

Ysgolion Tyddewi ar gyfer y dyfodol

St. Davids schools for the future

news 4

31 March 15

BIGGER
IDEAS

TRANSPORT



THE
PLAN

VA?

ONLINE
LEARNING?

3-16?

HUB+SPOKE?

LATEST

So here we are, solidly into the Public Consultation period on the Council's plan for the future of our schools, and if you were there at St Davids City Hall on Monday March 23rd for the first of the Council's public meetings, you will have heard that things have shifted a lot since January.

BIG SHIFT

The original Council proposal was to remove the 6th forms of YDS, Ysgol Bro Gwaun, and a combined STP/Taskar Milward and concentrate all A-levels in a new 6th Form Centre to be built in the grounds of Pembrokeshire College.

On Monday we heard Kate Evan-Hughes, the Director for Children and Schools at the Council, say **"We have moved from the centralised 6th form to something more fluid,"** something that will **"meet community as well as learner needs,"** keeping a **"6th form identity"** in the schools.

In the last news letter we talked about the role of **the web and distance learning** in a 21st Century solution to our education needs. On Monday we heard that the Council has **"started significant work on this"**, and that they will **"look to put in the infrastructure using 21st Century schools funding"**. Two days later at the consultation meeting in Fishguard Kate Evan-Hughes talked about Ysgol Bro Gwaun as a **potential community hub**, maybe with **small business units actually in the school**. She was encouraging the community to **go back to a blank piece of paper** in what it wants for the school.

There was still a lot of concern in these communities about the effect of the travel times to and from a centralised 6th form centre, but there was general acceptance that the current sixth forms in both schools are too small to pay for themselves, so something needs to change, and a sense that some mix of 6th Form Centre, online learning, and some A-levels still in the schools could be a way forward.

H'WEST

Haverfordwest was a very different story and the community there was in no mood for compromise. It accepts that STP and Taskar Milward need to combine, but the new school would have a 6th form easily large enough to survive, and there's no way the community wants to lose that to a 6th form centre up the road at the College.

CHALLENGE

So it's a big challenge to come up with a solution that works for Haverfordwest, Fishguard and St Davids, but if it's going to work, it has to work for all of us.

WHAT NEXT?

We've heard the Council's Director for Children and Schools actively asking at public meetings for ideas from the communities. If our suggestions solve her problems, she says, then they will be welcomed.

There are voices in the community that say you can't trust the Council or its employees. "Given their history of cynical manipulation and utter failure to listen, we must not imagine that some ideal 'civilised' debate will necessarily lead to a fair and satisfactory solution." That's one comment on our website, www.schoolsfuture.co.uk.

Paul Miller, the leader of the Labour group at the Council and parliamentary candidate in the general election has called for the whole process to be stopped. He has called for a vote at an extraordinary general meeting of the council on April 16th that, if he gets a majority of Councillors' support, will force the whole process back to the drawing board. www.paulmillerpembrokeshire.com

The approach of the Steering Group of **St Davids Schools for the Future**, is one of challenging, but constructive engagement with all the players. Whether you're from the Council, the Schools, School Governors or the Church, we listen, we question, we check facts, we research, and right now we are putting all our efforts into coming up with a plan that the community can believe in and back.

COMMUNITY PLAN

Thanks to all of you who came to share your views at the St Davids Rugby Club meeting on Thursday March 26th. You can still write to us, email us or comment via the website. Armed with your feedback we are aiming for a draft plan ready for the next Rugby Club meeting on Thursday April 16th. If the community is behind it we will petition and lobby locally and nationally to get support from the decision makers and we will submit our community plan as part of the public consultation process, hopefully with hundreds of your signatures backing it up.

The Council **has** to consider such a plan, but it's not just up to them. Because this is about 6th form provision it will also have to go to the Education Minister at the Assembly. If we can come up with a plan that solves the Council's problems and fits in with national educational agenda, it will be hard for our community voice not to have a significant impact on the future of our schools.

IDEAS!

So read on, talk to your friends, tell us what you think, send us your ideas, and we'll see you for Rugby Club III, Thursday April 16 6.30-8.00pm.



MUST ADDRESS:

STANDARDS

In education Wales performs badly compared to the rest of the UK and Pembrokeshire performs badly in Wales. So standards and outcomes for learners have to improve. This is a real opportunity for our plan to create the right foundation for that to happen.

