



## Consultation Report on the Future of Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School



### Report of Findings for



**Opinion Research Services**  
**July 2016**





## The Future of Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School



### A Report of the Consultation Findings

#### Opinion Research Services

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# Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Powys County Council (PCC) on the important consultation regarding the future of Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools.

We hope this report of the consultations will contribute to the County Council's thinking; and we hope the ORS contribution has been constructive and instrumental in ensuring that the views of the people of Powys are captured and considered as part of the overall consultation.

We are grateful to Powys County Council's managers for their helpful and positive liaison throughout the detailed preparation and management of the consultation. ORS' status as an independent social research organisation was respected throughout.

We also thank the members of the public, professionals and representatives of political, interest, voluntary and community groups who took part in the consultation; participants shared their views and took a full part in the process.

# 1. Background

- <sup>1.1</sup> On 11th November 2014, Powys County Council Cabinet approved a School Transformation Policy, which set out the Council's vision and process for the transformation of primary and secondary schools in the county. The Policy includes:
- » a range of criteria to be used to determine which schools would be reviewed
  - » the establishment of a School Organisation Review Panel (SORP) to carry out reviews of schools
  - » the establishment of a School Review Process to be used to review schools
- <sup>1.2</sup> On 24th March 2015, Cabinet approved 'the commencement of formal consultation to close Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School by August 2017 and open a new English-medium 11 – 16 dual-sited school on the current sites of both schools by September 2017, and also the commencement of formal consultation to withdraw Welsh-medium provision from Brecon High School from September 2016'. However, following procedural errors which were challenged in a Judicial Review, the process was stopped. The School Review Process as outlined within the School Transformation Policy 2014 was restarted in September 2015. The stages of the Process are outlined below:
- » An Initial Assessment of Schools in accordance with Stage 1 of the School Review Process was carried out, during which data for all schools was considered. Schools were considered against the criteria outlined in the School Transformation Policy. As a result of this Initial Assessment of Schools, SORP agreed to carry out a detailed review of the two schools.
  - » Dialogue took place with the governing bodies, headteachers and local members during 2015 and 2016 in accordance with Stage 2 of the School Review Process as described in the School Transformation Policy, as follows:
    - Initial meetings held on 21st September 2015 to agree data in respect of the school and to discuss future options relating to the school;
    - An opportunity for the governing bodies to provide feedback on the options presented to them;
  - » Following the initial meetings with governing bodies, headteachers and local members, the Council carried out a review of secondary education across South and Mid Powys, and developed a business case which considered the case for change in both areas, assessed and costed a range of options and included recommendations relating to the secondary schools under review.
  - » The business case and its recommendations were considered by the SORP on the 20th January 2016, and the SORP agreed draft recommendations in respect of the all schools under review.
  - » Feedback meetings were held with the governing bodies, local members and the headteachers on the 27th January 2016 to discuss the SORP's draft recommendations and to give the governing bodies a further opportunity to present additional evidence.



- » On the 23rd February 2016, Cabinet considered the SORP's recommendations, together with the business case and additional evidence presented by the governing bodies following the feedback meeting. Cabinet resolved to commence formal consultation on the following Proposal:

**Close Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools on the 31st August 2017, and establish a new English-medium 11 – 16 secondary school that will operate across the current sites of the two schools from 1st September 2017;**

**From the 1st September 2017, deliver post-16 provision (academic and vocational) via the NPTC Group of Colleges in Brecon;**

**From the 1st September 2017, close the Welsh stream at Brecon High School and deliver Welsh-medium secondary education at Builth Wells High School; and**

**Close the school sites at Gwernyfed and Brecon upon the opening of a new build campus in Brecon, in 2019/20.**

- <sup>13</sup> Powys County Council set out reasons for change in the County in the consultation document which in brief are repeated below:

Falling pupil numbers year on year

Continued reductions in Welsh Government funding

Budgetary problems, leading to staff reductions and increased class sizes

Poor quality of education and learning outcomes in some schools and an unacceptable Estyn profile across the secondary sector as a whole

Too many surplus places in schools

Old school buildings which are of poor quality and an associated backlog of maintenance

Most sixth forms in Powys are small, making it difficult to provide a broad range of subjects

Year-on-year reduction in funding for Post-16 provision means that the number of subjects offered is also reducing. Pupils currently have to travel between existing school sites to access a broad range of academic and vocational (post 16) courses during the school day, with associated costs.

- <sup>14</sup> Reasons for change to Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools were also given:

Falling pupil numbers over the last five years at both schools although numbers are projected to increase slightly;

Low numbers in some year groups making it difficult to provide the full curriculum;

Too many surplus places in schools (36% in Brecon and 20% in Gwernyfed), which Welsh Government believes leads to inefficiencies that impact on quality of education;

Old school buildings which are of poor or bad quality and an associated backlog of maintenance. Brecon High School has been categorised as a Condition D building, which means that its condition is 'Bad Life expired and / or serious risk of imminent failure' and Gwernyfed High School has been categorised as a Condition C building, which is defined as 'Poor. Exhibiting major defects and / or not operating as intended';

Small sixth forms at both schools. Year-on-year reduction in funding for Post-16 provision means that the number of subjects offered is also reducing. Pupils currently have to travel between existing school sites to access a broad range of academic and vocational courses during the school day, with associated costs;

Limited post 16 choice of subjects, meaning that some pupils need to travel outside of Powys;

Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School were judged by Estyn to have 'adequate performance' and 'adequate prospects for improvement' in their last Estyn inspections in 2012 and 2013 respectively;

Brecon High School was placed in 'Special Measures' by Estyn;

Gwernyfed High School was placed in the category of 'Estyn monitoring'. The school was recently judged to have made good progress in respect of the key issues for action following the Estyn visit in February 2016. The school has now been removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn monitoring;

Brecon High School is forecasting a significant budget deficit;

The number of pupils in the Welsh-medium stream in Brecon is unviable – there are currently 30 pupils in the Welsh stream in KS3 and KS4, and the school is unable to provide the appropriate range of subjects through the medium of Welsh

## The Consultation

- <sup>1.5</sup> Powys County Council commenced an eight week consultation period on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2016 on its proposed changes to Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools and through engagement with members of the public and other stakeholders, including pupils, staff, governors and community organisations. The consultation formally ended on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016, although paper copies of the questionnaire were accepted for a further week to allow time for receipt by second class post. During this period, stakeholders were invited to provide feedback through:
- » A consultation questionnaire: paper questionnaires were widely circulated and the questionnaire was also available online;
  - » Meetings with School Governors
  - » Meetings with School Staff
  - » Workshops with Secondary School Pupils
  - » Workshops with Primary School Pupils
  - » Public meetings
  - » Written submissions: stakeholders had the opportunity to provide their views by writing to Powys County Council or directly to ORS
- <sup>1.6</sup> Comprehensive notes were taken by ORS for each of these meetings and workshops. These notes form the basis of the findings in this report.
- <sup>1.7</sup> In addition, social media sites were reviewed by ORS for comments on the proposal.
- <sup>1.8</sup> Opinion Research Services (ORS), a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research and major statutory consultations, was appointed by Powys County

Council to facilitate aspects of the consultation process and to provide an independent report of the formal consultation programme.

## Nature of Consultation

### Accountability

<sup>1.9</sup> Consultation should promote accountability and assist decision making: public bodies should give an account of their plans or proposals and they should ensure that all responses are taken into account in order to:

- » Be informed of any issues, viewpoints, implications or options that might have been overlooked;
- » Re-evaluate matters already known; and
- » Review priorities and principles.

<sup>1.10</sup> Nevertheless, a consultation is not a vote; and influencing public policy through consultation is not simply a 'numbers game' in which the loudest voices or the greatest numbers automatically determine the outcome, since all of the various consultation methods have to be assessed.

<sup>1.11</sup> All types of consultation responses are important: as part of Powys County Council's consultation on secondary school transformation we received a range of responses from individuals and organisations as a result of the following activities:

- » The open consultation questionnaire;
- » School Governors' Meetings;
- » School Staff Meetings;
- » Secondary School Pupils Meetings;
- » Primary School Pupils Meetings;
- » Focus Groups with Special Needs
- » Public Meeting
- » Public meeting;
- » Written responses and submissions;
- » Responses via Social Media.

<sup>1.12</sup> This report identifies where strength of feeling may be particularly intense while recognising that interpreting consultation is not simply a matter of counting responses.

### Interpreting Outcomes

<sup>1.13</sup> Importantly, the different consultation methods cannot just be combined to yield a single course of action that reconciles everyone's differences and is acceptable to the whole of the local population – for two main reasons:

- » First, the various consultation methods differ in their nature and their outcomes cannot be just aggregated into a single result; and

- » **Second, the populations in different areas will inevitably have different perspectives on the reconfiguration options and in our experience there is no formula in any consultation process that can reconcile everyone's differences in a single way forward.**

- <sup>1.14</sup> It is also important to recognise that the outcomes of the consultation process will need to be considered alongside other information available about the likely impact of the proposed option. Whilst the consultation process highlights aspects of this information that stakeholders consider to be important, Powys County Council will need to consider the appropriate emphasis to be placed on each element. In this sense there can be no single 'right' interpretation of all the consultation elements and other information available to Powys County Council in its decision-making process. ORS is clear that its role is to analyse and explain the opinions and arguments of those who have responded to the consultation, but not to recommend any option or variant.
- <sup>1.15</sup> Whilst this report brings together a wide range of evidence for Powys County Council to consider, it does not provide a single answer for the future (whether short- or long-term) of secondary education in South Powys. It is for the Cabinet to take high-level policy decisions based on their understanding of the services for which they are responsible and other relevant considerations, including equalities. In their deliberations, the members of Powys County Council will review the evidence and considerations that have emerged during consultation while also taking account of all the other relevant evidence.

## Report of Consultation Outcomes

- <sup>1.16</sup> This full report of the consultation outcomes considers the feedback received through each of the different elements of the consultation process and provides a comprehensive evidence base to help inform the decision-making process for the Council. The report traverses public, professional and stakeholder opinions and feelings in considerable detail to achieve a comprehensive understanding – and it is the journey, as well as the destination, that will matter to those wishing to understand the assumptions, arguments, conclusions and feelings about current and future secondary education provision in Powys. Verbatim quotations are used not because we agree or disagree with them – but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse the statements made, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly.
- <sup>1.17</sup> We recognise that considering the feedback from each element of the consultation in turn can at times be repetitive given that similar issues often emerged across the different strands – but it is important that this full report provides an accurate reflection of all of the feedback received. However, the executive summary concisely reviews the full range of feedback received, and brings together the overall perspectives and the common themes that have emerged fairly quickly. We trust that the summary is a sound guide to the consultation outcomes and how they might be interpreted, and that both the summary and full reports will be helpful to all concerned.

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## 2. Executive Summary

### Summary of Main Findings

#### Introduction

<sup>2.1</sup> We trust that this executive summary is a sound guide to the consultation outcomes and how they might be interpreted, but readers are encouraged to read the full document for detailed insights. The full report traverses public, professional and stakeholder opinions and feelings in considerable detail to achieve a comprehensive understanding and it is the journey, as well as the destination, that will matter to those wishing to understand the assumptions, arguments, conclusions and feelings about changes to secondary schools in South Powys. We trust that the summary and full reports will be helpful to all concerned.

#### The Consultation Process

<sup>2.2</sup> The consultation comprised a number of elements intended to provide several opportunities for residents and stakeholders to become involved and to share their opinions on the proposals. These elements are outlined below.

#### The Open Consultation Questionnaires

<sup>2.3</sup> The Main, Young Persons' and Primary consultation questionnaires were developed to include relevant summaries of background information on the Council's Case for Change and each of the main proposals for English and Welsh medium education, including post-16 education. The following key topics were covered in the consultation questionnaires:

- » English Medium Education – Case For Change
- » The Proposal For English Medium Education
- » Welsh Medium Education – Case For Change
- » The Proposal For Welsh Medium Education
- » Considering Equalities
- » Information About Respondents

<sup>2.4</sup> The questionnaires were available online through the Council's dedicated website and the URL was also printed on the paper copies. Paper copies were made available in locations identified as relevant, including local libraries, leisure facilities, County Hall and all affected Primary and Secondary schools. Respondents had the option to submit their completed questionnaire directly to ORS via a freepost mailing address or to the Council.

## Questionnaire responses

- <sup>2.5</sup> All questionnaire responses in which at least one of the consultation questions was answered and received by ORS by the close of the consultation period were included in the analysis. One additional week was given for submissions sent by second class post or returned directly to PCC contact points.
- <sup>2.6</sup> A total of 1047 questionnaires were analysed, of which 625 were responses to the main consultation questionnaire, 148 to the Young Persons' questionnaire, and 274 to the primary school consultation questionnaire.
- <sup>2.7</sup> Of the total number of questionnaires received, 6 indicated that they were representing organisations or groups.

## Meetings and Workshops

- <sup>2.8</sup> Each meeting or workshop received a standard presentation from Powys County Council (henceforth PCC) on the proposed changes, which was followed by a question and answer session between participants and a panel of PCC officers. The sessions were held and attended as follows:

**Governors meetings** at Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools, involving 24 governors over the two sessions (10 at Brecon and 14 at Gwernyfed);

**Meetings with school staff** at Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools where most, if not all, of the schools' staff members attended;

**Secondary school pupil workshops:** both secondary schools were invited to select a number of children aged 11 to 18 years to participate in deliberative workshops. Sessions were held in each school for groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5. 177 pupils attended; 60 in Gwernyfed and 117 in Brecon;

**Primary school Pupil Workshops:** all Brecon and Gwernyfed feeder primary schools were invited to select a number of children aged between six and 11 to attend deliberative workshops - one for each high school catchment area. Over 130 children participated; and

**Public Meetings** were held at Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools. Around 175 people attended over the two sessions. According to figures provided by PCC, 1,013 members of the public attended the two sessions; 219 at Brecon and 794 at Gwernyfed.

## Submissions and Social Media

- <sup>2.9</sup> During the formal consultation process, 29 **statutory written submissions** were received concerning the proposals for Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools. These were from: Assembly Members and Members of Parliament; Estyn, other political groups; school Governing Bodies; Town and Community Councils; and other affected local organisations. In addition, 409 **other submissions** were received from local residents and non-statutory organisations. The vast majority of submissions were sent in by those within the Gwernyfed catchment area.
- <sup>2.10</sup> Five **social media** (Facebook) pages contained updates, comments or tweets referring to PCC's proposal and/or its perceived impacts, and this report presents content posted during the consultation period.

## Main Issues Raised

### The Case for Change

#### *The Consultation Questionnaire*

- 2.11 62% of parents, carers or guardians of Brecon High School or associated feeder school pupils agreed with the Council's case for change. More than half of Governors of schools in Powys (53%) and Employees of Powys County Council (not in education system) (52%) also agreed. However, less than half of respondents agreed that the Council is right to make changes in 5 of the 8 stakeholder groups. Most notably, parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed High School or feeder school pupils (33%) and other residents (34%) showed lower levels of support.
- 2.12 The first element of the proposal is to establish a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, which would continue to operate on the two existing sites.
- 2.13 A quarter of parents, carers or guardians of children in Brecon HS/feeder schools (23%), and a fifth (20%) of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) agreed with this element of the proposal. Only 5% of parents, carers or guardians of children who attend Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools agreed with this element of the proposal.
- 2.14 The second element of the proposal is the construction of a new building for the proposed new secondary school with an aim to open in 2019/2020.
- 2.15 Agreement with this element of the proposal was particularly higher among parents, carers or guardians of Brecon HS/feeder pupils (64%). However, there were lower levels of support among all other stakeholder groups. Two fifths (40%) of those who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) showed agreement with the proposal to create a new building for the proposed new secondary school, while around a third or more of those who are Governors of a school in Powys (35%) and members of staff in the Powys school/education system (32%) agreed. Just 5% of parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder pupils agreed.
- 2.16 The third element of the proposal is to locate the proposed new school building in Brecon as it is a population centre and to minimise the overall number of pupils that require schools transport.
- 2.17 Again, parents, carers or guardians of Brecon High School/feeder schools pupils (71%) indicated higher support than other stakeholder groups. Just 4% of parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed High School/feeder school pupils agreed.
- 2.18 The fourth element of the proposal is for all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges.
- 2.19 At least 80% of respondents in all stakeholder groups disagreed with this element of the proposal.
- 2.20 Respondents who disagreed with any elements of the proposal were asked why. The most frequently occurring arguments were that Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable; that the proposals will result in increased travel times/distances; that the proposals will negatively affect the community, and that Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools.

