



To:
All County Councillors
All Parliamentary Candidates
Huw Lewis, Welsh Government Minister for Education & Skills
Rt. Hon. Stephen Crabb, MP Secretary of State for Wales
All local AM's
Pembrokeshire Radio
Western Telegraph
Pembrokeshire Herald
BBC & ITV correspondents
Parents & Pupils
Feeder Schools Heads & Governors

25th March 2015

Dear Sirs

Haverfordwest 6th Form Provision

We the governing bodies at Sir Thomas Picton and Tasker Milward Schools (STP & TM) collectively have more than 200 years' experience in the governing of secondary schools in Pembrokeshire.

It is our view that the proposal for 6th Form provision in the Haverfordwest area contained in the recent consultation document published by Pembrokeshire County Council is not in the best interest of the current & future pupils, their parents and indeed the wider community. The premise on which the Council has communicated their consultation proposal is that in order to attract 21st Century Schools Grant funding there is only one possible configuration for 6th form provision in the Mid & North of the county. In our opinion this is completely erroneous; even under the stringent financial pressures facing the Council.

While it saddens us to acknowledge that our respective schools will no longer exist, it is our shared belief that a 6th form attached to the proposed new

secondary school in Haverfordwest would be a better option than a 6th form attached to Pembrokeshire College. We strongly believe that this option is viable and preferable as it would deliver considerably better outcomes.

We are extremely concerned that the consultation proposal, if adopted, will result in diminution of academic and personal development for the young people in the catchment area, depriving many of them the gateway through which to reach their potential. Academic attainment aside, cultural opportunities in the field of arts and sports which are so important in personal growth would also be lost. Further there are potentially profound wider implications of the desirability of the area for families living in the area, organisations considering relocation and much needed professionals which our county depends upon, e.g. medical practitioners.

We believe that some of the performance data published in the public consultation document is selective, biased and consequentially misleading. The data generally refers to Pembrokeshire averages and not specifically to the Haverfordwest schools.

- A level pass data leads the reader to believe that the pass rates attained by Pembrokeshire College are better than schools in the Mid & North of the County. However Appendix 1 shows, a direct comparison for 6th form subjects studied at a school (STP and/or TM) and Pembrokeshire College (PC) with the data provided by the Pembrokeshire Federation, clearly shows that STP & TM have consistently outperformed Pembrokeshire College.
- The suggestion that schools without 6th forms outperform schools with 6th forms at GCSE level is incorrect. Indeed the balance of evidence from various academic sources suggests the contrary. Of 19 studies we have reviewed on the impact of 6th forms 10 suggest 6th form attached to 11-16 schools improve attainment at GCSE (KS4) & A Level (KS5), 5 studies suggest no impact and only 4 studies state that they do not improve attainment at GCSE. However 3 of these 4 are specialist academies in the Sciences or Arts.
- The combined size of a joint 6th form attached to the new Haverfordwest secondary school would be viable, affordable and sustainable and challenges a recent press release from the Leader of the Council.
- The figures with regard to the percentage of pupils failing to complete their A level course do not reflect that being achieved at STP & TM. Comparative figures for Pembrokeshire College are also not provided.

We also believe that the proposal is discriminatory to the pupils of the area on several levels:

- It deprives English speaking pupils across all age groups the opportunities available to their Welsh speaking counterparts in the Mid & North of the County.
- Similarly it deprives pupils of the options available to their counterparts in the South of the county.
- Arguably those pupils with Additional Learning Needs wishing to progress to 6th form will have more challenges under the proposal.
- In an area of relatively high deprivation to limit choice and opportunity to those already disadvantaged is punitive and iniquitous.
- The loss of relationships with teachers would deprive many vulnerable but capable pupils a source of stability which allows them to continue their studies.

We are concerned about the impact of a school without a 6th form will have on the 11 to 16 year groups. There are significant and often unquantifiable contributions which a 6th form provides:

- They provide role models for younger pupils.
- They provide a resource for school improvement, e.g. reader buddies for children with reading difficulties.
- Schools with 6th forms attract the highest calibre teachers and pupils of all ages.
- Many extra curricula activities are often coordinated, organised and delivered by 6th formers.
- The consultation proposal argues that greater student choice will be available for academic and vocational subjects when the federation already provides this. Notwithstanding it is incongruous to suggest that, for example an A level student studying Physics, Maths and Chemistry will suddenly drop one of their subjects at the chance of doing for example a BTEC in Car Mechanics. Although the federation of schools arrangement provides the option none of the current A level students

currently choose such a combination. This has been the case for many years at STP & TM.

We are also concerned over the way the Council has engaged interested parties in particular the lack of transparency in the consultation process.

