
Powys County Council
Powys County Hall
LLANDRINDOD WELLS
Powys
LD1 5LG

30th January 2013

Mr Leighton Andrews AM
Minister for Education and Skills
Welsh Government
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Minister,

Re: John Beddoes School, Powys County Council

I write in response to your letter dated 7 January expressing concerns about John Beddoes School, Presteigne, Powys.

I would like to state at the outset that both Cabinet Members and Senior Officers have already determined that the current situation is unacceptable and a radical solution is being investigated. We recognise that more could and should have been done in the past to ensure the issues raised in the recent Estyn inspection report on the school were attended to.

The Council appointed a new Head of the Schools Service at the beginning of the academic year who, upon appointment, identified significant concerns at John Beddoes School resulting in him sending a letter of concern in early September 2012 to the Headteacher and previous Chair of Governors (who has subsequently resigned). Following the Estyn report on this Council, I have sought the removal of the "Chief Education Officer" role from the Strategic Director and placed it with our Chief Executive. I have also commissioned a thorough review of the School Improvement Service.

I have shared the contents of your letter with the Cabinet of the Council, Local Members, the Chief Executive and Senior Education Officers in both Powys and Ceredigion Council. We have also shared your letter with the new Chair of Governors and Headteacher of John Beddoes School and I assure you there is currently significant activity to address the issues you raise.

Our Head of Service is now working in partnership with the Director for Education and Children's Services in Ceredigion on all Powys School Improvement Issues. One of the very first actions of this partnership has been to place a joint Powys/Ceredigion team

around the school, led by the Head of School Improvement from Ceredigion who is currently the joint Head of School Improvement across both local authorities.

As part of the team around the school we have also appointed a system leader and experienced Headteacher from a high performing band 1 school (Newtown High) to intervene and work with the leadership team in the John Beddoes School and to assist in restructuring and improving leadership and management. We have adopted a system leadership approach where staff at all levels can work together across both establishments to share good practice in all fields.

It is clear from the Estyn inspection report that pupil tracking and intervention systems had been introduced in the School, but these had not been consistently applied by senior and middle leaders. This is now a major focus for the improvement team through the strengthening of leadership at all levels.

There are currently 354 learners at John Beddoes School which is likely to fall to around 335 from September 2013, with a further projected drop to around 300 by January 2016. There are currently 8 learners in Year 12 who will continue their post 16 courses in the academic year 2013-14. Cabinet decided on 8 January to withdraw post 16 funding for John Beddoes School in respect of any learners commencing year 12 from the start of the 2013-14 academic year. This is an interim decision while we consider a more radical way forward.

The Cabinet of Powys County Council have come to the conclusion that in terms of both standards and pupil numbers a radical solution is required and that the John Beddoes School is unviable and needs to close.

My Cabinet are currently looking at three options for closure:

Closure with students travelling to other Powys schools. We cannot influence parental preference and we are aware that the nearest secondary schools for a large proportion of families will be in Herefordshire and Shropshire. The nearest Powys secondary school is 23 miles from Presteigne while the nearest Herefordshire school is 7 miles distant.

Closure by amalgamation with a high performing Powys High School which has proven strong leadership and governance. This will mean the secondary school provision in the catchment area will be led and managed by a proven successful school leadership team who are able to secure rapid improved outcomes for learners in the current catchment area. The Presteigne campus would provide 11-16 education. We have progressed tentative discussions with a Powys band 1 school, Newtown High, on this option. We are also taking advice from your officials on the processes available to us in achieving this option which would deliver continuity of leadership and learning delivery at Newtown High School and deliver the closure of John Beddoes School.

Closure by amalgamation/reorganisation with Llandrindod High and Builth High creating

a new super school in Llandrindod Wells. As with option (i) there may well be a loss of learners from the current catchment area to English schools but this will enable us to concentrate our resources and will also provide an opportunity to recover from the closure of the Coleg Powys campus in Llandrindod Wells.

All the proposals have implications for school transport within the County and I have also commissioned a review of our current policy to ensure that the Council does not fund transport arrangements for learners who choose to attend schools in England. I consider that it is only appropriate for this Council to fund transport to learners nearest schools which are offering the Welsh curriculum.

We note that you intend to take account of the information set out in this letter in deciding whether to utilise your powers in accordance with Section 19 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1988 to direct the authority to close John Beddoes School. I would request that in making that decision we have an opportunity to meet to discuss our proposals further.

I hope from this letter you can see our determination to resolve the problem of John Beddoes School and provide a better education for the learners.

Yours sincerely

County Councillor David R Jones
Executive Leader, Powys County Council