CHOICE

Like all rural areas with small schools it's hard to give pupils a broad range of A-levels to choose from. It's hard to have specialist teachers in a wide range of subjects, and hard to get enough students in each subject to make the courses financially viable. YDS can't afford to run the range of courses it does now, so our plan needs to offer a creative solution to expand choice for our children.

DROP OUT

In Pembrokeshire as a whole, about a quarter of school students starting year 12 drop out by year 13. It's similar across Wales. The Council wants to concentrate A-level and vocational courses at Pembrokeshire College so students could shift between the two rather than drop out completely. Will that work? If not, what's the alternative?

SURPLUS PLACES

Every school building has a running and maintenance cost and a maximum number of students it can physically house. If it's not full then there are surplus places, but building costs stay the same, so surplus places waste money. Welsh Government is pushing hard for Councils to cut surplus places. Our plan needs to deal with this.

SUSTAINABILITY

The plan we come up with now has to be flexible enough to adapt to changes in population, falling school budgets, and changing business and employment needs, and it must be part of an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable future for rural Pembrokeshire.

FAIRNESS

Every child in Pembrokeshire must have access to a broad range of high quality courses. We can't have a system that works for kids in St Davids, but not Fishguard, or that works for Haverfordwest, but not the rural communities. Our plan must be fair to all.

FUNDING

PCC has about £130M from local and government 21st Century funding to spend on transforming our schools for the future. None of it is currently allocated to the St Davids Peninsular. We can argue strongly that some of that money should come here, if we come up with a truly transformative plan.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Here are the elements we can use to build our plan. If you think of others, let us know.

ALL-THROUGH SCHOOL

An 11-16 YDS, as in the Council proposal, would be uneconomically small and would not survive, but the Director for Children and Schools has stated publicly that merging YDS with at least two local primary schools would give economies of scale and reduce management costs and make the merged school financially sustainable (see News 2 or the website). The obvious potential primaries are the closest; Ysgol Bro Dewi and Solva. There are detailed questions on how that would work and how it would eliminate surplus places, but our research into such "all-through" schools looks very positive.

SCOTLAND

All-through schools are taking off across the UK. They join together primary and secondary education on one site or across 2 or more sites under a single school establishment. Successful all-through models have developed quickly in Scotland, especially in communities in the Highlands and Islands, many with much smaller school rolls than here, yet these schools are leading the way in terms of results and are now among Scotland's best performing schools.

DONALDSON

Prof Graham Donaldson, the architect of the Scottish education transformation, has just published a government-commissioned review of the Welsh Curriculum and is a great advocate of all-through schools. He says that they avoid problems in the transitions from primary to secondary, encourage a supportive school ethos, and often lead to greater community involvement. This is clearly the way things are going and some counties in Wales have already moved in that direction.

MACHYNLLETH

Ann Evans, former YDS teacher on the steering group of Schools for the Future, visited the new all-through school at Machynlleth for us and was very impressed.

"The school has been operational since last September and consists of 1 Primary and 1 Secondary, with a few federated Primary Schools. It is a split site school, but already staff are working between secondary and primary campuses, for instance a Maths graduate primary teacher is covering maternity leave for the secondary Maths department; secondary P.E. and French teachers teach in the Primary school. The Head Teacher is looking to develop that to Music and Art next year.

As for standards, the secondary is in the new Estyn green band of highly effective schools, whereas the Primary is in the red: in need of greatest improvement, so the Head is expecting the combining of resources to have a beneficial effect at Primary results." (Read more at www.schoolsfuture.co.uk)

COMMUNITY VIEW

At the Schools for the Future community meeting at St Davids Rugby Club on March 26th there was unanimous support for the idea of an all-through school here, with people saying that it would not only save our secondary school, but that the primaries wouldn't survive in the long term if the secondary were to go, so it was seen as good all round.

The management team and governors of YDS support this approach. The heads and governors of the primaries, at the time of writing, have yet to make any public statement.

6th FORM

Post 16 funding, for A-levels or vocational courses, comes out of a different government pot from 3-16. So we have to think about it separately.

The proposal to centralise all A-levels at a new 6th Form Centre was an attempt to pool all the students and funding in one place and create viable class sizes - 12 or more - for as many A-levels subjects as possible. Dedicated A-level teachers, easy movement between A-levels and vocational courses, and healthy competition between students would increase choice, reduce drop out rates, and raise standards. That's the argument.