*The Young Person's Consultation Questionnaire*

- 2.21 Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that their education was suffering due to a number of issues identified by the Council potentially affecting their education.
- 2.22 Not having enough different subjects available at KS4 and post-16: Over half (53%) of Brecon HS students agreed while only 8% of those in Gwernyfed HS agreed.
- 2.23 Problems with class sizes (too big/small): Around half (49%) of Brecon HS students agreed and just 2% of Gwernyfed HS students agreed.
- 2.24 Problems due to the quality of the school buildings: Almost three quarters (72%) of Brecon HS students agreed; only 2% of Gwernyfed HS students agreed.
- 2.25 Disruption due to having to travel between sites for lessons during the day (post-16): Around a fifth (21%) of respondents in Brecon HS agreed, while 5% of those in Gwernyfed agreed.
- 2.26 Not having enough up-to-date IT equipment: Over half (54%) of Brecon HS pupils agreed; around 1 in 10 (8%) of Gwernyfed HS pupils agreed.
- 2.27 Not having enough up-to-date other school equipment such as text books, laboratory or PE equipment: Half (52%) of respondents in Brecon HS agreed, 2% of those in Gwernyfed agreed.
- 2.28 Half (51%) of Brecon High School and feeder school students agreed with the Council's case for change, while less than 1 in 10 (8%) of Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed.
- 2.29 More than a quarter (28%) of Brecon HS/feeder students agreed that a new English-medium secondary school should be established for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017. 0% of Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed.
- 2.30 65% of Brecon HS/feeder school students agreed with the proposal to construct a new building for the proposed new school. Only 2% of Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed.
- 2.31 Three quarters (74%) of Brecon HS/feeder students agreed with the proposal to locate the proposed new school building in Brecon to minimise the number of pupils requiring school transport, while only 1 in 20 (5%) Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed.
- 2.32 More than a fifth (22%) of Brecon HS/feeder students agreed with the provision of post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC group of colleges. 8% Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed.
- 2.33 The most common reason for disagreement with the proposal among young people in Brecon HS/feeder schools was that they didn't want to lose their Sixth Form or believed that Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools. Others commonly expressed concern over the standards of education at/accountability of NPTC in Brecon, or state that the proposal may result in a lack of subject choice for Post-16 students.
- 2.34 Those in Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools most frequently disagreed with the proposals due to increased travel times/distances, or argued that Gwernyfed is a good/financially stable school and should not be closed. Others suggested that the proposals will result in a lower standard of education.



### *Primary Consultation Questionnaire*

- 2.35 Two thirds (66%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the Council's case for change, while less than 3 in 10 (28%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools agreed.
- 2.36 A third (34%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to establish a new 11-16 English-only school to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed. Only 1 in 10 (10%) of respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools agreed with the proposed changes.
- 2.37 While over half (57%) Brecon feeder respondents agreed with the proposed change to construct a new building for the proposed new school, only 6% of Gwernyfed feeder respondents agreed.
- 2.38 More than two thirds (69%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to locate the new school building in Brecon to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport. Only 6% of Gwernyfed feeder respondents agreed.
- 2.39 The proposed change of 16+ education being provided by the college in Brecon was opposed by around two thirds (64%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools, and more than three quarters (77%) of those from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed.
- 2.40 Respondents who disagreed with any elements of the proposal were asked why this was. Brecon feeder school pupils most commonly argued that Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools, and that the Council needs to maintain current provision of schools. Others suggested that the proposal will negatively affect Welsh speakers/Welsh as a language and that Welsh needs to be taught in schools.
- 2.41 Those in Gwernyfed feeder schools were most likely to disagree due to increased travel times/cost, and argued that Gwernyfed is a good and financially stable school. Respondents also commonly objected because they did not want to go to Brecon High School.

## Views on the Case for Change

### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.42 BHS pupils recognised their school's age and poor condition, as well as the relatively poor educational practices in evidence there. Some important examples of the latter were that teachers are frequently teaching subjects outside their areas of expertise and an over-use of supply teachers. Therefore, most understood and supported PCC's reasons for considering changes to the way in which it delivers secondary school education in the area.
- 2.43 Although GHS pupils agreed that change is needed at the Brecon site, they rejected PCC's case for their own school. Specifically, they argued that low pupil numbers are not an issue because: smaller schools and class sizes are preferable to larger ones in terms of educational standards; the school naturally has fewer pupils due to its rural location, not because it is in some way deficient; and it is a situation that has partly arisen as a result of this consultation, which has discouraged pupils from attending GHS.

### *Primary School Pupils*

- 2.44 Pupils at both workshops identified the age and poor condition of the two schools - and particularly Brecon - as a motive behind establishing a new school. Pupils in the Brecon catchment workshop also acknowledged the high running costs of both schools and the need to save money. In addition, specific issues in relation to Gwernyfed High School (henceforth GHS) were mentioned, notably its falling pupil numbers and lack of subject availability at A-level.

- 2.45 Pupils at the Gwernyfed catchment session recognised PCC's aim to improve educational standards, facilities and mutual support - but many felt that there is currently little wrong with their local high school, and that any proposed changes are unjustified.

#### *Additional Learning Needs Stakeholders and Pupils*

- 2.46 Stakeholders felt that the main issue with ALN education is the lack of funding: they therefore struggled to understand how a larger school could improve anything. On the other hand, pupils were optimistic that a new school would offer better teaching quality and support, a wider range of subjects and the opportunity to meet different people, including others with ALN.

#### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.47 In terms of the case for change, some respondents felt that the Council is being disingenuous in its framing of the consultation. They claimed that the primary purpose of the proposals is to eradicate BHS's debt and access capital funding - effectively sacrificing one school for another new one. Many doubted the legality of this.

## Quality of Education

### *Governors*

- 2.48 Governors at both meetings, but especially in Gwernyfed, felt aggrieved that the consultation document fails to acknowledge the positive improvement trajectory of their schools in terms of both educational standards and leadership.
- 2.49 Moreover, many took offence at what they saw as an implicit assumption in the document that teaching quality needs to improve - and there was some scepticism that this would indeed happen within a larger school, or at least that it would not happen in Gwernyfed's case given it has recently been outperforming Brecon.

### *Staff*

- 2.50 Participants at both meetings were unconvinced that reorganisation alone improves educational standards - and neither set of staff felt that their schools' current improvement trajectories are sufficiently recognised in the consultation document.
- 2.51 Furthermore, in their view, the consultation documentation unfairly suggests a connection between poor educational outcomes and the quality of the present teaching staff - and does not recognise the role PCC has allegedly played in falling educational standards across Powys as a whole, especially with respect to lack of support for schools.

### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.52 Gwernyfed pupils were strongly opposed to the proposed closure of their school: they described it as a 'happy' and 'safe' community-focused school in attractive surroundings with a good reputation - and they reasoned that given only BHS needs improving, it is unfair to 'tar Gwernyfed with the same brush'. Indeed, pupils felt that merging their school with 'a bad one' would have a detrimental effect on its current high educational standards.
- 2.53 Furthermore, pupils in both areas recognised that BHS has a 'bad reputation' and there was concern that locating the new site there would either allow these issues to continue or fail to eradicate the stigma associated with the existing school.

### *Primary School Pupils*

- 2.54 There was a great deal of support for GHS and thus strong opposition to its proposed closure. Pupils explained that Brecon High School (henceforth BHS) is considered '*to be the problem*' - in contrast to GHS, which was described as '*a good school*'. Furthermore there was concern that a merger of BHS and GHS would negatively impact on the latter's performance.

### *Public Meetings*

- 2.55 Participants at the meetings were unconvinced that reorganisation into a larger school alone will improve educational outcomes for pupils, and there was disquiet in both areas that PCC has not recognised the positive upward trajectory of both schools in its consultation materials.
- 2.56 The perception that pastoral care is better within smaller 11-18 high schools was noted by a former pupil of GHS, who described how the dedication, understanding and support they received from familiar teachers was invaluable in helping them achieve their educational aims. They also discussed the importance of a sixth form in terms of personal development and fostering a sense of responsibility.
- 2.57 Once again, it was said that concerns around stability, options choices and especially educational quality within Powys may result in parents and learners choosing an education elsewhere.

### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- 2.58 Llangorse and Erwood Community Councils doubted the wisdom and indeed legality of combining two schools with varying educational standards and cultures into one larger school - particularly when the underlying rationale for the proposal is, in its view, to eradicate BHS's debts. Gwernyfed Community Council was also concerned that a new school would not be subject to Estyn inspection for several years following the removal of BHS's special measures status, effectively ensuring a lack of standards monitoring at that school.
- 2.59 Furthermore, stakeholders were worried that an effective 'merger' cannot guarantee current educational and extra-curricular standards are maintained for GHS pupils let alone improved. It was also suggested that a larger school cannot provide proper pastoral care in the same way a smaller one can - and that the widely held view that schools with a minimum of 600 are preferable is no longer generally accepted.
- 2.60 Some responses suggested that PCC is removing a leadership team on an upward trajectory at Gwernyfed in favour of a new and untried formula - and is neglecting the fact that the school itself has improved significantly over the past few years in terms of educational standards and outcomes in developing its proposals.
- 2.61 Estyn is unconvinced that the proposals will demonstrate an improvement in current standards and outcomes for pupils. Moreover, Estyn state that current standards at the schools are not adequately explained.

### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.62 Despite one submitter agreeing that a critical mass of 600 pupils is necessary for the schools' future success, many challenged the assumption that this number is needed to make a school viable and felt that no evidence had been provided to show that that 'bigger' is 'better'. On the contrary, it was reasoned that Gwernyfed is a good school and that its size simply reflects its rural location.
- 2.63 Respondents were sceptical that merging GHS and BHS would improve educational quality at the former, particularly for pupils affected by uncertainty or transition to the new school at important exam

stages. Moreover, it was argued that PCC has failed to provide any evidence to suggest the proposals would be of benefit, and that its aim for the new school to be '*as good*' as the current ones in terms of standards is unacceptable. In fact, it was felt that merging a '*failing school*' with Gwernyfed would cause standards to slip there which, parents said, would encourage them to send their children out of county or into neighbouring English schools rather than to Brecon.

- 2.64 Being part of a larger school was thought to be disadvantageous to pupils in terms of increased bullying and absenteeism, both of which could affect performance. In addition, the loss of close relationships between pupils and teachers as well as having to get used to new teaching styles within larger classes could, it was said, have a negative impact.
- 2.65 Furthermore, there were concerns that the current close ties between GHS and local businesses that provide important work experience would be jeopardised, further affecting pupils' development.
- 2.66 There was particularly strong support for GHS and a lack of understanding as to why PCC is proposing to close it. Indeed, the current subject range, quality of teaching and strong leadership at the school were praised and thought to reflect the: positive relationships between staff and pupils; excellent academic results (especially compared to other schools); positive progress made since the last Estyn report; and satisfactory staff recruitment and retention record. The current small size of Gwernyfed was also considered to be an asset in continuing high standards in that it allows teachers to dedicate more time to students. In addition, parents described the invaluable support the school has provided to pupils with Additional Learning Needs.
- 2.67 Moreover, despite one respondent describing the management team at Brecon High School as '*failing*', a few responses commended the staff there for their hard work in trying to improve the school and recognised that there have been improvements since its placement in special measures.

### *Social Media*

- 2.68 Social media users frequently commented on the quality and '*well-rounded*' education provided at GHS, as well as the excellent pastoral care offered there.

## Finance and Funding

### *Governors*

- 2.69 The Gwernyfed Governors were keen to understand PCC's concerns about the financial management of their school given it is currently in surplus. They also sought clarity around how funding arrangements for both schools would be organised if the proposals are approved - especially in the context of how school budgets are presently managed and ongoing concerns around the implications of the historical debt burden at Brecon.
- 2.70 There was particular concern around what the Governors termed '*parity of educational opportunity*'. They worried that Brecon's resources would be significantly higher than Gwernyfed's under any new arrangement because of historical circumstances whereby the former has '*lived outside its means*' to maintain a larger staffing structure, whereas the former has made reductions to ensure a balanced budget.
- 2.71 Concerns around the capital funding being spent on developing NPTC's facilities were prevalent at the Brecon meeting.

### Staff

- 2.72 Participants at both staff meetings suggested that finance not quality is the driver for the proposals.
- 2.73 Staff participants at Brecon argued that the school's current financial situation has been caused by systematic failures and historical mismanagement by PCC - and in some part by the uncertainty raised by the ongoing consultation process around BHS's future - and should not reflect badly on its current staff and leadership.
- 2.74 Furthermore, they questioned whether the Council is reflecting the current picture at Brecon by using outdated financial figures in its consultation document, and complained about a lack of support for a head teacher who is attempting to move the school in the right direction in a financial sense.
- 2.75 It was also said that the projected financial savings are not sufficient to compensate for the 'chaos' the proposals will cause if implemented.

### Public Meetings

- 2.76 Participants were of the view that the proposals are simply about saving the most amount of money possible and not about improving pupil outcomes - and PCC was accused of wishing to close GHS to wipe out BHS's debts and moving too quickly to make changes in an attempt to secure Welsh Government capital funding for rebuilding the latter.
- 2.77 The need to address Brecon's buildings issues were not disputed, but the vision of building a brand new learning campus without any certainty around long-term Welsh Government capital funding was - as was how the new debt burden will be managed in future.

### Written Submissions (Public)

- 2.78 The balance of views suggested that the savings being proposed do not compensate for the cost to communities (especially in the Gwernyfed catchment area) if the proposals are approved - and some questioned whether or not the savings would, in fact, be swallowed by unforeseen costs or interest on capital loans.
- 2.79 For Gwernyfed catchment residents, the fact their school runs a balanced budget and that a large repayment to the Big Lottery Fund would be required in the event of closure made the proposed saving difficult to accept.
- 2.80 It was argued that the closure of BHS and the writing off of its debt supports the widely-held view that the proposals are driven by financial considerations rather than making improvements to the quality of education and pupil wellbeing. Furthermore, there was concern that once the school's financial situation has been rectified, further changes will stall.
- 2.81 Finally in terms of finances, the cost of providing more pupil transport was thought to represent '*removing one problem, and creating another*'. It was suggested that the money would instead be better spent improving the quality of education in the existing schools

### Social Media

- 2.82 Some social media users questioned the motives behind PCC's proposals, suggesting that they are primarily financial insofar as Brecon High School's debts will be eradicated if a new school is established. In this context, GHS was thus seen as something of a 'sacrificial lamb'.

## Buildings and Estates

### *Staff*

- 2.83 Staff at both meetings suggested that Powys should look again at the feasibility of keeping both current school sites by considering alternative options (such as an all-through school for Brecon).
- 2.84 There was also a great deal of scepticism around the reasons for the proposals: Gwernyfed staff in particular suggested that they are driven by the need to secure Welsh Government capital funding streams for a new building in Brecon and not by a need to develop better educational standards and outcomes for pupils.

### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.85 The short- and long-term future of the school buildings themselves were discussed by secondary school pupils: at Brecon reassurance was sought that the land would be put to good use if the proposals are approved, while there were concerns about how development on the Gwernyfed site may impact the local leisure centre at the sessions there. Brecon pupils also questioned whether whether PCC can afford to build a new school - as well as how it can safeguard BHS pupils in the short-term given the poor condition of the BHS buildings.

### *Primary School Pupils*

- 2.86 Primary school pupils were keen to understand what would become of the GHS building if it were to close.

### *Public Meetings*

- 2.87 Discussions on buildings and estates focused primarily on the lack of surplus capacity at the proposed new school to grow and meet future pupil number projections.
- 2.88 Brecon participants also sought clarification on whether NPTC's facilities will have the capacity and resources to cater for an additional range of subjects and increased number of students at post 16 - and those at Gwernyfed asked for information about how existing community facilities provided by the school sites will be maintained for community use.

### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- 2.89 The Gwernyfed Campaign Group was concerned that PCC will dispose of Gwernyfed's building and community assets well below their market value and sought more information about the valuation process. They also desired reassurance that the Council would, in the event of sale, put contingency plans in place to ensure that community facilities are maintained and accessible to local people in future.
- 2.90 There was widespread acceptance that BHS requires a new building, but its current Governing Body was concerned *over the lack of capacity at the proposed new school and the ability of the school to meet the future needs of the community. They are also concerned around the security of the funding available and the timeframe for building the new school and impacts on the current building in the interim.*

### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.91 Respondents sought more clarity around the possible options for the disposal of the GHS buildings and grounds if the school is to close. Some expressed concern around site falling into disrepair, while others

doubted that PCC would be able to retain the co-located community leisure facilities for community use.

- <sup>2.92</sup> Respondents were largely in favour of a new school for Brecon but there were worries around planning and the short timeframe which led some to question whether any development would happen in the near future. There was a clear sense that PCC is culpable for the decline in the quality of BHS's school buildings and that capital funds should be invested into improving or replacing them using a phased approach.
- <sup>2.93</sup> Moreover, it was stressed that improvements to or a new school for Brecon should not be dependent on the closure of Gwernyfed - though many suspected that the conditions of accessing Welsh Government capital funding will require a new build.

#### *Social Media*

- <sup>2.94</sup> Social media users commented on the poor condition of the school buildings at Brecon, and argued that the town needs a brand new school regardless of the outcome of the consultation - and in addition to the retention of GHS. In contrast, the GHS school buildings, facilities and surroundings were viewed very positively: people considered it a 'travesty' that they should be lost, although some suspected plans to convert the site into a 'super primary school' for the area.
- <sup>2.95</sup> The proposed new school was also discussed in the context of: its size and capacity; and future-proofing to cater for new housing developments and population growth.

## Governance and Staffing of a New School

#### *Governors*

- <sup>2.96</sup> Governors at Gwernyfed were keen to understand the relationship between PCC, the Shadow Governing Body and Senior Management Team in implementing any possible changes - and stressed that the former should maintain an advisory role and not seek to involve itself in the day-to-day running of the school. They were also concerned about maintaining standards during the transitional period, the potential for staff redundancies and the process for making any redundancies should they be necessary.

#### *Staff*

- <sup>2.97</sup> Gwernyfed staff principally underlined the challenge they believe a new Shadow Governing Body (when formed) will face in implementing a new school entity in an 'unachievable' timeframe, particularly with respect to developing timetables and negotiating contracts.
- <sup>2.98</sup> Furthermore, Gwernyfed were keen to understand the relationship between PCC, the Shadow Governing Body and Senior Management Team in implementing any possible changes - and stressed that the former should not seek to involve itself in the day-to-day running of the school.

#### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- <sup>2.99</sup> Stakeholders desired more clarity around the composition of the Shadow Governing Body and how PCC will ensure sufficiently strong leadership to enable the best possible start for the proposed new school - especially given that the current Gwernyfed Governors' vehement opposition to the Council's proposals means it is highly likely that most will leave their posts.



- 2.100 The challenge of a single leadership team ensuring consistent quality across two very different sites was also raised as a concern.
- 2.101 Estyn want more assurance around how the proposals will result in improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the proposed new school. Estyn raise concerns around the risks associated in trying to establish a new leadership team and staffing structure in the proposed timeframe, and question whether this will result in tangible improvements to governance and leadership.

#### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.102 Historical issues around the leadership and management of BHS were noted as a cause for concern. Indeed, addressing any leadership and governance deficiencies - including support from PCC - was considered more important than new bricks and mortar.
- 2.103 Establishing the right leadership team was considered critical to the success of a school, but respondents were concerned that PCC has offered little reassurance as to how they would ensure the right people are appointed.

## The Implementation Process

#### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.104 There was some scepticism among secondary school pupils around the proposed timescales for the opening of the proposed new school based on previous experiences of implementation delays in improving the area's primary schools.

#### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- 2.105 Estyn states that PCC has failed to develop a robust risk management plan associated with the timescale for implementation.

## Pupil Impacts

#### *Governors*

- 2.106 Gwernyfed Governors suggested that one of the most tangible impacts of the proposals for their school's pupils will be the unequal opportunity to take part in extra-curricular activities at the Brecon campus due to transport difficulties - an inequality that will be most keenly felt by the most disadvantaged families.
- 2.107 Governors at Brecon noted the excellent example sixth form students set to younger pupils - and that pupil support (both educational and pastoral) is generally far superior when provided by teachers with knowledge of those they have educated for many years.

#### *Staff*

- 2.108 Gwernyfed staff highlighted the psychological and social impacts of the recent history of proposed local school closures on young people (and indeed the wider community). Families have apparently moved from the area due to the uncertainty, which has also apparently been very 'damaging' to children's mental wellbeing.



### Secondary School Pupils

- <sup>2.109</sup> Brecon pupils were supportive of a new secondary school and were hopeful that it would bring important educational improvements such as: subjects being set-based rather than mixed ability; a wider range of subject options; more permanent teachers; and better facilities. However, they were also mindful of resistance to the proposals within the Gwernyfed catchment area, which led them to question whether the two schools should or could be merged successfully. In particular, the increased travel for pupils from the Gwernyfed catchment area was recognised as an issue - as was the possibility that many pupils from that area would likely attend a school elsewhere rather than the proposed new one at Brecon.
- <sup>2.110</sup> These issues and concerns were confirmed in the Gwernyfed workshops, where pupils were overwhelmingly opposed to PCC's proposals on the following grounds: Brecon is too far to travel to and access (especially for those in remote areas with no public transport), which has not been sufficiently considered due to *'the difference between what the government and pupils think are acceptable travel times'*; and the additional travel time to and from school would impact on pupils' ability to undertake extra-curricular activities (and on their parents who might have to travel further to collect them) - and would leave little time for homework and 'down time'.
- <sup>2.111</sup> Many other reservations were expressed and reassurances sought about attending a larger school. These included: Brecon and Gwernyfed pupils not 'getting on well', possibly resulting in conflicts; pupil increases leading to misbehaviour and larger classes, which would place further strain on teachers and affect educational standards; whether the wellbeing centre at BHS would remain successful within a larger school; whether the school uniform would change and, if so, whether parents would they be expected to pay for it; and whether the termly inter-school sports tournament would be affected.

### Primary School Pupils

- <sup>2.112</sup> Pupils in the Gwernyfed catchment workshop were particularly concerned about the impact of attending a new secondary school in Brecon, concerns that were also shared by Brecon catchment pupils, though to a lesser extent. Specifically, the location of the new school raised issues around travel, transport and after/out-of-school activities - mainly in relation to: increases to journey times, particularly in terms of time spent on buses and the inconvenience involved in getting to and from school should the bus be missed; and the impact on pupils' social lives and their ability to undertake after-school extra-curricular activities. Given these concerns, it was suggested by some that PCC should consider establishing a new school in a location between the two current facilities.
- <sup>2.113</sup> Some pupils in both catchment areas were concerned about the following aspects of attending a larger school: an increase in bullying and the ability of the new school to deal with it effectively; larger class sizes leading to distractions and insufficient teacher time (and thus not necessarily meaning a better education); developing relationships with new teachers; and being split-up from existing friends and making new friendships.
- <sup>2.114</sup> There were also general worries in the GHS catchment workshop about the timing of having to move to a new school (if approved). Many workshop pupils would be studying for their GCSEs around this time, which they felt would be unsettling and disruptive.
- <sup>2.115</sup> Despite the general concerns about and opposition to the proposals though, some participants in both workshops acknowledged some potential benefits to pupils of having one larger school. In particular they felt that the two existing schools: would be 'stronger' together; would offer opportunities to make new friends; and could be combined into a modern building with better facilities.

### *Additional Learning Needs Stakeholders and Pupils*

- <sup>2.116</sup> Although one stakeholder reasoned that being exposed to and getting to know other pupils, especially those with ALN, could be beneficial, others were sceptical as to whether a larger school would benefit pupils with ALN: their main concern was that being around so many more pupils would increase anxiety and stress levels. There was also worry around staff, particularly around ALN teacher to pupil ratios and that new staff may not be sufficiently qualified in or knowledgeable about ALN, resulting in some pupils 'slipping through the net'.
- <sup>2.117</sup> In contrast, many pupils were positive about the thought of attending a larger school: they felt it would: enhance the quality of their education by employing more teachers, offering a wider range of subjects and providing a larger support unit; and offer more socialisation opportunities.
- <sup>2.118</sup> Conversely, there was some apprehension around having new teachers - and a few participants felt that they would receive better support from a smaller school where pupils and teachers can get to know each other well- and there was also some scepticism about how well pupils from Brecon and Gwernyfed would integrate because they '*don't really like each other*'. This, along with a general increase in pupils, led to fears of more bullying within the proposed new school.
- <sup>2.119</sup> There were strong concerns among stakeholders that increased travel and use of public transport could cause anxiety and stress among ALN students, many of whom rely on routine and consistency. Furthermore, it was said that: pupils without sufficient support at home (such as young carers) would be affected by the logistics of their starting day earlier and pick-ups/drop-offs; and that it would be unacceptable for pupils with specific issues such as incontinence to be expected to travel further. However, most pupils already have to travel to school and did not consider it to be a significant issue.
- <sup>2.120</sup> Stakeholders identified the importance of effective transitional management if the proposal is to go ahead; they emphasised that ALN pupils may find the changes particularly stressful. Suggestions as to how PCC could (and should) help pupils and their families with the transition included: sufficient, ongoing communication; engagement with parents throughout the whole process; thorough assessments of pupils to ensure they receive the correct support; multi-agency working (for example between the school, social services and mental health services); providing as much continuity as possible; and beginning transitional support as early as possible.
- <sup>2.121</sup> Pupils also discussed the types of things they would find useful in navigating around and accessing facilities within a new school - such as maps, signposting, lifts and ramps.

### *Public Meetings*

- <sup>2.122</sup> Participants highlighted a number of concerns around the impact of the proposed changes on pupils' wellbeing, particularly in relation to: additional travel distance and time and their consequences for: reduced sleep, homework and recreational time; academic attentiveness; and extra-curricular participation both within and outside young people's home communities; the mechanics and implications of schools providing more daytime extra-curricular activities; reduced pastoral care within a larger school; The loss of role models, support and mentoring for younger pupils if sixth forms are removed; and fractured friendship groups.

### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- <sup>2.123</sup> Respondents complained that PCC's proposals represent the removal of choice for some parents and pupils within the current Gwernyfed catchment area.

- <sup>2.124</sup> Respondents also questioned the rationale of transporting pupils additional distances and the impacts this will cause for farming families (in terms of the time available for children to assist with the day-to-day running of farms) and to young people's attainment levels, access to educational and other opportunities, general well-being and connections to their communities. Indeed, it was suggested that the prospect of additional travel time to Brecon may prompt Gwernyfed parents and pupils to consider furthering their education in Herefordshire, in contravention to several local and national policies designed to protect and meet the needs of rural Welsh communities. Estyn want more detail about how PCC will engage with parents who may chose a school other than the proposed new school to reduce this risk.
- <sup>2.125</sup> It was especially emphasised that the proposals create an unequal playing field in terms of pupil access to and participation in after-school activities - and that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the Gwernyfed area will be double disadvantaged in accessing to the full range of extra-curricular activities because of restricted transport.
- <sup>2.126</sup> Estyn state that PCC need to demonstrate how any disruption to learners would be minimised if the proposal is approved, and would like to see a clearer risk management strategy from PCC relating to possible negative impacts that additional travel time would have on learners. They also want to see greater clarity on the exact provision planned for those learners having to travel more than one hour.

#### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- <sup>2.127</sup> Many written responses expressed concern - and indeed anger - around the negative impact additional travel would have on pupils, which some argued directly contradicts the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It was said that many pupils in the Gwernyfed catchment area already spend long periods of time travelling to and from school, and that any increase would be unacceptable. Indeed, there was concern that longer days and time spent travelling between the two sites would severely impact on their quality of life by: restricting their social lives; impacting on their ability to attend after-school clubs; and causing tiredness. The lack of reliable public transport and access issues for pupils in more isolated, rural areas was also predicted to result in increased non-attendance at school.
- <sup>2.128</sup> The burden of potentially having to transport their children to and from a school much further away so they can attend after-school clubs was noted by pupils' parents and family members, many of whom said they have neither the time nor financial means to do so. There were also concerns that farming families would be impacted by the proposals, as their children would not be home from school in time to assist in the running of the farms and develop their future farming careers.
- <sup>2.129</sup> Comments were made on the effect continued uncertainty around the future of their local primary and secondary schools is having on pupils' wellbeing. Not knowing where they will study for their GCSEs and potentially having to move between school sites was described as stressful for pupils, while other worries included: losing friendship groups; not being able to make new friends because of the 'rivalry' between the two schools; and a larger school resulting in fewer available places for sports competitions and other events.
- <sup>2.130</sup> Moreover, parents from the Gwernyfed area were of the view that their children's health would be put at risk through: spending more time on public transport as opposed to walking to and
- <sup>2.131</sup> from school; having longer days with less sleep; not having access to the school nurse who is local to their area; and potentially being exposed to negative influences in the Brecon area (such as drug use).

### *Social Media*

- 2.132 Concerns were expressed around transportation, particularly in relation to: the implications of longer journeys to and from school for GHS pupils in terms of tiredness, time for homework and revision, the ability to undertake extra-curricular activities and the potential for bullying on school buses; additional expense for families and PCC; and the potential environmental impacts of increased travel.
- 2.133 For these reasons, many social media users suggested that GHS parents may choose not to send their children to a new high school in Brecon, instead preferring other Powys schools, out-of-county schools or schools in England. Either of the latter two options, it was said, would result in a detrimental loss of revenue for PCC.

## Staff Impacts

### *Governors*

- 2.134 Governors at Brecon raised the threat of losing the best teachers if A-levels are removed, which would impact upon the quality of teaching and support available to all pupils.

### *Staff*

- 2.135 Of most concern to staff was the impact of continuing job insecurity on their own and colleagues' mental, emotional and financial wellbeing - and the lack of support offered by PCC in relation to this. They also suggested that the retention of current staff will be a real challenge in the short-term unless there is some recognition of their positive contribution to the schools and some clarification around job security, redundancy and redeployment can be given.
- 2.136 Furthermore, another important concern was that the loss of sixth form provision from BHS will result in a teacher 'exodus' because of their general enjoyment of teaching at this level and the loss of career development opportunities.
- 2.137 Participants were also keen to see the possible financial, logistical and time-related impact of teacher travel between sites factored into the current proposals - as well as a recognition that such an increase in travel will have on staff stress levels (and thus sickness levels).

### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.138 Secondary School Pupils worried that the proposals would put teachers' job security into doubt and that such uncertainty may result in some choosing to leave, further impacting on the current quality of education for pupils.

### *Primary School Pupils*

- 2.139 Primary school pupils asked: whether current teachers from Brecon and Gwernyfed would be employed at the proposed new school; whether they would need to reapply for their jobs; and how PCC plans to recruit to a new school bearing in mind travel times.

### *Public Meetings*

- 2.140 It was said at the public meetings that the recruitment and retention of teaching staff is already difficult because of job insecurity - and that the possible removal of the challenge of teaching at A-level will further exacerbate this.

### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

2.141 Stakeholders questioned whether the proposed timetable for forming the new school entity is feasible given that negotiations around staff appointments and contracts may be complex and time-consuming. Furthermore, it was said that: uncertainty around job security could lead to the imminent loss of high quality staff; PCC's Human Resources department is currently too overstretched to cope with changes of this magnitude; and that the Council must clarify whether the whole range of potential staff and pupil travel costs has been taken into account.

### *Written Submissions (Public)*

2.142 Without the challenge of teaching at A-level and with the added pressure of job insecurity affecting morale, it was feared that Powys will struggle to attract and retain the best teachers - leading to a drop in overall teaching standards. There were also responses around teachers potentially being required to travel between the two sites: people asked whether this would detract from time spent in the classroom - and whether they would be reimbursed for additional travel costs.

2.143 PCC was criticised for its lack of support for staff, and it was suggested that the Council should try to help staff overcome the issues within their schools rather than continually threaten closure. There were also questions around whether PCC has capacity to develop and process new staff contracts, as well as time to recruit new members of staff before the proposed opening in September 2017.

### *Social Media*

2.144 Comments were made on staff uncertainty and redundancies (and the cost the latter would entail) at both Brecon and Gwernyfed:

*Have they even budgeted for all the redundancy pay outs they will need to make when these new schools open on one site? (Save Powys Schools)*

2.145 Furthermore, there was concern about the ability of the proposed new school to attract quality teaching staff without a sixth form.

## Community Impacts

### *Secondary School Pupils*

2.146 An important issue for many pupils was the impact the proposed closure of GHS would have on its affiliated local clubs. Indeed, there was concern that many of the area's young people would no longer be able to attend these clubs due to getting home later from school and that numbers would further dwindle with no local high school. In addition, it was thought that local businesses and the area's sense of community would suffer hugely in the absence of GHS.

### *Primary School Pupils*

2.147 Primary school Pupils were concerned about the impact of the proposed closure of GHS on its associated clubs, especially the Rugby Club. Indeed, there is apparently a great deal of uncertainty around their future insofar as the area's children would likely choose to attend clubs around their new school rather than in their local area.

2.148 There was also worry about how communities and friendships would be affected by the proposal: that is, existing friendship groups may break up, especially as some pupils would be likely to attend schools

other than Brecon depending on their location. Some participants also explained that their siblings currently attend Gwernyfed and that they wish *'to follow family footsteps.'*

#### *Additional Learning Needs Stakeholders and Pupils*

- 2.149 Stakeholders emphasised the importance of keeping ALN services within communities because of providers' local knowledge and better understanding of the needs of pupils and families. It was also argued that attending a school further away could weaken pupils' links to their local communities, which could lead to: mental health problems such as anxiety, especially for those with spectrum disorders who rely on the structure and routine of being within their local areas; young people not being home in time to attend local after school-clubs; and some pupils requiring help and support from their local communities later on in life, but encountering difficulties in doing so if they have become disconnected.
- 2.150 Furthermore, it was reasoned that pupils are *'entitled to be in their communities'* and that integrating with pupils within their local areas is an important part of their socialisation.

#### *Public Meetings*

- 2.151 Both sets of participants raised concerns about the future prosperity, wellbeing and cohesion of their communities should the proposals be approved.
- 2.152 Participants at Brecon focused mainly on the negative impacts of losing the sixth form and Welsh language stream at BHS, commenting that pupils attending schools outside their local area will find it difficult to attend extra-curricular activities, resulting in alienation and a general *'erosion of community cohesion'*.
- 2.153 At Gwernyfed, meeting attendees were strongly opposed to the proposed closure of their local school, which they felt would eventually also lead to the loss of its associated community clubs and groups (the latter being essential for well-being and cohesion).
- 2.154 Another significant issue at Gwernyfed was that approval of the changes would be very much against the will of the people and would result in the further depletion of essential services. This, it was said, will result in families *'voting with their feet'* and leaving the area - leading to further falling pupil numbers (and financial premiums) and broken, ageing communities.

#### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- 2.155 Stakeholders stressed the case for retaining GHS in part because of the disproportionately negative impact its loss would have on community cohesion, culture and wellbeing.
- 2.156 A particular worry was the detrimental impact closing GHS would have on the area's sporting, arts and other community groups, many of which make significant use of the school buildings currently - and the lack of mention in the consultation document about specific mitigations against this impact. Furthermore, Painscastle Community Council and the Gwernyfed Campaign Group both raised the prospect of a decline in Young Farmers Club membership as a result of GHS's proposed closure and the dispersal of its pupils to various schools.
- 2.157 The economic impact of the school's loss on local businesses and the housing market was also highlighted as a key concern - as was the expectation that families will *'vote with their feet'* and leave the area (or indeed not be attracted there in the first place) because of the lack of secondary education provision, leaving behind broken, ageing communities.

