning from 3 to 16;

"a coherent and progressive whole, including the move between the primary and secondary sectors."

He says, "Children and young people should have opportunities to learn from expertise and experience from outside the school". So a chance for local businesses, artists, National Park and all to make the wealth of expertise in our community even more central to our young people's education.

And good news, kids - he wants fewer tests! Don't we all.

Overall, his proposals are ambitious and imaginative. The government likes big ideas that will give young people an education fit for the 21st century - so we can afford to think big when it comes to the plan for our own schools.

There's a link to the whole report on our website www.schoolsfuture.co.uk.

Tell us what you think of the Donaldson review and what it means for us

Schools in St Davids - how the numbers stack up

The community vision for the future of our schools has to take into account the reality of local school finances and government policy. Here's what we've found out so far.

Just this week YDS told us that the budgets for primary schools and secondary schools years 7-11 across Wales are being cut by 25% over the next three years. That means finding savings of some £500,000 at YDS. On top of that 6th form funding is also being reduced.

Even now YDS can't afford the whole range of A levels it offers. They, like many Pembrokeshire schools, are having to take money from the lower years to subsidise A levels. So the situation right across the county is not sustainable.

Pembrokeshire County Council proposes to deal with that by removing the 6th forms from YDS, Ysgol Bro Gwaun, and Sir Thomas Picton and centralising them at Pembrokeshire College.

But that would leave YDS with only about 250 students.

One of the other reasons for PCC to reorganise our schools is to reduce the number of surplus places, based on the number of students each building could hold - empty classrooms cost money. At the moment YDS is full, but remove the 6th form and you instantly create over 100 surplus places, making the school even less financially viable.



Any plan to remove a school's 6th form has to be ratified by the Welsh Assembly. But they are not going to agree a plan that makes our school smaller and more expensive. That would take us one step away from the original council plan to close YDS.

And there would be a huge knock-on effect for the peninsula primary schools. With no local secondary school children would have to travel to Fishguard or Haverfordwest. That would create disruption between primary and secondary education; the opposite of what the Assembly's Donaldson review wants (see p3.)

It would also have a big impact on families. As one parent said the other day, if I had a child in Ysgol Bro Dewi and one at secondary in Haverfordwest, it would make the family logistics impossible. We'd be driving all over the place for after-school activities. It would just make better sense for us to move our home and business from St Davids to Haverfordwest.

Of course if parents of primary age children move out, or don't move here in the first place, then primary numbers would also fall and primary schools would become unsustainable too.

Tell us your views www.schoolsfuture.co.uk

Tie a yellow ribbon

Whether you've got an old oak tree, a fence post or your car aerial, help tell everyone that this is a cause worth fighting for by tying yellow and black ribbons to whatever you fancy.

We can also let you have stickers for your car or windows, or just tape one of the "have your say" flyers to your window. Let everyone know you care about the future of our schools.

Contact us through any of the news points, or email us at myvoice@schoolsfuture.co.uk, and please do sign up on the website and leave your YDS testimonial, or fill out a have your say flyer, to support St Davids schools for the future.