Radical Overhaul of Secondary Education

A radical overhaul of secondary education in Powys is needed to give learners a chance to achieve their potential, the council’s cabinet has been told.

The county’s existing secondary school structure although well regarded is struggling to deliver the full national curriculum range within available resources and is failing to meet the challenges demanded of 21st century education.

Cabinet Member for Schools, Councillor Arwel Jones said: “Our secondary schools have done a valiant job in the past delivering excellent results. But, falling school rolls and financial pressures have created a position that cannot be tackled without radical change.

“We simply don’t have enough pupils or resources to sustain current school numbers, if we try, we will fail and it will be our young learners that lose out.

“Our goal is simple to transform education in Powys to ensure all our young learners have the best possible chance of achieving their full potential. Delivering that ambition will not be easy and will need the help and understanding of our communities.

“The work so far has identified the number and size of secondary schools we need, the minimum number of pupils required to maintain viable sixth forms and the best way to deliver Welsh-medium education across the county.

“It is not just about money, it is about improving standards but we cannot do that without effective use of resources. Without change in the future we will not be able to afford to the best teachers, provide the best learning environment and deliver the best results.

“Our plans will be built on solid foundation. Ideally, we want to see schools with at least 600 pupils aged 11 – 16 with sixth forms of at least 150 pupils - this will ensure that schools can provide the broadest range of subjects without pupils having to travel to other schools. We would like to see thriving Welsh-medium streams which have enough pupils to sustain at least two classes per year group. - this will enable schools to provide an extensive curriculum through the medium of Welsh.

“We have identified initial priority schemes covering separate areas of the county with immediate action – set out below.”

Beacons Learning Campus
The building of a new £50m state-of-the-art education campus - the Beacons Learning Campus – in Brecon, to replace the current Brecon and Gwernyfed secondary schools. This will be a flagship project based on an innovative partnership between the Council, schools and NPTC Group of Colleges. The new campus will include an English-medium 11 - 16 school, a Sixth Form Academy providing a broad range of high-quality A-level provision and a Vocational College. This partnership will provide learners with a broad range of post-16 subjects, both academic and vocational. Full consultation with parents, pupils, staff and communities will start in May.

The first stage of the project will be to open a new dual-sited 11 – 16 school, on the current sites of Brecon HS and Gwernyfed HS, by September 2017, with full transfer to the new campus in Brecon by September 2018.
Welsh-medium education will be provided at a dual-stream school in Mid Powys, currently Builth Wells High School. The number of pupils in the Welsh stream at Brecon High School is very low and does not provide enough progression opportunities through the medium of Welsh. Full consultation will take place, but it is proposed that from September 2016 pupils from the area will access Welsh-medium education at Builth Wells.

The Cabinet will consider the business case for the Beacons Learning Campus on March 24th.

**Mid Powys**

A review of secondary education in Builth Wells and Llandrindod Wells will be carried out. The number of pupils between both schools are projected to fall to around 900 in a few years. It is the Council’s aspiration that, in future, there will be one bilingual secondary school in Mid Powys which will have a thriving sixth form, but a full assessment will need to be carried out first to explore all possible options. A business case to be considered by cabinet in July.

**Sixth Form Provision Ysgol Maesydderwen**

Another priority in South Powys will be a review of post-16 education in the Ystradgynlais area. A business case to be considered by cabinet in July.

**Welsh-medium secondary education in North Powys**

A Review of Welsh-medium education in North Powys will take place, exploring the possibility of establishing at least one Welsh-medium secondary school in the area, and assessing the viability of dual-stream provision. A business case will be considered by cabinet in September.

ENDS