- There remains confusion over the status and ‘options for consideration’ in the public consultation process undertaken in 2014 which notably made no reference whatsoever to the withdrawal of 6th forms from schools in Haverfordwest. We are deeply suspicious about this particularly since discussions between the Council and Pembrokeshire College to attach a 6th form seem to have been underway for several years previously. There is a Freedom of Information Request outstanding which should hopefully resolve this matter.
- To the outside observer the Council’s approval of the public consultation documentation document in January 2015 has an air of political gerrymandering, with many councillors with apparent conflicts of interest being deprived the option to debate and vote during the Council meeting which approved the public consultation.
- At the above mentioned meeting the Principal of Pembrokeshire College spoke directly to councillors which we believe is again prejudicial.

We would therefore urge councillors to withdraw the current consultation and allow more in depth and open debate on the matter. This would not derail the whole 21st Century School’s programme as some would suggest. It would give rise to more reasoned and therefore hopefully a better outcome for Pembrokeshire.

This response in no way should be taken as an attack on the role of the Pembrokeshire College and the contribution it makes in education. While there is immense pressure to merge ‘A’ level provision, the focus should be to move away from a ‘dash for cash’ solution and give proper consideration as to what is affordable and in the best interest of future generations affected by such a critical decision.

Finally, we would like to reflect and emphasise the comments made by Staff and 6th form pupils:

“the school environment is one where they feel safe and cared for, and one in which they have built up relationships with staff, who help them deal with a variety of issues and concerns”

“A-level choices partly based on the teaching as they have experienced it at KS3&4, and they attribute their post 16 success in large part to the supportive yet disciplined nature of the sixth form community”

“teachers will be faced with having to choose between continuing their careers with KS3&4 or KS5; and if they want or need to work full-time, and thus are obliged to stay at a school, the KS5 will not benefit from their expertise and experience; and if they choose to teach KS5 then the same will be true of KS3&4”.

“Sixth Form is not only about studying for "A" levels it is about mentoring young people, feeling responsibility and setting an example for younger students. Having to go to school every day whether you have lessons or not gets you into the right frame of mind for study and the daily commitment becomes similar to that required by the world of work. Young people should have the choice and there should be consistency of choice Throughout the County of Pembrokeshire”

“The removal of choice at ‘A’ Level stage would be a travesty. The absence of a dedicated 6th form would undoubtedly deter pupils from selecting STP or Tasker Milward when entering the secondary school system (especially the brighter pupils with higher-level aspirations). Not only would this remove pupils' choice, it would also deprive the schools of older role models and sadly bring an end to a long tradition of senior team competitive sports - the importance of this and sense of pride it engenders should not be underestimated. Such a move may also deter more able teachers from applying for teaching roles at the schools. Hospital closures, death of town centres, disgraceful Councillors and now this. What next for beautiful Pembrokeshire?”

“Although I went to STP, I am sure I speak for both schools when I say - It's not just about the range of options available to the pupils at school for A-level or the richness of the curriculum itself....it's about the consistency of heartfelt guidance, support and belief that students receive from the relationships they maintain with the incredible teaching staff....all the way through secondary school! I know for a fact that is what most of us valued from our journey through school, into SIXTH Form and beyond! Something of that importance should not be removed!”

“we should not be forced into an environment we don't want to be in”

Yours sincerely

Governing Bodies of Sir Thomas Picton & Tasker Milward Schools
(For the sake of avoiding any potential conflict of interest this expressly
excludes governors who are either councillors or who are connected to
councillors)

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Appendix 1

A direct comparison for sixth form A Level subjects studied
at school (STP and/or TM) and college (PC)
The data is provided by the Pembrokeshire Federation

2014	STP/TM	PC	STP/TM	PC	STP/TM	PC	Number	Number
	A*-B	A*-B	A*-C	A*-C	A*-E	A*-E	STP/TM	PC
Art	67	50	100	100	100	100	9	4
Biology	27	36	33	64	93	82	15	11
Bus St	43	50	79	88	93	100	14	8
Chem	77	64	92	71	100	100	13	14
En Lit	83	75	100	100	100	100	12	8
Fmaths	100	50	100	75	100	75	3	4
H&S	0	0	71	0	100	0	7	1
Maths	63	40	84	40	95	70	19	20
Physics	60	67	80	75	100	92	6	12
Psychology	17	13	50	27	100	48	12	48
Sociology	65	55	82	91	94	100	17	11
Averages	54.73	45.45	79.18	66.45	97.73	78.82	11.55	12.82

2013	STP/TM	PC	STP/TM	PC	STP/TM	PC	Number	Number
	A*-B	A*-B	A*-C	A*-C	A*-E	A*-E	STP/TM	PC
Art	71	40	71	50	100	70	12	10
Biology	37	0	53	14	74	86	30	7
Bus St	56	20	87	40	89	80	9	10
Chem	71	27	88	36	94	64	17	11
En Lit	76	10	82	40	94	50	17	10
Maths	44	57	79	71	94	71	34	14
Physics	67	14	100	28	100	71	6	7
Sociology	83	33	100	67	100	100	6	3
Averages	63.13	25.13	80.00	43.25	93.13	74.00	16.38	9.00

Key

STP	Sir Thomas Picton School
TM	TaskerMilward VC School
PC	Pembrokeshire College