

January 6th 2017

Response from the Governing Body of Brecon High School to the Welsh-medium Consultation - 21st November 2016 to 9th January 2017

The Governing Body is clear that we wish to see the continuation of a Welsh-medium stream at Brecon High School. We recognise that this has to be one that is financially viable and so there must be growth for Welsh-medium education in the catchment area. We believe that there is considerable local interest in the growth of the Welsh language. This is borne out by the fact that there are almost a dozen classes teaching Welsh to adults in the Brecon area. There is also a verifiable commitment from parents of children in Year 6 at Ysgol y Bannau who wish their children to continue their education through the medium of Welsh at BHS. Current parents at Sennybridge Primary School have also expressed a desire to continue to have the option to send their Welsh-medium children to BHS.

There are a number of points raised in the consultation document which should be considered carefully:

Numbers in the Welsh stream - The reduction in numbers in the Welsh stream is cited on a number of occasions as a factor in favour of removing the Welsh stream from the school. The reduction in numbers is directly related to the two previous consultations, and the constant undermining and lack of support for the development of the Welsh stream at BHS in attaining 2B status as promised by Powys County Council. This has been publicly admitted by officers of the Authority during the consultation meetings.

The Welsh-medium Curriculum - Given the reduction in numbers and the resultant impact on the school income, the curriculum for the Welsh stream in Key Stage 3 had to be reduced to make it more financially viable. With small numbers entering KS3 it is inevitable that there would be a reduction in the curriculum, especially around option subjects. An increase in the numbers will lead to developing the curriculum again. However BHS still has the staff to provide a fuller curriculum if funding were to be provided.

Post 16 Welsh-medium options - It has been stated that we do not offer A Levels through the medium of Welsh. Through agreement of the South Powys Post 16 Consortium this provision has been centred on Builth Wells High School, so it is never the case that Brecon High School would be offering these courses. This is not the failing of the school. The South Powys Consortium helps to maintain access to some A Levels through the medium of Welsh.

Impact on Ysgol y Bannau - There is recognition in the Consultation Document of the impact on pupil numbers at Ysgol y Bannau, should the proposal go ahead. There is mention of support for the school to help ensure that numbers can at least be maintained, if not grow, to increase numbers transferring to Builth Wells.

Why can there not be the same support for Ysgol y Bannau in supporting a Welsh-medium stream at BHS? The current demographic at Ysgol y Bannau is of non-Welsh speaking parents and therefore the continuity and support of a local Welsh-medium secondary school is key to their choice of secondary provision in the future. These parents have made a significant commitment on behalf of their children. Future parents will not make this initial commitment to Welsh-medium if the local secondary provision is removed; thus numbers at Ysgol y Bannau will suffer and Welsh will be lost to South Powys. The recent response of parents from Ysgol y Bannau to the consultation on National and local TV, radio and newspapers as well as the overwhelming consensus from the consultation meeting indicates a resounding desire to retain a Welsh stream at BHS. There is no doubt that if the

Welsh stream is withdrawn these parents will not send their children to Builth, but will be sending them to English streams and they will be lost to the Welsh language.

Numbers of pupils transferring to Brecon High School's Welsh-medium stream at the end of Year 6 - The numbers transferring to BHS have been very low for the last two years. This is a direct result of the uncertainty caused by previous consultations. Parents are very clear: they need certainty, they have not had it, which has led to parents having to make difficult decisions. The figures that we are being judged on as a reason for lack of viability have been created by the lack of clarity and direction by PCC.

The impact on Transport - The commitment to just one Welsh-medium stream in the South/Mid Powys area will mean a long-term commitment to additional transport costs, which PCC have disclosed is £110,976 per annum, representing a tripling of costs over the previous academic year. Given that the cost of upgrading BHS to a 2B status Welsh-medium school would be only £47,000, we would consider this to be a scandalous waste of public resources.

The decision to remove the Welsh stream could not be reversed - BHS is now in a position where it should be able to move into new premises from September 2019. If the Welsh stream were removed, the planning for these new premises would be undertaken based on this knowledge. This would make it very difficult to re-establish a Welsh stream in the future in a school potentially only planned for English-medium. Brecon High School prides itself on being an inclusive, diverse community school: this proposal, should it go ahead would result in a 21st Century school that accepts students from most backgrounds, including Nepalese and eastern European, providing them with all the amenities and advantages that Powys would hope for but telling our local Welsh-speaking stakeholders that they are excluded.

Surely in these more optimistic times for BHS it would be more forward-thinking of Powys to include our Welsh-speaking students and all the academic, sporting and artistic talent that they bring in a flagship, future-proof school.

Estyn's recently cited view that sacrificing local provision for critical mass and breadth of choice is not necessarily conducive to raising standards, surely applies as much to Welsh-medium provision as it does to English pre- and post-16 provision.

Therefore the Governing Body of Brecon High School is adamant that we should continue to provide Welsh-medium education within, and in accordance with the wishes of, the local community in an inclusive 21st Century environment.