- 2.158 Estyn suggest that PCC should do more to evidence what steps it would take to mitigate the risks identified in its equalities and community assessments.

#### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.159 A range of community impacts were identified by respondents from the Gwernyfed area, whose submissions reflect the important role the high school plays within the local community. There was deep concern that, should it close, the impact on the local area would be deep and far-reaching. Specific worries were that: educated, talented young people will leave the area, leaving an older population and a low-skilled local community; pupils and their parents will use facilities in the Brecon area, putting the Gwernyfed catchment area's economy at risk; an area without a local high school is discouraging to families; and that local facilities such as the leisure centre, sport clubs and cultural groups will face an uncertain future. Consequently, it was predicted that the proposed closure of GHS would effectively divide the community.
- 2.160 In addition, the range of facilities that would be made available at Brecon Leisure Centre while the new school is being built was questioned: reassurance was sought that there would be sufficient capacity for adequate provision in the interim period.
- 2.161 Essentially, PCC's was criticised for generating urban solutions to rural problems: its proposals were considered more suited to densely populated urban areas and the Council was accused of failing to consider issues specific to the rurality of Powys communities - such as difficult transport networks and naturally smaller schools.

#### *Social Media*

- 2.162 Many social media users described Gwernyfed High School (henceforth GHS) as an essential part of the community, and suggested that its removal would be to the detriment of the local area and its residents.

## Post-16 Education

#### *Governors*

- 2.163 The main argument put forward by both sets of Governors is that the proposals discriminate against Brecon and Gwernyfed learners by removing parental/learner choice at post-16 level. It was frequently said that, if the proposal is approved, BHS and GHS pupils alone in Powys will lose the choice between sixth form and tertiary education - and indeed the ability to 'mix and match' their subjects. This is particularly important in the context of the apparent value placed on the sixth form system in the area and the fact that tertiary education will not suit all pupils, some of whom value the structure of a sixth form.
- 2.164 Many concerns were raised around the perceived poor quality of NPTC's post-16 provision - as well as the College's capacity to offer as many subjects as stated, deliver courses from beginning to end and offer adequate pastoral support to pupils. Indeed, there was significant worry that, should NPTC fail to retain enough students on particular courses (or lose the staff members delivering them), those remaining would have to travel to Neath to continue their education - which would again be potentially difficult for disadvantaged families and those living in very rural areas.
- 2.165 The suggested implication of these concerns is that Powys learners will be lost to other Welsh counties or to England because of their reluctance to entrust their post-16 education to NPTC.



- <sup>2.166</sup> Finally in terms of post-16 education, Governors in both areas suggested that replacing the current successful and well-regarded South Powys consortium model with an untested provider is a risk to pupils' education.

### *Staff*

- <sup>2.167</sup> Staff participants made a number of points around the continuity and quality of post-16 education in the area. They suggested that NPTC lacks the capacity and resources to provide at least comparable education provision to what is currently provided by the schools - and sought reassurances that pupils will never be expected to travel to Neath to complete their education (which has apparently happened in the past).
- <sup>2.168</sup> Lack of accountability and quality assurance in relation to NPTC's performance was also a concern, and overall staff felt that removing the option of school-based sixth form in favour of the proposed tertiary model would lead to an unnecessarily uncertain future for pupils.
- <sup>2.169</sup> There was also significant worry about continuity for pupils; that is, being taught at the critical A-level stage by teachers with whom they are familiar and who know 'what makes them tick'. Moreover, there was a sense that younger pupils would suffer as a result of a lack of sixth form, whose pupils act as role models and have a significant positive influence on others.
- <sup>2.170</sup> Staff also noted the unfairness of removing post-16 parental and learner choice within the area, a unique situation in the context of Powys as a whole and one that may result in the loss of Powys pupils to educational establishments in, for example, Hereford and Merthyr Tydfil where more courses are offered and the quality of education is assured. This, in turn, would seriously jeopardise the sustainability of NPTC's Brecon-based provision.

### *Secondary School Pupils*

- <sup>2.171</sup> Pupils in both areas considered it unfair to take away pupils' right to choose where they study, especially in the case of those who prefer to learn in a school environment.
- <sup>2.172</sup> BHS pupils were particularly opposed to the proposal for the area's post-16 education to be delivered by NPTC. They urged PCC to retain a sixth form at the proposed new school site for the following reasons: sixth form pupils provide inspiration, encouragement and set a good example for younger year groups; sixth forms offer more continuity in terms of pupil/teacher relationships and educational support; it is advantageous to provide post-16 education locally because after-school support can be easily accessed as teachers more often than not live nearby; college teachers not being 'local' may affect the quality of education and pastoral support; a range of important (and CV-friendly) responsibilities and opportunities are offered in sixth forms that colleges do not provide; friendship groups can be educated together; and the current South Powys Consortium is working well.
- <sup>2.173</sup> One of the most significant concerns among pupils in both catchment areas was the perceived poor standard of NPTC's provision. The Neath and Brecon campuses were both said to be lacking in: teaching quality; proper management (especially in relation to teachers leaving before the end of term and not being replaced); facilities; and capacity to accommodate more pupils. Participants thus expressed strong reservations as to whether NPTC can deliver what is promised; indeed, some felt they would prefer to attend colleges and schools elsewhere - such as in Merthyr or Hereford - with proven track-records and good quality assurance.
- <sup>2.174</sup> Indeed, some pupils explained that uncertainty around the future of their school has led many to apply for or consider Hereford or Merthyr Colleges regardless of the consultation outcome. As such, they said



that the number of post-16 education pupils at the NPTC campus in Brecon may not increase by as much as PCC suggests.

#### *Primary School Pupils*

<sup>2.175</sup> The proposal for post-16 education to be delivered via the NPTC Group of Colleges in Brecon was not met with a great deal of opposition, though pupils in the Brecon catchment workshop were more sceptical and questioned: why the new school would not have its own sixth form; why PCC cannot run the college; whether the college would offer a sufficient range of subjects; and why the Council feels NPTC would provide better post-16 education than the proposed new school. There was also some concern about being unfamiliar with the college teachers.

<sup>2.176</sup> However, some pupils recognised the benefits of having a better range of subjects available at A-Level.

#### *Additional Learning Needs Stakeholders and Pupils*

<sup>2.177</sup> Most stakeholders saw issues with the provision of post-16 education for ALN pupils, particularly in terms of access to a range of subjects. Therefore, participants predicted that college-based study would help improve ALN pupils' educational quality. It was also hoped that encouraging and enabling more of them to attend college would free space in schools like Penmaes.

<sup>2.178</sup> Despite this though, NPTC's apparently poor reputation and lack of suitable courses in the Brecon area led some to question whether it would be able to 'deliver' for ALN students. Other reservations included: whether college-based education only is the most appropriate option for such a large area; potentially less focus on the pupil wellbeing within the college compared to schools; and the implications of increasing numbers of pupils requiring transport for college.

<sup>2.179</sup> The importance of transitional support for post-16 pupils, as well as partnership working between the college and adult services, was also discussed by stakeholders.

<sup>2.180</sup> Some ALN pupils recognised the advantages of college-based education: participants who were planning to attend college explained that they were doing so because of the range of options and flexibility available to them. However, most who were almost 16 years of age said they would prefer to continue their studies at Ysgol Penmaes because of the help offered to SEN students there.

#### *Public Meetings*

<sup>2.181</sup> Meeting participants were extremely concerned that the NPTC group does not currently have the capacity to deliver at least equal or better quality post-16 provision than is currently offered in South Powys in terms of teaching quality, subject and teacher availability and facilities such as science labs and common rooms.

<sup>2.182</sup> Participants also noted the lack of assurance around sustainability and that all the advertised courses will continue to be delivered locally and not transferred to Neath or cancelled altogether once commenced due to student or teacher shortages - and about the lack of accountability in such an event.

<sup>2.183</sup> All this is compounded by a sense that Brecon and Gwernyfed pupils are not being offered the same choice of post-16 provision (that is, a sixth form in addition to a tertiary college) as others are across the county.

<sup>2.184</sup> In light of the above, it was strongly suggested that the current arrangement - close collaboration between sixth forms and the college - is maintained.

*Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- <sup>2.185</sup> Many comments made by statutory stakeholders underline a sense of inequity that parents and pupils in south Powys will not have the same choice of post-16 delivery models as those in the rest of the county. Furthermore, there is a sense that entrusting local post-16 education to an untried and untested provider with limited accountability to PCC is a risk. Particular concerns were around: a perception of poor educational standards and outcomes at NPTC; reduced access to teachers and the support and pastoral care they can offer within a sixth form environment; the possibility that NPTC could withdraw provision from the Brecon campus at any time should student numbers render it unviable; and whether the promised breadth of A-level choice will materialise in reality.
- <sup>2.186</sup> Indeed, several respondents were of the view that PCC's estimates of potential NPTC student numbers are optimistic given many are likely to look outside Powys (and even Wales) for their post-16 education - and even if accurate could not sustain the proposed 25 A-level courses.
- <sup>2.187</sup> Estyn state that there is insufficient evidence around how the reorganisation of post 16 education into a single site at Brecon will improve quality and outcomes for learners. Furthermore, the risks to the first cohort of year 12 pupils entering the tertiary system have not been adequately assessed.
- <sup>2.188</sup> The balance of opinion among statutory stakeholders was that the current South Powys Consortium model of post-16 education provides better quality for pupils, even if it offers less subject choice. They thus strongly desired maintaining the status quo; that is, both BHS and GHS continuing to deliver academic A-levels, with support from NPTC in the delivery of vocational options.

*Written Submissions (Public)*

- <sup>2.189</sup> Some respondents complimented the quality of post-16 education at the two current schools and could not understand how the loss of their sixth forms could be of any benefit to pupils. Others rejected PCC's claim that the current range of A-Level subjects is insufficient; on the contrary, it was argued that some pupils do not want or need greater choice, while others would prefer to settle for a more limited range of subjects delivered in smaller, good quality sixth forms than risk their educational future with an apparently untested provider in the form of NPTC. There were, however, a few comments around the poor choice of A-level subjects, inadequate facilities ('outdated' science labs for example) and poor teacher retention within the current high schools.
- <sup>2.190</sup> Many responses highlighted serious concerns about NPTC's educational standards and capacity to deliver the broad range of courses promised at the Brecon campus. The College's apparently poor reputation and lack of local accountability were also criticised; in relation to the latter, people commented on their own and others' experiences of courses being cancelled due to low numbers. Furthermore, current facilities (such as the science laboratories) at the College in Brecon were considered poorer than those at GHS in particular.
- <sup>2.191</sup> A further reservation was whether sufficient good quality staff could be recruited to teach for only '*a couple of hours a week*'. Also, there was worry that they would not be as available and supportive as sixth form teachers who have built up a relationship with their pupils over a number of years.
- <sup>2.192</sup> Respondents typically did not wish to see post-16 education provided by an out-of-area organisation, leaving PCC with reduced control and influence; in fact, some accused the Council of abandoning their responsibilities in this respect. There was also some distrust of NPTC's intentions and fear that its main focus is profit over educational quality. Respondents also questioned what would happen if the College decides it is not financially viable to continue its Brecon-based provision in future.

- 2.193 In addition to the above, it was claimed that the lack of local school-based sixth forms would encourage some parents to send their children to out-of-county colleges and schools, including those over the border in England. This, it was claimed, would not only impact on post-16 pupil numbers in Powys, but also on students' right to be educated in their own country. There was also concern around additional transport costs, which it was feared families and pupils would be responsible for.
- 2.194 Respondents also championed the benefits of having sixth form pupils within schools: they were described as role models for younger pupils and were thought to offer a great deal in terms of tutoring and mentoring. Furthermore, the continuity of education offered by school-based sixth forms was considered essential in terms of improving pupil performance and encouraging those who wish to further their education.
- 2.195 Alternative suggestions from written submitters included: merging Brecon and Gwernyfed sixth forms; and teachers travelling to different sites or carrying out 'Skype tutorials' to reduce travel and disruption for pupils, while still providing a range of subjects.

### *Social Media*

- 2.196 Social media users frequently discussed the potential quality and sustainability of the education proposed to be provided by NPTC in Brecon. Moreover, the College's ability to provide the requisite number of staff to deliver a full range of A-levels was also called into question - as was the ability of its teachers to develop relationships with pupils in the same way those at Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools have been able to do.
- 2.197 Other concerns were around governance, accountability and finances. With specific regard to the latter, several participants questioned the proposed £24 million spend on a new building to house the NPTC sixth form provision.

## Welsh Medium Education

### *The Consultation Questionnaire*

- 2.198 More than half (55%) of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) agree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues in Welsh education. More than two fifths of those representing an organisation based in or covering Powys (44%) and Governors of schools in Powys (43%) agreed, as did around a third of members of staff in Powys school/education system (34%) and around a quarter (27%) of other residents.
- 2.199 While around two fifths (38%) of pupils and parents/carers/guardians of pupils in Powys overall agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the issues identified in Welsh education, and 39% of pupils/parents/carers and guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils specifically agreed, only around a quarter (24%) of pupils/parents/carers and guardians Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils agreed.
- 2.200 Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream.
- 2.201 Almost half of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) (48%) and around two fifths of Governors of schools in Powys (43%) agreed with the proposal to deliver Welsh medium education from a single Welsh stream. More than a third (35%) of pupils, parents, carers or guardians of Powys pupils also agreed, while only around a quarter (26%) of other residents agreed.

- 2.202 Around two fifths (38%) of parents/carers and guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils agreed with the proposal to deliver Welsh medium education from a single Welsh stream, compared to only around a fifth (19%) of parents/carers and guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils.
- 2.203 Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school.
- 2.204 More than half of Governors of schools in Powys (54%) agreed with the proposal. Almost half of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) (49%) and members of staff in Powys schools/education system (46%) also agreed.
- 2.205 While two fifths (40%) of pupils/parents/carers/guardians of Powys pupils overall agreed with this proposal, parents, carers or guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils had slightly higher levels of agreement (49%), while only around a fifth (21%) of parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils agreed with this proposal.
- 2.206 Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at Builth Wells.
- 2.207 Around a third of employees of Powys County Council (not in education system) (35%), members of staff in the Powys schools/education system (30%) and Governors of schools in Powys (30%) agreed.
- 2.208 However, more than half of all respondent groups disagree with the proposal. Other residents (61%), representatives of organisations based in or covering Powys (60%), and Governors of schools in Powys (57%) were particularly likely to disagree, with well over half of pupils/parents/carers and guardians of Brecon (62%) and Gwernyfed (57%) HS/feeder school pupils disagreeing with the proposal.
- 2.209 Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh.
- 2.210 More than half of Governors of schools in Powys (57%), employees of Powys County Council (not in education) (56%) and representatives of organisations based in or covering Powys (51%) agree with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh. Nearly half of members of staff in the Powys school/education system (46%) and pupils/parents/carers/guardians of Powys pupils (45%) also agree.
- 2.211 Nearly three fifths of parents, carers and guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils (58%) agreed, compared with 3 in 10 (30%) of parents, carers and guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils.
- 2.212 Those who disagreed with any elements of the proposal were asked why. The most common reasons for disagreement with the proposal among Brecon and Gwernyfed questionnaire respondents was that it will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs. Some suggested parents will be deterred from educating their children in Welsh, and that Welsh as a language will suffer. Respondents commonly expressed support for keeping Welsh provision at Brecon HS.

#### *Young Person's Consultation Questionnaire*

- 2.213 Respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with that the Council is right to respond to issues raised around Welsh medium education in South Powys. Around half (48%) of Brecon HS/feeder school students agreed, while only 1 in 10 (11%) of those in Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools agreed.

- 2.214 Respondents were then asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with each element of the proposal.
- 2.215 45% of young people in Brecon HS/feeder schools agreed with the proposal to consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single stream in South/Mid Powys. Just over 1 in 10 (13%) of those in Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools agreed.
- 2.216 Half (51%) of Brecon HS/feeder students agreed with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as a part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school, compared with a quarter (25%) of those in Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools.
- 2.217 27% of respondents in Brecon HS/feeder schools agreed with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream in Builth Wells. Only 12% of those in Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools agreed.
- 2.218 Over three fifths (62%) of respondents in Brecon HS/feeder schools supported the proposal to increase provision of subjects via the medium of Welsh. However, this proposal only received support from less than a third (29%) of Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools.
- 2.219 Young people in Brecon and Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools commonly argued that the council should keep Welsh provision at Brecon, and that the proposed changes will lead to longer travel times and increased travel costs. Others suggested that the proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh.

#### *Primary Consultation Questionnaire*

- 2.220 Around two fifths (42%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools, and just over a fifth (23%) of those in Gwernyfed feeder schools agreed that the Council is right to make changes to Welsh medium education.
- 2.221 Two thirds (66%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to teach pupils wanting to learn in Welsh from a single school. Less than a third (30%) of Gwernyfed feeder respondents agreed.
- 2.222 Over a third of those from Brecon feeder schools (36%) agreed with the proposed change for pupils wanting to learn Welsh to do so in Builth Wells, as did around a quarter of those from Gwernyfed feeder schools (26%). Around half of respondents from Brecon (50%) and Gwernyfed (47%) feeder schools disagreed with this.
- 2.223 Nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to increase the number of different subjects available in Welsh to pupils 16+. A third (35%) of Gwernyfed feeder respondents also agreed.
- 2.224 Respondents who disagreed with the proposals were asked why this was. Many in Brecon feeder school students simply stated that they did not want to be moved to Builth Wells, and that the council should maintain Welsh provision at Brecon High. Respondents from both Brecon and Gwernyfed feeders commonly argued that the proposals will lead to increased travel times/cost and that Welsh should be available to all pupils.

