

# Tasker Milward V.C. School Ysgol Tasker Milward

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S.T.A.R  
"Strive to Achieve Respect"

**Acting Headteacher/ Pennaeth Gweithredol: Mrs. H Lewis**

3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2015

Dear Kate,

As we reach the end of the Consultation period, I feel I should write to you and formally submit my opinion. As the Acting Headteacher of Tasker Milward, I am obviously very involved with the process but I am also a resident of the local community and the mother of three. Two of my daughters have benefited from the sixth form education provided by Tasker Milward and both also took A levels through the federation with Tasker Milward and Sir Thomas Picton schools. Both daughters are now successfully studying at Russell Group Universities. My youngest daughter is a pupil at Tasker Milward and will soon be entering the Sixth Form before going on to University. Both my husband and I benefited from the Sixth Form at Tasker Milward as did many other family members and friends, a large number of whom have returned to this county and now contribute to the local community and economy in a great number of ways through their various professions and businesses.

I am aware that there is a need for change in the education provision in Pembrokeshire. One only has to look at the results at Tasker Milward and the recent Estyn progress reports to see that a change has already started in our school and that there has been a rapid improvement in standards, behaviour and well-being. However, your remit is to ensure that there is a change in the whole of mid and north Pembrokeshire.

I am a supporter of the Welsh language and I believe that there is a need for Welsh medium education in mid and north Pembrokeshire. I support the proposal of a 3-16 Welsh medium school and I believe that the best location for this is in Haverfordwest. I also believe that when entering the sixth form, these pupils should have the choice to continue their education through the medium of Welsh at Ysgol y Preseli, or to join an English medium sixth form closer to home, or to join the Pembrokeshire College.

I also understand that to continue with 11-19 education in both St Davids and Fishguard is unviable. However, to remove one or both of these schools from their towns would have a massive negative impact on their communities, the knock-on effects would be disastrous in an infinite number of ways. However, I do believe that both these communities can sustain smaller rural schools. I support the proposal of a 3-16 through school in St Davids and I support the proposal of an 11-16 school in Fishguard with specialised ALN provision. Both of these proposed schools will answer the needs of the communities that they serve and will, in their own ways, tick the "transformational" box necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century funding.



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In Haverfordwest, while I am deeply saddened to see the end of Tasker Milward School and Sir Thomas Picton School in their current forms, I am not opposed to one new school for Haverfordwest. To have a state of the art building with 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology is an exciting prospect and it is what we should be providing for our young people to give them the best possible building blocks for their futures. However, I cannot support the proposal for the Haverfordwest school to be 11-16 with all A level provision at a Sixth Form Centre in the College. I believe that to remove the sixth form provision from the school would be detrimental in both academic standards and for many of our young people's social development.

The reasons for keeping a sixth form within a school setting have been publicised widely many times and I do not feel I need to repeat these now. I would also like to stress here and now that I have nothing against the Pembrokeshire College and the education they provide. There is a real need to keep the College and its services in Haverfordwest as a large number of young people and adults have benefited hugely from their provision and this must continue.

My argument is more about choice and about listening to the voice of the people of Pembrokeshire. No-one can have missed the strength of feeling amongst local people, and especially the younger generation, who (95% at their recent ballot) firmly believe that to keep a sixth form in the school is what they want; to have the same choice as their Welsh, and southern county, counterparts.

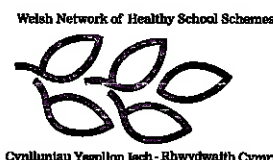
As an experienced teacher and senior school leader, I believe strongly that the best way to raise standards is to have the best teachers in front of a class. It is not all about shiny buildings and new computers. These things help of course but there is so much more to raising standards. The GCSE results of Level 2 including English and maths rose phenomenally last year in both St Davids and Tasker Milward. This is due to the dedication and commitment of the staff of both establishments and is despite the physical conditions of both schools' buildings.

The danger we are heading towards is the lure of financial gain. It is no secret that Pembrokeshire College have experienced financial difficulty and a convenient solution would be for the Council to work in conjunction with the College to "fill a hole" in Pembroke School with vocational students and then to provide all A levels at the College. However, this would involve a new structure of Governance and there are so many questions about the practicalities of how the proposed Sixth Form Centre would be staffed and the pay and conditions for those staff. Even if the current school teachers were sub-contracted by the Sixth Form Centre at first, would this be sustainable to provide a model that would last for the next two, three or more generations? Is there any evidence of the proposed Governance structure being successful in other settings and if so, how many? One of my concerns is that we would be using our young people in a "trial", simply to ease finances. This is a gamble which may or may not succeed but the stakes are so high it surely cannot be a gamble that we can morally take part in.

However, if the County Council were to listen to the people of Pembrokeshire, they could still address the current issues and satisfy the needs of the people of Pembrokeshire and the aspects raised by Estyn.

Having one 11-19 school in Haverfordwest is in itself "transformational". Changing the catchment areas could further address the issue of surplus places – although I am unsure that the current proposal for catchment change is the exact answer. Increasing the catchment of the two smaller schools in the north may be the solution for further filling their surplus places. Building a 3-16 Welsh medium school in Haverfordwest would address the need for Welsh medium education. Incorporating specialised ALN provision in two of the secondary schools would address the needs for ALN pupils.

The argument that there should be parity between the schools in mid and north Pembrokeshire and all should be 11-16 is null and void, unless every school in the county became 11-16. Pembrokeshire is not a unique county. If one looked at Cornwall, for example, which shares many similarities with Pembrokeshire geographically, demographically and economically, one would see that 11-16 schools, 11-19 schools and further education colleges work well side by side, all providing a healthy competition to raise standards across the county.



My concern is that, as we are against a tight time scale, the lure of the finances is taking some people's eye off the key driver, which should be behind this entire re-organisation, which is to Raise Standards.

I trust that you will take these comments and opinion on board as you formulate your response to the Consultation period. Please be assured that, as a dedicated professional, I will support the final decision of the Council and will continue to lead my staff to raise standards for the pupils entrusted in our care.

Yours sincerely,

Heien Lewis  
Acting Headteacher  
Tasker Milward VC School



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