

ysgolion Tyddewi am y dyfodol  
St. Davids schools for the future  
**news 2**

12 March 2015

## **Council proposal would see YDS close. Community vision could keep it open.**

Paul Howe and Grant Sonnex, chair and vice chair of Schools for the Future met with Kate Evan-Hughes, Director for Children and Schools, Pembrokeshire County Council

**So it's just as we thought.** When we met with Kate Evan-Hughes at County Hall early on Wednesday morning, it was clear within minutes that the proposal that had emerged from that extraordinary Council meeting back in January with our protest going on outside, the proposal that appeared to save YDS from closure, the proposal to keep it open as an 11-16 school but remove its 6th form, that proposal would leave YDS too small to survive. It's what many had thought, but now we know for sure.

It may seem strange to hear that from the Director for Children and Schools at Pembrokeshire County Council, but Kate Evan-Hughes is not an elected Councillor and has no vote in the council chamber. She works for the councillors (she prefers to say that she works for the children of Pembrokeshire) and is charged with turning Council proposals into a workable education system, so it is her job to work out implications, and the implication of the proposal as it stands is that YDS would close.

**But that's not the end of the story.** Public consultation on the proposal starts on March 23rd (see back page), but dialogue with schools and governors has already begun and since January things have shifted and clarified a great deal.

Even though YDS can't survive as an 11-16 school, Kate Evan-Hughes told us that if it were to combine with local primaries under one management team that would increase its school roll and provide sufficient savings to make the amalgamated schools sustainable. There is no suggestion that there would be 3 year olds and teenagers on the one site - all sites would remain open. But, if the schools amalgamate, 3-16 education is secured on the peninsula. If they don't, then YDS would close.

**And what about A levels?** The January 29th proposal was to remove the 6th forms of YDS, Ysgol Bro Gwaun, and a newly combined Sir Thomas Picton/Tasker Milward and centralise them all in a new unit at Pembrokeshire College. It looked as though the College, with a good track record on vocational training, but limited A-level experience, was suddenly going to control and take over all A-level provision. That is not the case. *Continued on next page ...*

**What we have learned:** Although all Welsh Assembly post-16 funding would go directly to the college, the decision on how to spend it on A-levels would be made by an "A-level Committee", made up of school heads, school governors, Director for Children and Schools, and County Councillors. The College itself would only allocate money for vocational courses, it would have no representation at all on the A-level committee. So control of A-levels would stay with people who have A-level experience.

**But why centralise the A-level courses at all?** As we reported in our first edition YDS can't afford even the A-levels it provides now. It is breaking the rules by subsidising them from 11-16 funding, as are some other Pembrokeshire schools, as the only way to keep its 6th form going. That has to change.

Kate Evan-Hughes also pointed to the need to raise standards. The federation of schools that allows students to travel between schools and college to do the A-levels they want has increased choice, but standards have not improved. KEH said there's not enough competition in small classes. Students think they are doing well, but only in comparison to a handful of others. She also pointed to the 25% drop-out rate on A-level courses. Students are quitting subjects altogether rather than switching to related vocational courses. All of those issues could be addressed by providing A-levels in more economical, more competitive, larger classes with the option to combine vocational and A-level courses on the same site.

**But wouldn't that inevitably leave YDS without a 6th form?**

There is huge public concern that no A-levels at YDS would see the best teachers leave to teach elsewhere and reduce teaching standards lower in the school. Kate Evan-Hughes counters this by saying that there is no evidence for this (a fact supported by Schools for the Future's own extensive but fruitless enquiries with 8 of the UK's leading educational academics). And the Council's plan has evolved so that teachers based in the schools could be seconded to the College just for A-level classes, giving students from 11-19 (or 3-19 in an amalgamated school) the benefit of their expertise.

Another concern is that a school without a sixth form would have no role models for the younger students, no-one to take responsibility, nothing to aspire to. This is where the Director for Children and Schools, the management team at YDS and its governors, and the Principal of the College, Sharon Lusher, are all now advocating the same potential solution - concentrate most A-levels at the College, but have a centre of excellence in a smaller number of subjects at YDS.

**It raises many questions** - what subjects? how many? How would you divide subjects between the schools? How would students travel between the A-level centres? And it leaves other concerns voiced to us by the community unaddressed - why should our children spend hours a day on a bus? A large school doesn't suit everyone - our child thrives in the intimacy of YDS. So, where does that leave us?

**Could we still lose YDS?** Yes, unless our community's schools amalgamate.

**Could we still lose our 6th form?** Yes, unless we are creative and flexible and come up with solutions that work for us, the other secondaries, the College, the Council and the Welsh Government.

But, in our meeting with Kate Evan-Hughes it was clear that she is genuinely open to community input. Her challenges are raising standards, cutting surplus places and ensuring an even provision of education across North Pems. **if our community plan solves her problems the Director for Children and Schools will be thanking us, not fighting us.**

## What's next?

**1. There are 4 important meetings coming up.** The public consultation on the Council's proposals begins on March 23rd and ends on May 5th (later than previously announced). Kate Evan-Hughes and Sharon Lusher, Principal of Pembrokeshire College, will be holding two public consultation meetings at St. Davids City Hall.

**The council meeting dates at St. Davids City Hall are:**

**Monday 23 March**

Time: 6.30 - 8.00pm

**Wednesday 15 April**

Time: 6.30 - 8.00pm

**To book a place: Phone 01437 764551**

**St Davids Schools for the Future** will be holding two important community meetings at the Rugby Club to make best use of the Council consultation.

**Meeting one** will be after the first Council meeting to get your feedback and discuss what should be in our proposal.

**Meeting two** will be a fortnight later to discuss our draft community plan with the aim of getting full community support before the second Council Consultation meeting.

Please do come and contribute. It is SO IMPORTANT!

**The Schools for the Future Rugby Club dates are:**

**Thursday 26 March**

6.30 - 8.00pm

**Thursday 9 April**

6.30 - 8.00pm

## On-going research

### **2.** In our next news sheet we will start to discuss possible solutions:

What role the Church in Wales can play, how Digital technology and distance learning could help us, and how other schools have made similar situations work.

**So get in touch, tell us your views, concerns and questions and help put together a plan for education on the peninsular that we can all support.**

### **Keep up to date**

Keep an eye out for the latest new sheet at the news points.

Please tell your friends what you've learnt and pass us their feedback.

Better still, subscribe to the website [www.schoolsfuture.co.uk](http://www.schoolsfuture.co.uk) and get news updates by email.



Look for the gold newpoint spot!

**Leave a letter** at any of the Schools for the Future News Points.

**Email us** at [myvoice@schoolsfuture.co.uk](mailto:myvoice@schoolsfuture.co.uk)

**Leave comments on the website [www.schoolsfuture.co.uk](http://www.schoolsfuture.co.uk)**

**Do continue to add your testimonials** to the website and once we have an agreed plan we will be collecting signatures on a petition to support it.

Diolch yn fawr! Thank you!

*The St Davids Schools for the Future Steering Group*

*Chair, Paul Howe*

*Vice chair, Grant Sonnex*

*Treasurer, Mair Davies*