#### *Governors*

- 2.225 Brecon Governors were angry that PCC has not developed a long-term vision to support the development of Welsh medium education in their area - and argued that the proposals will negatively

impact on the likelihood of local parents choosing Welsh medium education in the future, thus in turn impacting on the future sustainability of primary feeder schools such as Ysgol Y Bannau.

- 2.226 Furthermore, they suggested that the proposals will do nothing to stop the flow of local pupils accessing Welsh medium education out-of-county (at Ystalyfera in Neath Port Talbot for example) - and that this can only be arrested through the provision of quality education through the medium of Welsh at BHS.
- 2.227 As a result of these two factors and low pupil numbers in general, the Governors questioned the assumption in the consultation document around creating a critical mass and increased Welsh medium offer at Builth Wells High School.
- 2.228 The Governors also complained about the tenor of the consultation document, arguing strongly against the insinuation that the standard of Welsh medium education at Brecon is comparatively poor. Moreover, they suggested that if the Welsh stream at Brecon could be maintained and expanded to include only a few more subjects, local parents (including those from Sennybridge) would be happy to send their children there for reasons of convenience and that quality is better than quantity.

### *Staff*

- 2.229 Participants desired a more honest appraisal of the likely pupil numbers and breadth of courses that will be offered at Builth Wells - as well as more information about primary school provision in the area - so that parents can make better informed choices around their children's future. Indeed, some argued that there is a lack of evidence that the proposal will create a critical mass at Builth Wells and encourage sufficient numbers to make it feasible, especially in the short-term.
- 2.230 There was considerable anger among Brecon staff members that the school's Welsh stream has lost many pupils to Builth Wells as a result of the consultation process: parents apparently proactively removed their children for 'fear that the Welsh medium unit would close'. Furthermore, the provision of out of school transport to enable pupils from Sennybridge to attend Ystalyfera was noted; participants were unclear as to how this was allowed to happen in preference to encouraging people to send their children to Brecon and growing Welsh medium provision locally - particularly in the primary school sector.
- 2.231 In addition, the lack of support offered by PCC to BHS's bid to obtain Welsh language status 2b was noted as another contributory factor to the decline of Welsh medium education at the school.
- 2.232 It was also said that PCC is not being as creative, proactive and supportive in terms of developing Welsh medium education as other counties across Wales.

### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.233 The proposal to provide Welsh medium education at Builth Wells High School and close the Welsh stream at Brecon was met with significant opposition from BHS pupils, who queried why said stream could not be included within the proposed new school. They said that the consultation and resulting uncertainty around the future of Welsh medium education in Brecon has already caused parents to start moving their children to Builth, further exacerbating the problematic issues of low pupil numbers within the Welsh stream at Brecon.
- 2.234 The potentially negative impact of the proposal on Ysgol y Bannau's pupil numbers was a worry; it was suggested that parents (especially English-speaking parents) may be discouraged from sending their children to a Welsh medium primary school without any secondary provision locally. Furthermore,



Brecon pupils argued that the knock-on effect of fewer people learning Welsh would result in a decline in the Welsh language locally.

- 2.235 Travel was another main concern insofar as Builth was considered too distant from Brecon. Using public transport to and from difficult to access areas was predicted to be particularly problematic, as was the lack of flexibility for pupils wishing to continue participating in after-school clubs or needing time off for, say, GP appointments.
- 2.236 The fragmentation of friendship groups and the depletion of local extra-curricular clubs were also thought to be potential consequences of removing the Welsh stream from Brecon.
- 2.237 Despite the overwhelming negativity though, a few pupils from Brecon acknowledged that removing the Welsh-stream from their high school would make good financial sense and allow more money to be spent on educational improvements.

#### *Primary School Pupils*

- 2.238 The plans to continue Welsh-medium education in Builth Wells High School but not at Brecon was met with criticism, mainly from Ysgol y Bannau pupils. They were chiefly concerned about: the lack of Welsh medium secondary education locally discouraging parents from sending their children to Ysgol y Bannau – leading to a decline in the Welsh language in the Brecon area; the distance between Brecon and Builth and the logistics of being so far from home if, for example, they became ill while at school; and the cost to PCC of having to transport pupils from Brecon to Builth.

#### *Public Meetings*

- 2.239 There was grave concern that the transferal of the Welsh stream to Builth Wells High School would be to the detriment of Welsh culture in the Brecon area and also to a lesser degree in Gwernyfed. Moreover, participants in Brecon suggested that the proposals will make local parents think twice about choosing Welsh medium primary education for their children if there is no local high school Welsh medium provision available - with the overall effect that numbers of Welsh medium pupils will decline and ultimately affect the viability of both the Welsh medium stream at Builth Wells and of Ysgol y Bannau.
- 2.240 Brecon participants also argued that the council's recent transport policy for Welsh medium education (that is, paying for pupils to be transported to Builth or even out-of-county to Ystalyfera) has damaged the prospect of strengthening provision at BHS and could be judged as pre-determination of the consultation outcomes. It was also said that expecting pupils from Brecon's core Welsh-speaking area of Crai, Sennybridge and Trecastle to travel over 30 miles to Builth is unrealistic and will contribute further to the out-of-county pupil exodus given Ystalyfera is closer. A suggestion was thus made that PCC should: *look at not paying for children to go outside the county from Ysgol y Bannau and Sennybridge to bring the numbers up here in Brecon and keep the pupils in the county?* (Brecon Public)
- 2.241 There was also some scepticism that the anticipated critical mass of Welsh medium pupils will not materialise at Builth, meaning the promised wider range of subjects to be provided there will not either.
- 2.242 Overall, Brecon participants felt that the BHS Welsh stream has been intentionally downgraded in favour of Builth (as particularly highlighted by the aforementioned provision of free school transport for Welsh medium pupils to Builth and Ystalyfera) and that its loss is contrary to the will of local people, who recognise the essential contribution the Welsh stream pupils have made to both the school and the local community.

*Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- 2.243 Stakeholders argued that removing the Welsh stream from BHS without a significantly improved alternative Welsh medium offer elsewhere will lead to reduced number of parents choosing to educate their children through the medium of Welsh. This, it was felt, will inevitably impact on the cultural and linguistic fabric of south Powys.
- 2.244 It was also said that a likely reduction in Welsh medium primary pupil intakes at Ysgol Y Bannau and Sennybridge (which in itself was considered highly regrettable) may starve Builth Wells High School of the critical mass of pupils it needs to expand its dual stream provision and ensure sustainability.
- 2.245 Furthermore, a dual stream by its very nature was considered somewhat uncertain in terms of sustainability - and a possible reason for some parents' decision to send their children to a more 'secure' Welsh medium educational environment at Ystalyfera. Indeed, Ysgol y Bannau commented on parents' willingness to allow their children to travel long distances to secure a quality Welsh medium education, and suggested that the establishment of a Welsh medium secondary school for south and mid Powys would be welcomed and well-supported.
- 2.246 Overall, respondents were keen to see Welsh medium provision supported in the Brecon area at least until a fully bilingual 2a/2b school can be established to serve mid and south Powys.
- 2.247 Estyn suggest that PCC's assumption that a greater critical mass of Welsh medium pupils will lead to a broader curriculum and greater differentiation of pupils is reasonable, but would like greater detail on how this will improve on current standards. Estyn state that the proposals do not address the immediate need to address inequity in choice for Welsh medium learners at post 16.
- 2.248 Estyn also highlight that PCC has not given sufficient consideration to alternative provision should the proposal for a new dual stream school in Builth Wells not be approved.

*Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.249 Equity of choice and access to Welsh-medium education was regarded as a right - and moreover essential to ensure the continued vibrancy of the language in Brecon and its surrounding areas. As such, PCC was accused of being discriminatory in discouraging Welsh language use among young people in the area; the expectation was that many pupils, especially from South Powys, would attend or transfer to their local English medium school instead of travelling long distances on public transport to Builth Wells High School. It was thus suggested that the projected number of pupils entering the Welsh stream at Builth has been overestimated.
- 2.250 The removal of the Welsh stream from BHS was thought to make little sense when Ysgol y Bannau - a category 1 Welsh language primary school - is located in such close proximity. Indeed, many concerns were expressed around the negative impact of the proposal on pupil numbers at Ysgol y Bannau - as well as on facilities and community life in the area.
- 2.251 Some responses criticised PCC for its recent policy decisions and a lack of support and funding for BHS - all of which have apparently undermined the Welsh stream there. Several respondents also said that the case for change document is somewhat disingenuous and misleading insofar as constant uncertainty around the future of the school's Welsh stream has, in fact, been a significant contributing factor to its declining pupil numbers and educational quality.
- 2.252 The balance of views called for the preservation of the Welsh stream at Brecon and there were suggestions to: increase pupils numbers by ensuring local primary school pupils (including Sennybridge) attend BHS; invest the money saved on pupils travelling to Builth into the recruitment of good quality



Welsh medium teachers; and allow teachers to travel between the two sites to enable both to remain open. Others said they would accept a lesser range of subjects if at least some Welsh medium education could be retained at Brecon.

- 2.253 There was also general support for strengthening Welsh-medium provision across Powys as a whole: while some proposed Welsh-medium staff pooling across primary and secondary schools, others called for PCC to commit to establishing a fully Welsh-medium secondary school to serve South and Mid Powys.

#### *Social Media*

- 2.254 Brecon's social media users were especially concerned about PCC's proposed changes to Welsh medium education, particularly in relation to travel distances, arrangements and costs. The possible negative impact of the proposals on pupil numbers at Ysgol y Bannau was also noted.

## Alternative Suggestions

#### *Secondary School Pupils*

- 2.255 Pupils urged PCC to provide a new building for BHS only, and to spend any additional funding on improving Gwernyfed instead of closing it. Indeed, they asked '*why this was not the main option*' under the proposals. A less popular alternative was to merge the two schools into one site, but to locate it at Gwernyfed instead.
- 2.256 There was at least some opposition and concern across both catchment areas to the closure of the two schools, and one Gwernyfed pupil asked: '*why are the schools in South Powys proposed to close and none in North Powys?*' Those who were opposed to the closures explained that they would prefer PCC to save money in other service areas and repair the two schools instead.

#### *Primary School Pupils*

- 2.257 Pupils proposed some alternative suggestions that they felt would result in less disruption for GHS and the pupils within its catchment area. These included: retaining GHS in its current form and focussing on improving BHS without a merger; merging BHS with another school; merging GHS with Crickhowell High School; and reversing the proposal so that the single site school would be located in Gwernyfed rather than Brecon.
- 2.258 Pupils in both workshops questioned why the money earmarked for the proposed new school could not be spent on repairing and maintaining the two schools instead of building a new one. This, to many, was a preferable option.
- 2.259 Finally, building two new schools on the respective sites was suggested - to be funded by the savings made from not having to transport pupils from the Gwernyfed catchment to Brecon.

#### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

- 2.260 In addition to the retention of the status quo (excepting the need to build a new school at Brecon), several stakeholders urged PCC to give further consideration to alternative options – the most frequently mentioned being a through-school at Brecon.

### *Written Submissions (Public)*

- 2.261 Several respondents called on PCC to consider a through-school model for Brecon (and a couple suggested the same for GHS) - while another suggested a similar model to John Beddoes and Newton for Gwernyfed, whereby GHS would become part of a campus school.
- 2.262 Greater partnerships and shared resources (for example through federation or combining sixth forms) were also proposed: these, it was hoped, would mitigate against the critical mass issues cited in the case for change.
- 2.263 Several people would like to see PCC adopt better and more creative uses of information technology across sites within a federation or consortium model in order to allow pupils to access a better range of subjects without having to travel long distances.

### *Social Media*

- 2.264 Some social media users had ideas or proposals of their own, for example: reintroducing an agricultural college for long-term sustainability; the development of a new three to 18 'through school'; and retaining a dedicated sixth form within the proposed new building and renting a portion of it to NPTC for vocational provision.

## Consultation Process

### *Governors*

- 2.265 The Brecon Governors voiced concern about PCC's apparently insufficiently transparent decision-making processes and lack of external scrutiny - and said that the Council's Cabinet would be going against the will of the local population if it endorses the proposals in their current form.
- 2.266 There was also concern that the Council has failed to take previous feedback and inputs from the BHS Governing Body into account when formulating its proposals.
- 2.267 Some wanted to know how PCC has evaluated and weighted the potential impacts of the proposals on communities, what mitigations have been considered and why some alternative options (such as a through school model for Brecon) have been discarded when, in the view of Governors', they are perfectly workable.

### *Staff*

- 2.268 Many staff members suggested a lack of detail in the consultation document, which was thought to contain too many vagaries and implicit assumptions:

*In the consultation document there seems to be a lot of presumption. We'll try to make sure this happens/that happens. The schools will make the decisions. Not the Council... (Gwernyfed Staff)*

### *Public Meetings*

- 2.269 A number of people at the Gwernyfed meeting voiced distrust of the council based on its alleged mismanagement and poor implementation of the previous primary schools reorganisation consultation in their area.
- 2.270 Participants also sought reassurance that the balance of opinion will be considered and that the consultation process will be in line with the Welsh Government's legal requirements and compliant with wider relevant legislation - which was doubted by several attendees.

2.271 A lack of confidence in the democratic process was also evident from the comments made at Gwernyfed, where people accused PCC of: not listening to public concerns; not wishing to have constructive discussions; and having already made up its mind to proceed with the proposals.

#### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

2.272 Many of the comments made underline a sense of mistrust and a lack of confidence in PCCs decision-making and implementation processes, in some cases based on its alleged mismanagement of the previous primary schools reorganisation consultation in the Gwernyfed catchment area.

2.273 A number of concerns were raised either around inaccurate or missing/incomplete information in PCC's documentation in relation to, for example, budgets, predicted spend and the financial cost of the proposed project. Moreover, stakeholders raised concerns around the transparency and technical precision of the options appraisal processes, citing inconsistencies and mistakes that erode their faith in the accuracy of the consultation document.

2.274 Estyn raised issue with the lack of measures in the proposals to mitigate the four key risks identified by the proposals, namely; 1. That the leadership and governance are not in place by September 2017, 2. The challenges associate with transferring the first cohort to NPTC. 3. The new dual stream welsh school for mid-Powys is not approved and 4. The possibility that the proposed new school will fail to improve standards.

2.275 Other concerns were around: the lack of consultation with affected pupils and parents in 'other' schools such as Crickhowell; the lack of consultation generally at a formative stage; and possible pre-determination (for example on the basis that PCC has already agreed to provide free school transport to pupils wishing to enter the Welsh stream at Builth Wells).

#### *Written Submissions (Public)*

2.276 There was an evident sense of distrust in the way PCC has developed its case for change. Many felt that the consultation process is at best cosmetic, whereas others alleged a pre-determined outcome and cited both bias (against GHS) and errors in the consultation document.

2.277 Some respondents were keen to see the decision-making process involving not only the PCC Cabinet, but all elected members. There was also criticism of: PCC's performance at the consultation meetings; the objectivity of the consultation questionnaire; and the inaccessibility of the online version of the consultation document.

2.278 More generally, respondents demonstrated a loss of confidence in PCC and sought reassurance that their views and the strength of opposition to the proposals would be heeded. Their responses also underlined the need for early dialogue with affected communities in developing options for schools reorganisation, especially in light of the recent primary schools process.

#### *Social Media*

2.279 Many social media users commented on the consultation process, describing it as something of a 'done deal'. The fact that the ultimate decision as to whether the proposals are approved or rejected will be taken by the PCC Cabinet (as opposed to the whole Council) was also referenced several times: several social media considered this to be undemocratic.

2.280 In terms of public meetings, the Brecon public meeting was considered a success by social media users. However, some users were unhappy with the conduct of the Gwernyfed consultation event held on

20th April 2016, particularly with respect to the answers (or perceived lack thereof) provided to questions from the floor.

## Projections, Facts and Figures

### *Governors*

2.281 The Brecon Governors raised a number of objections to specific evidence and assumptions in the consultation document underpinning the case for change, particularly in relation to: the difference between offer and take-up of Welsh medium subjects; the omission of an 'up-to-date assessment of the progress the high school has been making'; outdated figures on BHS's financial situation; and the apparently misleading insinuation that the school fails to offer post-16 Welsh medium education (when it was agreed this provision, post 16, would be provided at Builth Wells as part of the South Powys Consortium).

### *Staff*

2.282 Participants at both staff meetings challenged a number of specific statements around the reasons for falling pupil numbers put forward in the case for change.

### *Secondary School Pupils*

2.283 On the issue of pupil numbers, the secondary school participants argued that it would be 'very unlikely' that those in the Gwernyfed catchment area would attend the new school in Brecon, instead preferring to 'go over the border' to England - and they felt that the closure of GHS would discourage parents of young children from settling in the area, again exacerbating the issue of low pupil numbers.

### *Public Meetings*

2.284 Participants at the Gwernyfed meeting felt that not enough consideration has been given during the options appraisal to maintaining both sites in some form.