If we want to maintain the role of 6th forms in our schools, reduce travel times, and give students a choice of learning environments as well as subjects, and if we fear that a centralised 6th form would mean good teachers leaving the schools and so reduce the quality of pre 16 education, then our plan has to address the same issues in different ways. We also have to be sure that our concerns are well founded and our plan doesn't create problems as well as solve them.

KEEPING A-LEVELS IN SCHOOL

The Council has shifted from the totally centralised model and is looking at ways to keep some A-levels in the schools - a hub and spoke model. So what subjects, where, and who decides?

Currently the Council suggests that if a school can get at least 12 students for a given subject they can run it in the school. Since the 150+ sixth form of the combined STP/Tasker could do that for pretty much any subject there are clearly issues to be ironed out. But could it work for YDS?

OTHER APPROACHES

Rather than just look at what subjects a school 6th form could run based on numbers of students we might want to consider a more strategic approach. If we think of the four potential A-level providers (YDS, YBG, STP/TM, Pembrokeshire College) we might look at:

- which subjects to clump together to reduce travel time for students - sciences, languages, humanities, arts
- which subjects would best satisfy the business needs of the local economy - on the St Davids Peninsular we might want catering, business studies, agriculture...
- how to attract A-levels that would have a spin-off in terms of facilities for the tourism economy - art and music in a new school/public gallery/performance/cinema space?
- what each locale offers in education terms - here we have a natural environmental, geographical and biological classroom on our doorstep, the Cathedral...
- which A-level courses to co-locate with vocational courses to allow easy combination or movement between them - sciences and engineering maybe.
- And what about Welsh Baccalaureate, sport, and music staying in the schools because of the strong community roots of those subjects?

WHO DECIDES?

Although at one time there was a fear that somehow the College was getting control over all A-levels, the Council suggestion is to address that by creating an "A-level Committee", made up predominantly of school heads and governors, which would make decisions about A-level provision within an agreed framework.

But that framework is still very much open to debate.

DIGITAL

In News 3 we looked at how distance learning might make A-levels available to our students even if only a few of them wanted to take them. You remember Toby Houston-Sime who took an environmental studies online A-level while at YDS and it got him onto an environmental resources course at Uni. We know that the Donaldson Curriculum Review says strongly that digital skills need to be at the heart of education from 3-19, and we know that online skills will be vital to the future economy of our rural community.

So how do we use them in our plan? Wi-fi enabled buses becoming mobile classrooms? An online learning centre at the heart of our schools? Read more at www.schoolsfuture.co.uk

CHURCH IN WALES

The Church in Wales has offered to make YDS a VA school. In a VA/Voluntary Aided school the capital costs of running the school buildings switch from being the responsibility of the Local Authority to being split between the Church (15%) and Welsh Government (85%). The thinking is that this would reduce the cost of YDS to Pembrokeshire County Council, and would potentially attract new pupils from outside the catchment whose parents want them to have a Christian-based education.

The Church is absolutely clear that the school would be inclusive and welcome and take into account the different traditions and beliefs of all faiths. This would formalise a strong link between School and Cathedral that already exists. It would however mean that any future building projects related to the school would depend on the Church supplying or applying for Government funding. There would no longer be access to Council funding for school improvement.

YDS management and governors back this approach, but at the time of writing the details of the financial implications still need to be clarified, particularly whether the Church would have access to 21st Century funding currently allocated to the Council, and its future plans for investment in the fabric of the buildings which are already in need of over £3M to bring them up to scratch.

COMMUNITY

It's a big subject with no detail at this stage, so it's ripe for big ideas... the Donaldson review wants to see communities much more involved with their schools. How can we integrate our community, its expertise, and its businesses with the future of our schools? Do we want business units, community art facilities, music facilities in the school? How can we use school facilities outside of school hours, and in school holidays? Could they be let and the income help fund education? How can all this help address standards, choice, surplus places, sustainability and fairness?

YOUR IDEAS

The Schools for the Future steering group is now working to develop these building blocks into an ambitious but realistic plan for 21st Century education on the St Davids Peninsula. We aim to have it ready to present at a community meeting at the Rugby Club on April 16th for your feedback. So now is the time to add your ideas. Please do get in touch.

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See you on the 16th. **Diolch yn fawr!**