2.285 Gwernyfed participants also said that local demographics (many families with school-age children for example) and population growth in light of local housing development should have been factored in to the pupil number assumptions in the case for change, specifically around the viability of maintaining the Gwernyfed site.

### *Written Submissions (Statutory Stakeholders)*

2.286 The Gwernyfed Campaign Group questioned the validity of PCCs pupil number projections, quoting miscalculations within the consultation document. They group (as well as Councillor Melanie Davies, Talgarth Town Council and Felinfach Community Council) also insisted that projected numbers are projected to rise in coming years:

2.287 In any case, the Gwernyfed Community Council challenged the assumption that surplus places are harmful to schools' viability: they were considered perfectly acceptable providing school budgets are managed effectively. Furthermore, the Gwernyfed High School Governing Body suggested that uncertainty around the future of GHS has had a negative impact on admission numbers - but that the school has now re-established its intake and is in a stable position once more.

2.288 Finally in terms of pupil numbers, it was said that the proposals themselves may, in fact, serve to further exacerbate the issue of falling pupil numbers given that many parents in the Gwernyfed

catchment area will choose to send their children out of county, into England or to private school (Christ College) in preference to the proposed new school in Brecon.

2.289 Estyn want further clarity around the projected pupil numbers and capacity of the proposed new school

#### *Written Submissions (Public)*

2.290 The projections, facts and figures underpinning PCC's case for change were challenged in many of the written responses. For example, while the consultation document cites falling pupil numbers and surplus school places, it was argued that uncertainty around the future of BHS and GHS has been partly responsible for these trends. Conversely, it was said that positive investment in the two schools would attract families to the area - thus increasing pupil numbers once more.

2.291 It was also suggested that future housing developments in the local area will increase student numbers and address the surplus places issue. Furthermore, some responses highlighted PCC's own projections, which show that a single new school could be oversubscribed within a very short time and suggested that the Council should consider the longer-term picture by supporting secondary schools at both Brecon *and* Gwernyfed. On the other hand, others asked how PCC can possibly predict where Gwernyfed parents will send their children given that other high schools may be closer or easier to access than Brecon. As such, they felt that the number of pupils projected to attend the new school could have been overestimated.

## Overall Comments

2.292 While there was a great deal of support for a new school to replace the ageing Brecon High, participants and respondents across all consultation methodologies clearly and overwhelmingly rejected PCC's proposal to:

Close Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools and establish a new English-medium 11–16 secondary school to operate across the current sites of the two schools from 1st September 2017;

And close both sites upon the opening of a new-build campus in Brecon in 2019/20.

2.293 Furthermore, there was almost universal opposition among consultees to the delivery of academic and vocational post-16 provision via the NPTC Group of Colleges in Brecon only; as well as the closure of the Welsh stream at Brecon High School in favour of delivering Welsh medium education provision from Builth Wells High School.

2.294 The reasons underpinning these views have been fully recorded both in the summary of findings above and in the detailed chapters that follow. The table below, though, shows people's main objections to the proposals across all consultation strands.

**Figure1: Table Summary of main themes**

The Case for Change		
Some support for change and recognition of underlying evidence: non-specialist teaching; over-use of supply teachers; poor condition of school buildings; high running costs; falling pupil numbers; limited A-level choice.	Rejection of PCC's case for GHS: small rural schools deliver better standards and outcomes through quality teaching, positive pupil/teacher relationships, strong leadership and satisfactory staff retention and recruitment. It is a happy, safe and community-focused school with	Some assertions that the underlying reason for the proposals is to eradicate BHS's debt and access capital funding - effectively sacrificing one school for a new one. The legality of this was questioned.

	attractive buildings and surroundings.	
Quality of Education		
Failure by PCC to acknowledge improvements in educational standards and leadership at the schools or provide convincing arguments that the proposals will increase educational quality, especially at Gwernyfed.	Scepticism that a larger school would lead to better quality: GHS is an appropriate size for its rural location and smaller 11-18 schools provide good pastoral support as a result of teachers knowing pupils throughout secondary school.	Merging a high performing school (GHS) with a school in special measures (BHS) would be to the detriment of overall standards at the former.
Educational performance in a larger school might be affected by increased bullying and absenteeism; the loss of close pupil/teacher relationships; and pupil difficulties adjusting to new teaching styles.	The proposals would replace a successful senior leadership team at Gwernyfed with a new and untried team.	PCC has failed to support schools across Powys and has had a role, therefore, in any fall in educational standards.
Finance and Funding		
More information is needed from PCC around how the proposed new school would be funded bearing in mind current financial differences: GHS in surplus and BHS's debt burden.	BHS's resources would be much higher than GHS's under the proposed new arrangement owing to the historical legacy of living beyond its means in the former's case and working to budget in the case of the latter.	Finance (and the need to eradicate BHS's debt) and not quality of education or pupil wellbeing is driving PCC's proposals.
PCC's vision of a brand new learning campus is unviable without certainty around long-term Welsh Government capital funding and how the new debt burden will be managed in future.	Outdated financial data for Brecon in the consultation document.	BHS's financial situation has been caused by PCC failures, mismanagement and lack of support – as well as uncertainty over the School's future.
Proposed financial savings proposal will not compensate for the cost to communities in the GHS catchment area.	A large repayment would be required to the Big Lottery Fund in the event of GHS's closure.	The money spent on more pupil transport would be better spent on improving educational quality in the existing schools.
Buildings and Estates		
BHS needs a new building - but concerns around: security of funding; the timeframe for building the new school; and the safety of the existing building in the interim.	PCC is responsible for the decline in the quality of BHS's buildings and a main driver for the proposals is to secure Welsh Government capital funding for a new building in Brecon.	Will the GHS school buildings fall into disrepair - and will PCC dispose of the school's building and community assets at well below market value?
What will happen to the GHS leisure facilities – and how will the existing facilities at both school sites be maintained for community use?	How can PCC afford to build a new school?	Lack of surplus capacity at the proposed new school to meet future pupil numbers. A new school should be future-proofed to account for population growth.
Will NPTC's facilities have the capacity and resources to cater for an increased number of students?	How will BHS's land be put to good use if the proposals go ahead?	A new school in Brecon should not depend on closing GHS.
Governance and Staffing of a New School		
More information needed on the relationship between PCC, the Shadow Governing Body and Senior Management Team in implementing	Clarity required over the composition of the Shadow Governing Body and how PCC will ensure strong leadership and management - especially given	Will a single leadership team be able to deliver consistent quality across two very different sites?

possible changes. PCC should have an advisory role only.	past issues at BHS.	
Suggested timeframes are challenging, particularly in terms of timetabling, negotiating staff contracts and implementing a staff redundancy process if necessary.	Maintaining standards during transition could be problematic.	Scepticism over PCC's ability to deliver secondary school reorganisation to timetable in view of past experiences in the primary sector.
Post 16 Education		
Proposals discriminate by removing parental/learner choice for pupils in Brecon and Gwernyfed alone in the whole of Powys. Other areas have the choice between school and tertiary college for post-16 learning.	NPTC's provision is thought to be poor in terms of: resources (e.g. science labs/common rooms); capacity to offer subject choice in Brecon; pastoral care; proper management; and provision and support for ANL pupils.	Replacing the well-regarded South Powys consortium model with an untested out-of-area provider is a risk. The consortium model should remain even if it offers less choice at A-level - with NPTC in support for vocational courses.
Lack of accountability should NPTC cancel courses in Brecon once started because of teacher shortages. PCC criticised for abandoning its responsibilities.	In the case of teacher shortages, will students have to travel to Neath to continue their studies (a difficult option for disadvantaged and rural families)?	Sixth form pupils would be lost from schools where they currently encourage, support, mentor and inspire younger pupils.
After-school subject and pastoral support would be jeopardised because tertiary college staff would be more likely to travel daily into the Brecon area.	A lack of continuity due to pupils being taught at A-level by teachers unfamiliar to them.	Post-16 learners may be lost to establishments outside Powys with proven track records for sixth form provision. This would jeopardise the sustainability of NPTC's Brecon base for A-level study.
Additional transport costs to families, especially in the Gwernyfed catchment area.	The proposed £24 million spend on a new building for the NPTC sixth form is excessive.	College-based study may help improve the quality and range of education for ALN pupils.
Welsh Medium Education		
PCC has failed to develop a long-term vision for, and support the development of, Welsh medium education in Brecon.	Proposal would lead to local parents opting out of Welsh medium education or choosing out-of-county provision (at e.g. Ystalyfera) - thus threatening the 'critical mass' of Welsh learners at Builth Wells High School.	Proposal would jeopardise the sustainability of primary feeder schools like Ysgol y Bannau as parents decide against Welsh medium primary education knowing that there is no Welsh stream at BHS. This would also negatively impact Welsh medium provision at Builth Wells.
PCC transport support for Sennybridge pupils to attend Ystalyfera school instead of Brecon should be discouraged in future to encourage attendance at the Brecon Welsh medium stream.	Builth is too far from the Brecon area: the distance would ensure difficult access to out-of-school activities and appointments. The cost of travel to PCC will be significant.	The lack of support from PCC for Brecon HS's bid for 2b status was unacceptable.
The consultation and continuing uncertainty has led to the loss of Welsh medium pupils from Brecon to Builth: PCC has pre-determined the consultation outcome.	The contribution of the Welsh stream to the school and local community would be lost.	PCC should commit to a Welsh medium secondary school to serve South and Mid Powys.
Other Pupil Impacts		
Unequal access to extra-curricular activities for GHS pupils at the proposed Brecon campus owing to	Potential harm to pupils' connections to their local communities and other implications of extra travel, for	Increased travel for GHS pupils contradicts the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Many



transport difficulties - particularly affecting the most disadvantaged families and those living in areas with poor public transport.	example: less time for sleep, homework and 'down time'; less attentiveness in class; health and well-being (no longer walking to school); and absenteeism.	already have long travel times to school, and further increases may lead them to choose other (closer) schools outside Powys - a potential loss of revenue for PCC.
Negative psychological and social impact of the recent history of proposed school closures on young people and the community - families have moved from the area as a consequence.	Impact of continuing uncertainty on pupils' wellbeing, including increased stress and worry over: losing and making new friends; inter-school rivalries; the possibility for poor discipline in larger classrooms; fewer opportunities to take part in sports competitions and other events; and GHS pupils being exposed to negative influences in the Brecon area and bullying on school buses.	Practical issues such as: whether the school uniform would change and, if so, whether parents would be expected to pay for it; and how the proposals will affect inter-school sports tournaments.
Continuity of support (both educational and pastoral) from teachers known to pupils over many years would be at risk under the proposal.	A larger school might be more difficult for ALN pupils and new staff may be insufficiently knowledgeable about ALN. On the other hand it might offer ALN pupils a larger support unit and more social opportunities.	A need identified for early and continuing support for pupils and families - especially those with ALN - during a transition period.
The timing of the proposals may be potentially disruptive for pupils studying for significant examinations (GCSE).	Current close ties between GHS and local businesses that provide work experience would be jeopardised, further affecting pupils' development.	Brecon pupils supported a new secondary school that would set lessons by ability; with wider subjects choice, better teacher retention and better facilities. Other negative implications of extra travel to school by bus: additional expense for families and PCC; environmental impacts.
<b>Other Staff Impacts</b>		
Job insecurity is affecting the mental and financial wellbeing of teaching staff. PCC criticised for lack of support.	Cost of teachers' travel between sites should be factored into proposals.	Increased travel will increase staff stress levels and sickness leave and reduce contact time with pupils.
Does PCC have the capacity to develop and process new staff contracts and recruit new staff before the proposed opening?	Cost implications of staff redundancies and whether these have been factored into budget savings calculations.	Loss of school sixth forms will lead to challenges in staff recruitment and retention.
<b>Community Impacts</b>		
Threat of GHS closure to affiliated local sport, arts and community groups and clubs: pupils will be more likely to choose clubs near school than in their local area, impacting negatively on community cohesion.	Potentially negative impacts of closing GHS on local businesses, the housing market, culture, services, prosperity, social cohesion and wellbeing will mean families move from or will be deterred from relocating to the area. This will result in an ageing community.	Important to keep ALN services within communities to support pupils and families. The proposals threaten the wellbeing of these pupils by disconnecting school from community and local opportunities for socialising.
Educated, talented younger people will leave the area, resulting in an older population.	Communities and friendships will be affected by pupils being educated away from their local communities.	PCC criticised for generating urban solutions to rural problems and failing to consider issues appropriate to rural communities.
<b>Some Alternative Suggestions</b>		



Keep both schools: provide a new building for BHS only and improve Gwernyfed instead of closing it.	Merge the two schools on the GHS site.	Look at alternative options to keep both schools open such as an all-through school model.
Implement a model similar to John Beddoes and Newtown with GHS as a campus school.	Greater partnerships and shared resources (for example through federation or combining sixth forms) to create critical mass.	Adopt creative uses of information technology across sites within a federation or consortium model to allow pupils to access a wider range of subjects without travelling long distances.
Retain a dedicated sixth form within the proposed new building and rent a portion of it to NPTC for vocational provision.	Reintroduce an agricultural college.	
Consultation Process		
Lack of external scrutiny – and concern that the process will be in line with the Welsh Government’s legal requirements and compliant with wider relevant legislation	PCC must listen to the will of the population when making its decision.	PCC has failed to take previous feedback and inputs from BHS Governing Body into account in formulating the proposals – the decision is a ‘done deal’.
How has PCC evaluated and weighted the potential community impacts; what mitigations have been considered and why alternative options were discarded?	Consultation document thought to: lack detail and accuracy; contain too many errors, vagaries and assumptions; and to be biased against GHS.	Distrust of PCC, based mainly on its ‘mismanagement’ of the primary schools reorganisation process.
Criticism of: PCC’s performance at consultation meetings (especially at Gwernyfed); the objectivity of the consultation questionnaire; and the inaccessibility of the online version of the consultation document.	That the ultimate decision will be taken by the PCC Cabinet (as opposed to the whole Council) is undemocratic.	
Projections, Facts and Figures		
Some evidence for the case for change in the consultation document is incorrect.	Projected pupil numbers challenged in view of housing plans for the area, which will see populations rise - particularly affecting plans for GHS.	No assurance that GHS pupils would attend a school in Brecon in favour of going over-the-border to Herefordshire.
Uncertainty around the future of GHS has in itself led to falling numbers, with parents choosing schools in England over Brecon.	Surplus places are acceptable as long as school budgets are managed properly.	PCC projections show that a single new school could be oversubscribed very quickly, although the number of projected pupils might have been overestimated by PCC as parents vote with their feet and choose schools elsewhere.

<sup>2.295</sup> Moving forward, interpreting the overall ‘meaning’ of the consultation outcomes is neither straightforward nor just ‘numerical’ - for the different methods, groups and outcomes have to be respected and cannot be simply ‘summed’ into an unambiguous consensus.

<sup>2.296</sup> It is also worth reiterating that consultation is not a ‘numbers game’ - and that the key issue is not whether most people agree or disagree with the proposals but whether the reasons for their popularity or unpopularity are rational and convincing. People’s reasoning has been well documented throughout this report, and it is this that the PCC Cabinet will primarily wish to consider when making its judgements.

<sup>2.297</sup> In this context, it is not the role of ORS to make policy recommendations or to go beyond the fact-based interpretation above. In the light of the evidence presented, the PCC Cabinet will consider all the

consultation outcomes, alongside all the other evidence, in order to make its decisions. Ultimately, an overall interpretation of the consultation will depend upon the Cabinet itself: its members will consider all elements and determine which seem the most telling, by considering the relative merits of the various opinions as the basis for public policy.

# 3. The Open Consultation Questionnaires

## Foreword

3.1 This chapter concerns the Main, Young Persons' and Primary School Consultation Questionnaires. These were designed by ORS in partnership with the Council and were available for completion by any interested stakeholders through paper copies as well as online.

## Overview

3.2 A consultation document covering the proposed changes was produced and made publicly available on the Council's dedicated website. The website also included links to detailed information about the processes undertaken by the Council so far, including communities, equalities and Welsh language impact assessments.

3.3 The Main, Young Persons' and Primary consultation questionnaires were developed to include relevant summaries of background information on the Council's Case for Change and each of the main proposals for English and Welsh medium education, including post-16 education. The following key topics were covered in the consultation questionnaires:

- » English Medium Education – Case For Change
- » The Proposal For English Medium Education
- » Welsh Medium Education – Case For Change
- » The Proposal For Welsh Medium Education
- » Considering Equalities
- » Information About Respondents

3.4 The questionnaires were available online through the Council's dedicated website and the URL was also printed on the paper copies. Paper copies were made available in locations identified as relevant, including local libraries, leisure facilities, County Hall and all affected Primary and Secondary schools. Respondents had the option to submit their completed questionnaire directly to ORS via a freepost mailing address or to the Council.

3.5 This chapter details the methodologies and responses to all the consultation questionnaires. Questionnaires can provide considerable information about the views of particular groups and individuals at local levels. However, it is important to note that it was open to any interested stakeholders, individuals or organisations both within and outside of Powys regardless of their affiliation with, or usage of education services.

3.6 The results, therefore, are not representative of any particular population, including that of the Council's authority area. However, within the context of the consultation it provides an appropriate and important opportunity for the public to provide their opinions.

- <sup>3.7</sup> Of course, it is for Powys County Council to determine what appropriate emphasis to be given to different elements within the consultation, while bearing in mind that the outcome of the consultation should not be just a ‘numbers’ game. In other words, the question is not ‘*Which findings should determine our decision?*’ but ‘*What evidence or considerations have emerged that should influence our deliberations about the future reorganisation of schools in mid and south Powys?*’

## Questionnaire responses

- <sup>3.8</sup> All questionnaire responses in which at least one of the consultation questions was answered and received by ORS by the close of the consultation period were included in the analysis. One additional week was given for submissions sent by second class post or returned directly to PCC contact points.
- <sup>3.9</sup> A total of 1047 questionnaires were analysed, of which 625 were responses to the main consultation questionnaire, 148 to the Young Persons’ questionnaire, and 274 to the primary school consultation questionnaire.
- <sup>3.10</sup> Of the total number of questionnaires received, 6 indicated that they were representing organisations or groups.

## Findings of the Main Consultation Questionnaire

### Respondent Profile of Consultation Questionnaire

- 3.11 Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the respondent profile from the 619 individuals who responded either online or by post to the main open consultation questionnaire. Figures for Powys's population are also outlined for comparison.
- 3.12 Figures for Powys's population are based on ONS 2015 Mid-Year Population Estimates (for age and gender) and Census 2011 data (for ethnicity and disability). ORS prefers to report ONS Mid-Year population estimates (over Census 2011 data) where possible as we believe this more accurately reflects the current state of the population. Where this is not possible due to data being unavailable (e.g. for ethnicity and disability data), Census 2011 data has been used as an alternative. As a result, the total number of occurrences in the population across the two data sources will not match exactly.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics for the main consultation questionnaire and Powys's population**  
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic	All Responses		Powys population 16+		
	Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses	Number of occurrences	% of population	
<b>BY AGE</b>	Under 25	27	5.7%	12,372	11.1%
	25 to 34	56	11.7%	12,230	11.0%
	35 to 44	145	30.2%	13,538	12.2%
	45 to 54	159	33.1%	19,506	17.6%
	55 to 64	58	12.1%	19,238	17.3%
	65 to 84	35	7.3%	29,611	26.7%
	85+	0	0.0%	4,547	4.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>111,042</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Not known</i>	139	-	-	-	
<b>BY GENDER</b>	Male	126	26.1%	54,573	49.1%
	Female	357	73.9%	56,469	50.9%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>111,042</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	136	-	-	-
<b>BY ETHNIC GROUP</b>	White	454	97.8%	108,539	98.6%
	Mixed or multiple ethnic	5	1.1%	453	0.4%
	Asian or Asian British	4	0.9%	890	0.8%
	Black, African, Caribbean, Black British	0	0.0%	109	0.1%
	Any other ethnic group	1	0.2%	92	0.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>110,083</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Not known</i>	155	-	-	-	
<b>BY DISABILITY</b>	With disability	16	3.3%	26,357	24.3%
	No disability	465	96.7%	81,971	75.7%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>108,328</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	138	-	-	-

Characteristic	All Responses		
	Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses	
<b>BY CHILDREN CURRENTLY IN SCHOOL, NURSERY OR COLLEGE IN POWYS</b>	Has children currently in school, nursery or college in Powys	354	72.5%
	No children currently in school, nursery or college in Powys	134	27.5%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	131	-
<b>BY CHILDREN ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS</b>	Has children entitled to free school meals	15	4.5%
	No children entitled to free school meals	318	95.5%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not applicable</i>	134	
	<i>Not known</i>	152	-
<b>BY CHILDREN HAVING BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>	Has children with SEN	27	8.1%
	No children with SEN	308	91.9%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not applicable</i>	134	
	<i>Not known</i>	150	-
<b>BY CHILDREN CURRENTLY RECEIVING A WELSH MEDIUM EDUCATION</b>	Has children receiving Welsh medium education	45	13.5%
	No children receiving Welsh medium education	289	86.5%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not applicable</i>	134	
	<i>Not known</i>	151	-
<b>BY WELSH SPEAKER</b>	Speaks Welsh	164	35.8%
	Does not speak Welsh	294	64.2%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	161	

## Interpretation of the Data

- 3.13 The results for the Consultation Questionnaire are presented in a largely graphical format. The pie charts and other graphics show the proportions (percentages) of respondents making relevant responses.
- 3.14 Where possible, the colours of the charts have been standardised with a ‘traffic light’ system in which green shades represent positive responses, red shades represent negative responses, and beige and purple shades represent neither positive nor negative responses.
- 3.15 The bolder shades are used to highlight responses at the ‘extremes’, for example, strongly agree or strongly disagree.
- 3.16 Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the volume an asterisk (\*) denotes any value less

than half of one per cent. In some cases figures of 2% or below have been excluded from graphs to avoid potential identification of individual responses.

- 3.17 The number of valid responses recorded for each question (base size), is reported throughout. As not all respondents answered every question, these base sizes vary between questions. Every response to every question has been taken into consideration.
- 3.18 Where there are low response rates among stakeholder groups for particular questions, results have been displayed as a number, rather than (or in addition to) a percentage in the text.
- 3.19 All open-ended responses have been classified using a standardised code frame. This approach helps ensure consistency when classifying different comments and the resulting codes represent themes that have been repeatedly mentioned in a more quantifiable manner. The various comments provided by a respondent to any single text question may present a number of different points or arguments, therefore in many cases the overall number of coded comments counted in a particular question can actually be higher than the number of people responding to that open-ended question.

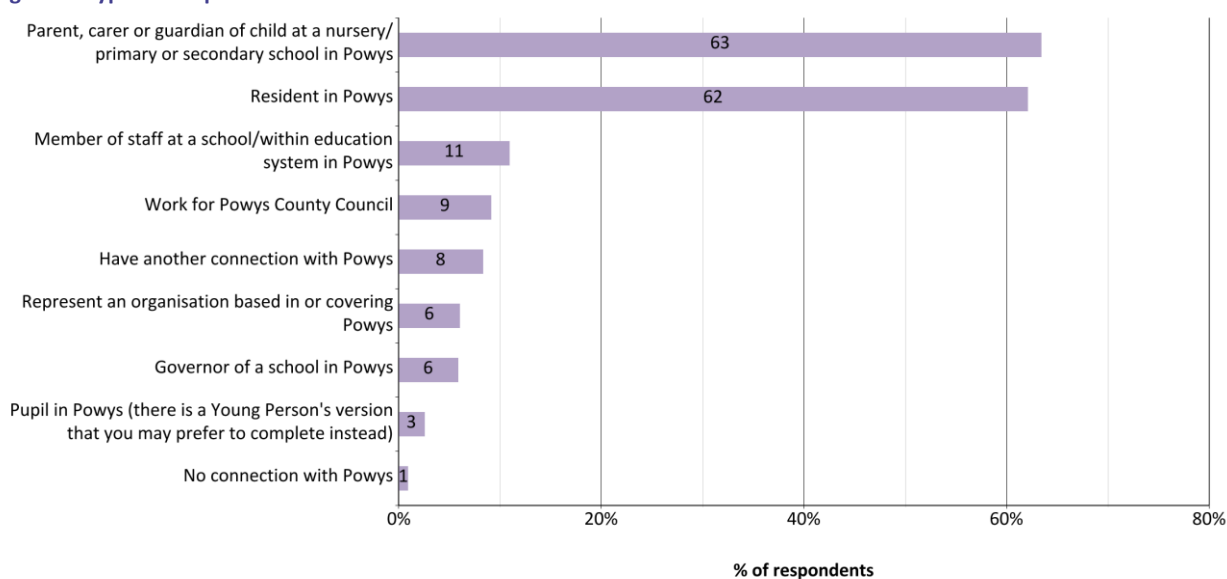
## Further analysis by sub-groups

- 3.20 For some questions, further analysis revealed differences in responses by key demographic and other variables e.g. respondents' local authority. Such analysis highlights how sub-groups within key variables (e.g. within 'age', those aged 35-44) provided different answers compared to the overall average.
- 3.21 Where results are particularly higher or particularly lower for certain sub-groups, in comparison to the overall score they are further discussed in commentary text.

## English Medium Education

*Which of the following apply to you?*

**Figure 1: Types of respondent**



Base: All Individuals (610)

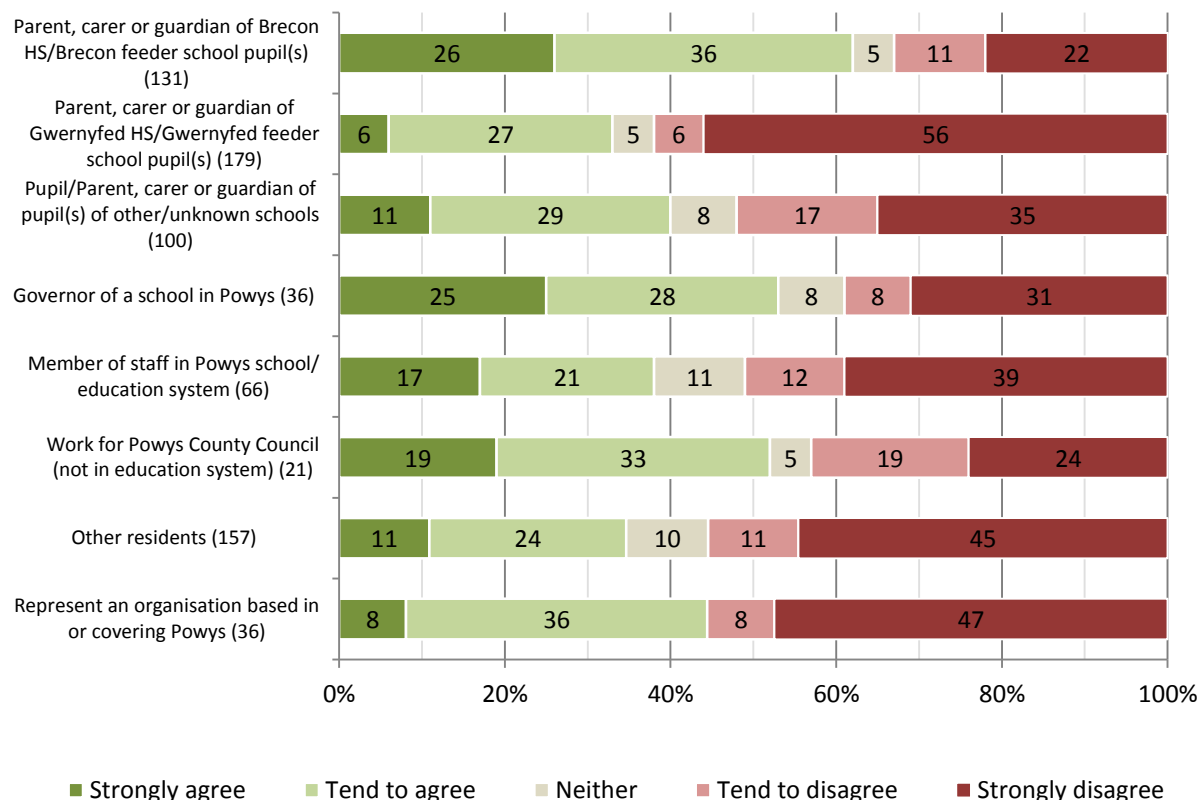
- 3.22 More than three fifths of respondents said they were a parent, carer or guardian of a child at a nursery/primary or secondary school in Powys (63%) and/or a resident in Powys (62%). Around 1 in 10 (11%) respondents to the consultation are members of staff at a school or within the education system in Powys, while just under 1 in 10 (9%) work for Powys County Council or have another connection with Powys (8%).
- 3.23 Because of the differences in the proportions of these stakeholder groups, results have not been combined to produce “overall” findings. It is not appropriate to report overall figures because the stakeholder groups with a greater number of responses will have a larger influence on the overall average, and potentially conceal the difference of opinions between stakeholder groups. Consequently, the results to the closed questions of the questionnaire overleaf have been reported separately by stakeholder groups.
- 3.24 It is also not appropriate to report results quantitatively where the rate of response is especially low. Consequently, where this appears and is appropriate to do so, some stakeholders have been grouped together.
- 3.25 Views from parents, carers or guardians of children vary depending on whether their child or children attend Brecon High School/associated feeder primary school, Gwernyfed High School/associated feeder school or an ‘other/unknown’ school, and so these results have been displayed separately.
- 3.26 Almost all school age respondents responded to the separate Young Persons’ consultation questionnaire. The small number of Powys school pupils who responded to the main consultation were from unknown schools, and so their responses have been grouped with parents, carers and guardians of pupils from other/unknown schools.
- 3.27 Those who reported that they were residents in Powys, and were not members of any other stakeholder group, have been combined with those who have ‘no connection with Powys’ and those who ‘have another connection with Powys’ into the group ‘Other residents’.



*In the context of the problems outlined on the previous page, Powys Council believes a number of changes are needed.*

*To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues?*

**Figure 2: Levels of agreement and disagreement that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues.**

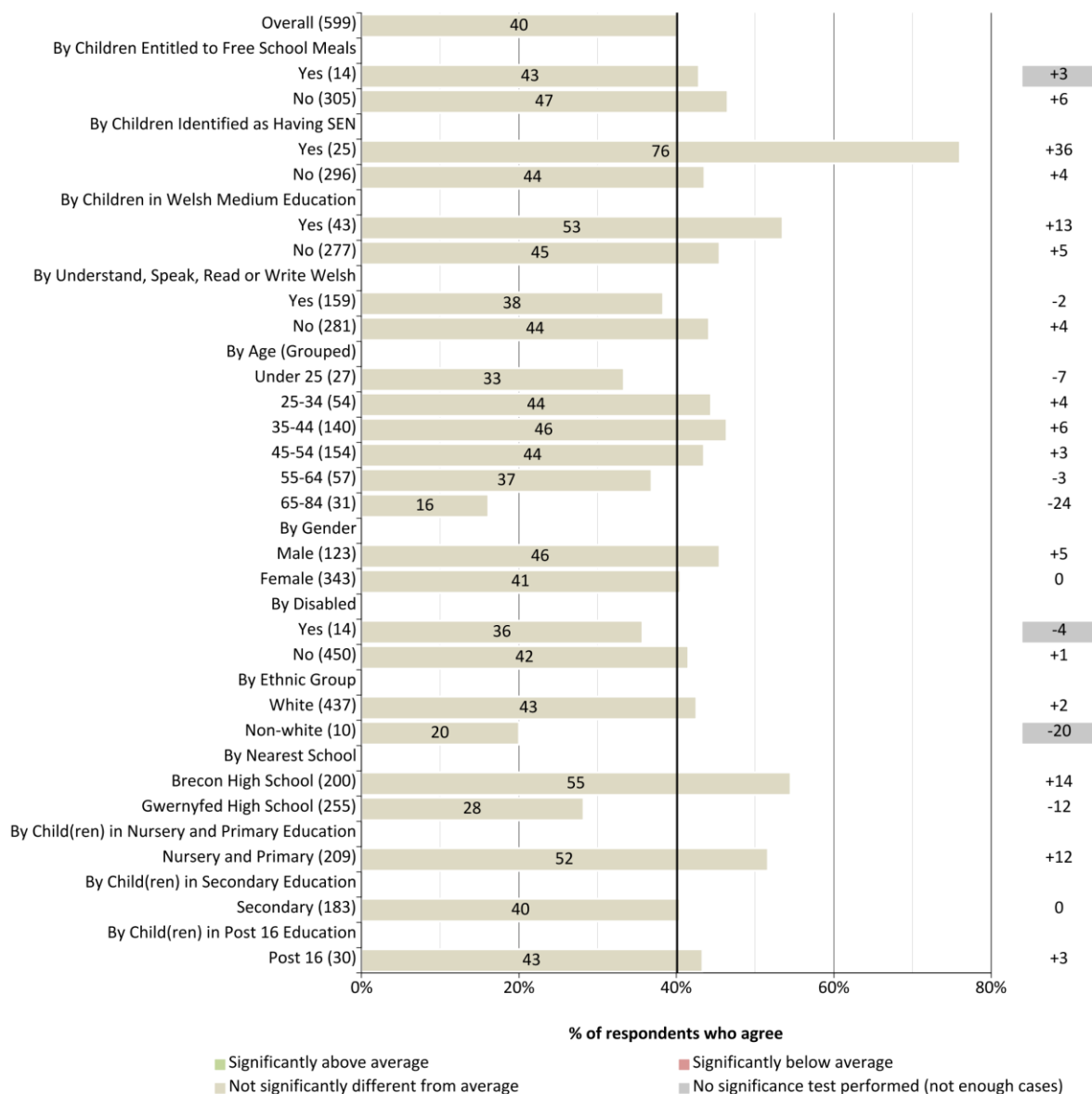


**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

- 3.28 Respondents were given a short explanation of some of the general and post-16 specific issues that the Council had identified as affecting English medium secondary education in Brecon and Gwernyfed schools. These issues included falling pupil numbers, leading to empty school places in both schools; poor quality of buildings with costly maintenance; quality of education; Estyn monitoring feedback; and financial considerations. Post-16 issues included a narrow choice of subjects in the 6<sup>th</sup> forms at both schools; learners travelling between sites during the school day to access subjects; a reduction in the Welsh Government grant funding post-16 provision, and learners going outside the county for their education, affecting the local economy.
- 3.29 In this context, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that Powys County Council is right to make changes to respond to the issues identified.
- 3.30 Over three fifths (62%) of parents, carers or guardians of Brecon High School or associated feeder school pupils agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the above issues. More than half of Governors of schools in Powys (53%) and employees of Powys County Council (not in education system) (52%) also agreed.

3.31 However, less than half of respondents agreed that the Council is right to make changes in 5 of the 8 stakeholder groups. Most notably, parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed High School or feeder school pupils (33%) and other residents (34%) showed lower levels of support.

**Figure 3: Levels of agreement and disagreement that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues. (Demographic sub-group analysis)**



**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

3.32 This chart shows how the responses for this score vary across different sub-groups of respondents for those who *agreed*. Results highlighted in grey should be treated with caution, due to a low number of responses from that particular sub-group.

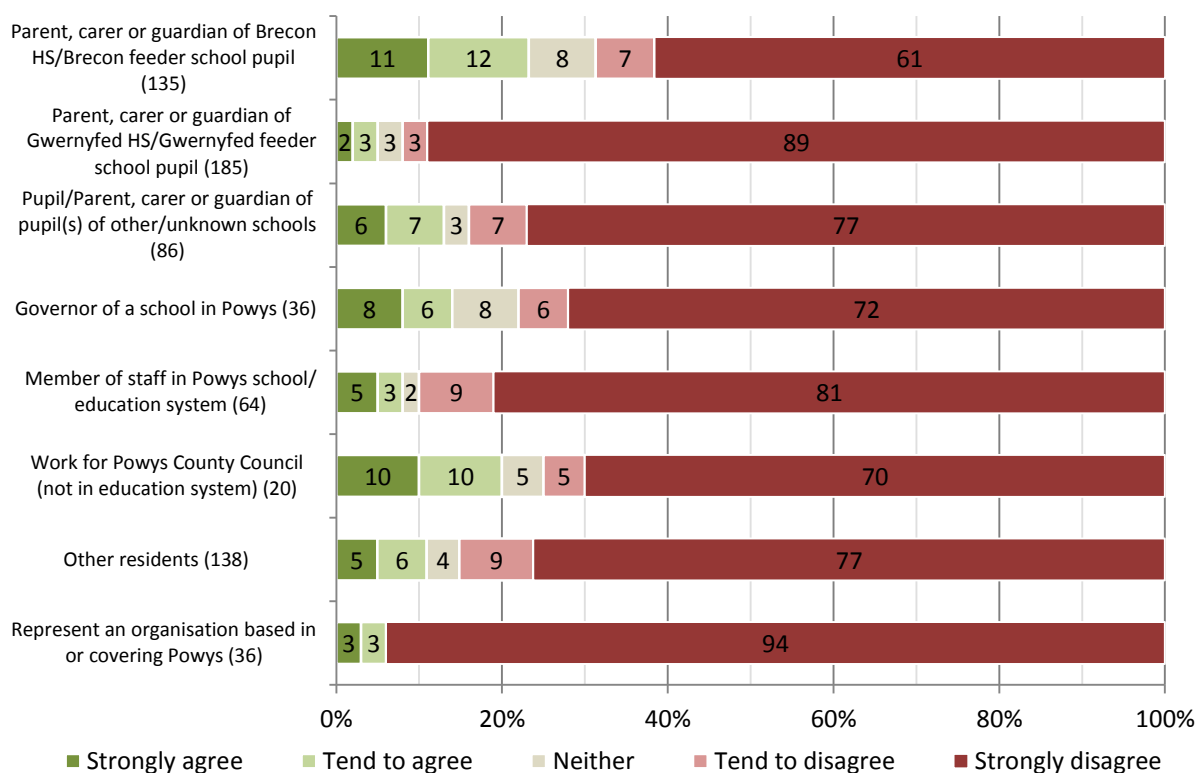
3.33 Respondents with children identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) were particularly likely to agree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues (76%), as were those whose nearest high school is Brecon (55%), or with Children in Welsh Medium Education (53%) or Nursery and Primary education (52%).

3.34 Those living nearest Gwernyfed High School (28%) and those aged 65-84 (16%) were least likely to agree.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

To establish a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, which would continue to operate on the two existing sites.

**Figure 4: Levels of agreement and disagreement for establishing a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017,**

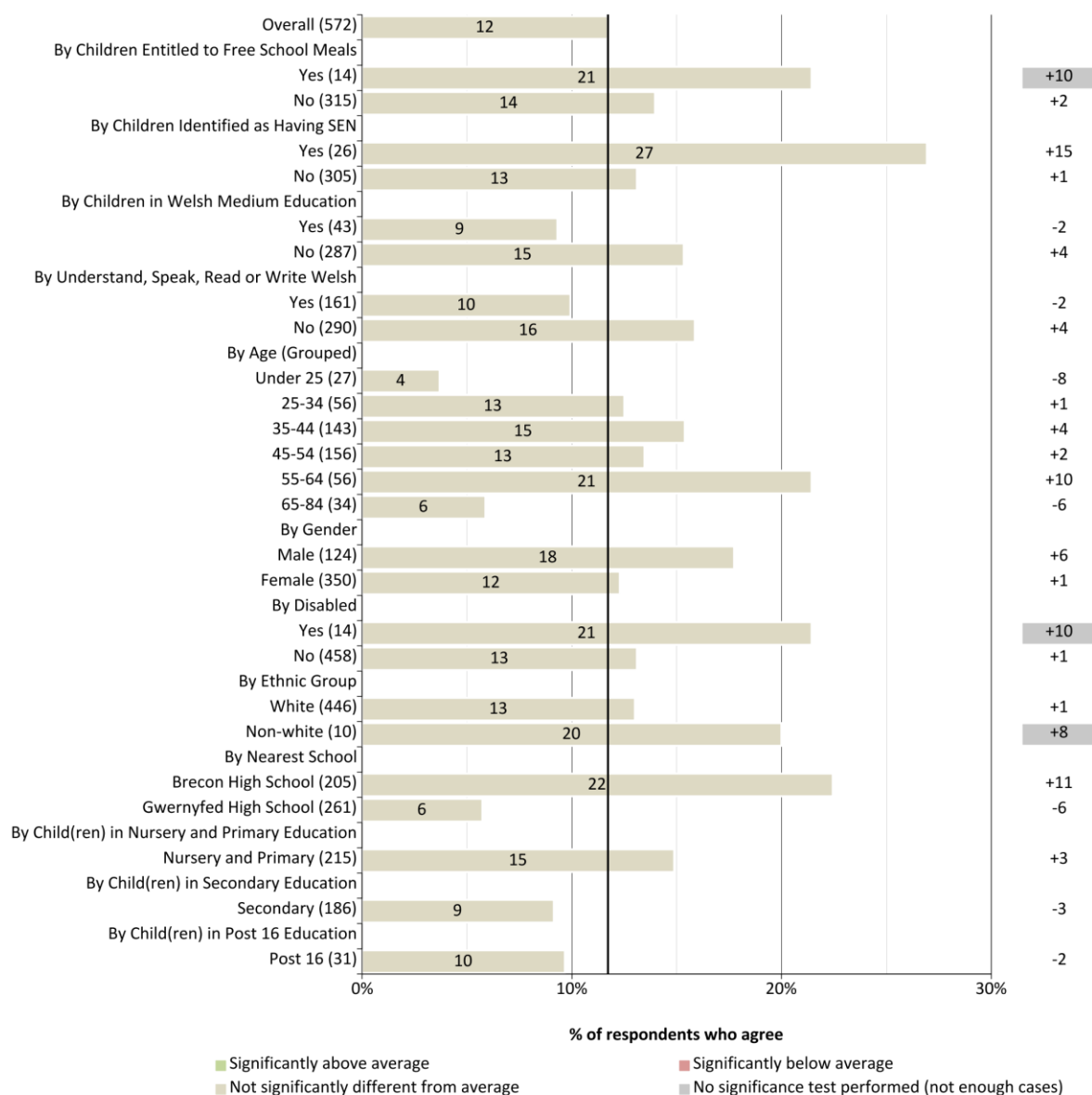


Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

- 3.35 Respondents were then provided with a description of the four elements of the Council's proposal, as well as an explanation of how the Council believed the proposal would address the issues identified in the previous section.
- 3.36 The first element of the proposal is to establish a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, which would continue to operate on the two existing sites.
- 3.37 The highest levels of agreement with this element of the proposal were from parents, carers or guardians of children who attend Brecon High School or a Brecon feeder school (23%). A fifth (20%) of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) agreed with this element of the proposal.
- 3.38 Around 1 in 10 school Governors (14%), pupils and parents, carers and guardians of pupils from other/unknown schools (13%), other residents (11%), or members of staff in a Powys school/education system (8%) agreed with this element of the proposal, while only around 1 in 20 respondents who represent an organisation based in or covering Powys (6%), or are parents, carers or guardians of children who attend Gwernyfed high school or associated feeder school (5%) agreed with this element of the proposal.

3.39 More than 9 in 10 of those representing an organisation based in or covering Powys (94%), parents, carers or guardians of children who attend Gwernyfed high school or associated feeder school (92%) and members of staff in the Powys school/education system (91%) disagreed with the establishment of a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools.

**Figure 5: Levels of agreement and disagreement for establishing a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017 (Demographic sub-group analysis)**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

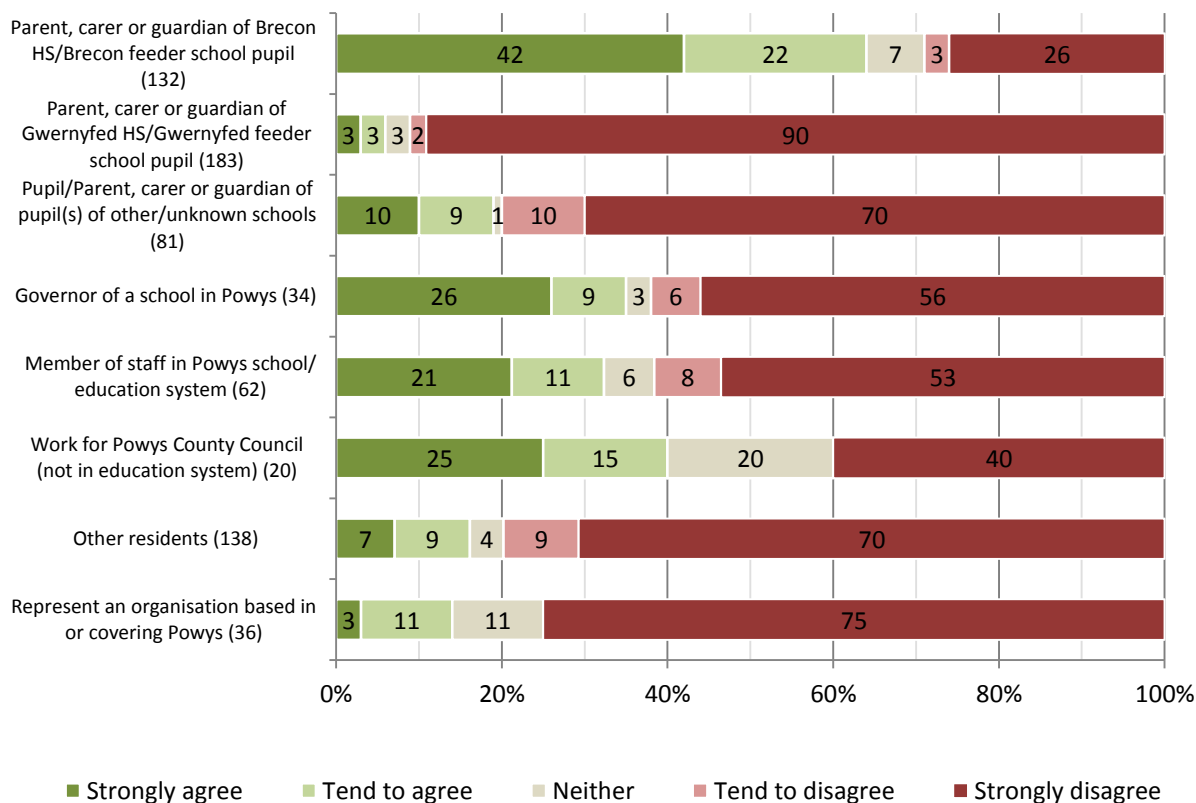
3.40 Respondents with children identified as having SEN (27%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal to establish a new dual-site English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16, as well as respondents living nearest Brecon High School (22%), or who are aged 55-64 (21%).

3.41 Respondents nearest Gwernyfed High School (6%), those aged 65-84 (6%) and those aged under 25 (4%) were least likely to have agreed.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

*To construct a new building for the proposed new secondary school, with an aim to open this in 2019/20.*

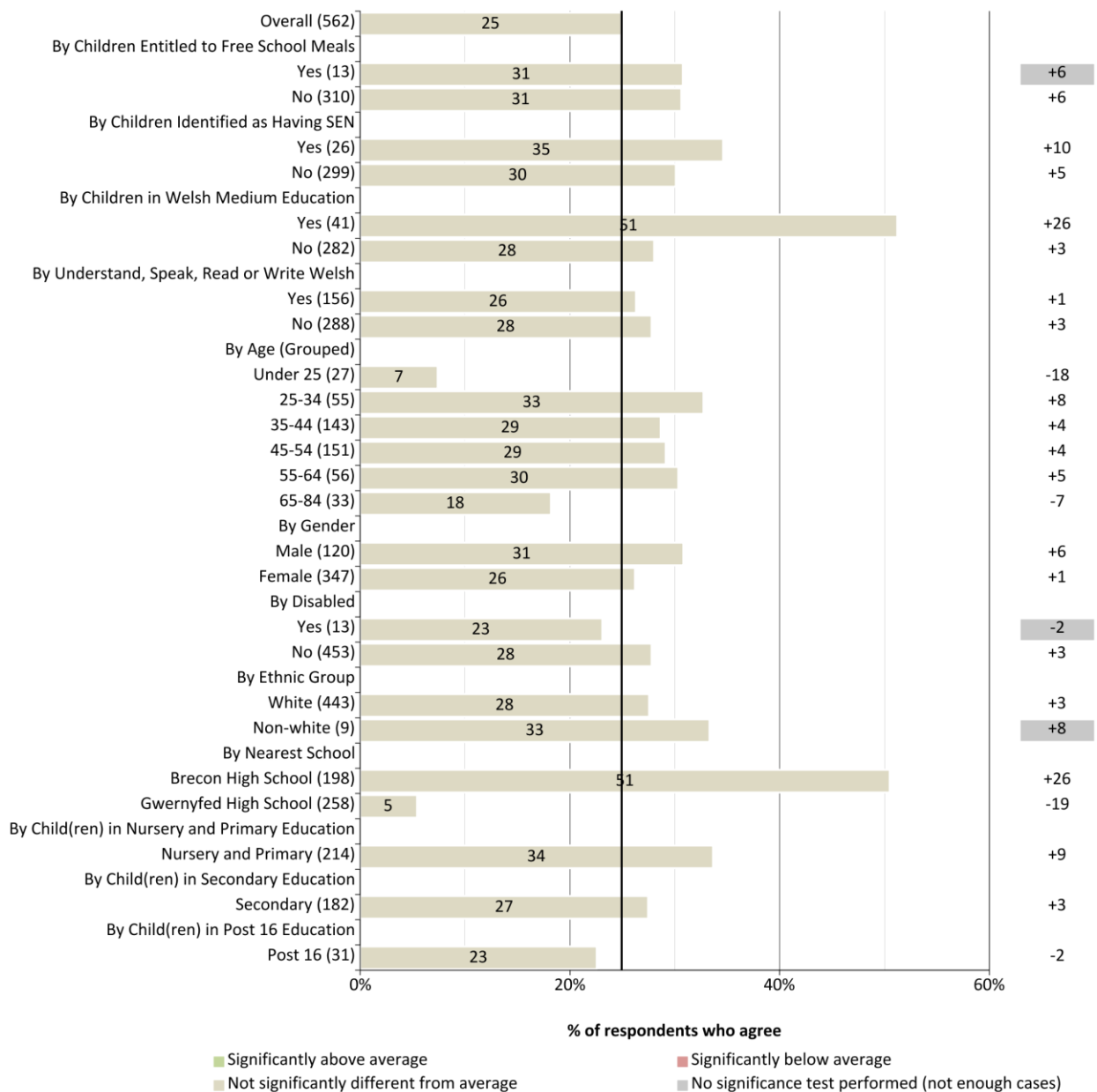
**Figure 6: Levels of agreement and disagreement for constructing a new building for the proposed new secondary school, with an aim to open this in 2019/20**



**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

- 3.42 The second element of the proposal is the construction of a new building for the proposed new secondary school with an aim to open in 2019/2020.
- 3.43 Agreement with this element of the proposal was particularly higher among parents, carers or guardians of Brecon High School/feeder school pupils, with more than three fifths (64%) agreeing with this proposal.
- 3.44 However, there were lower levels of support among all other stakeholder groups. Two fifths (40%) of those who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) showed agreement with the proposal to create a new building for the proposed new secondary school, while around a third or more of those who are Governors of a school in Powys (35%) and members of staff in the Powys school/education system (32%) agreed.
- 3.45 Less than a quarter of the all remaining stakeholder groups agreed with this element of the proposal, including pupils/parents, carers or guardians of pupil(s) of other/unknown schools (19%), Other residents (17%), and those representing an organisation based in or covering Powys (14%). Only 5% of parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed High School/feeder school pupils agreed with the construction of a new building for the proposed new secondary school.

**Figure 7: Levels of agreement and disagreement that for constructing a new building for the proposed new secondary school, with an aim to open this in 2019/20 (Demographic sub-group analysis)**



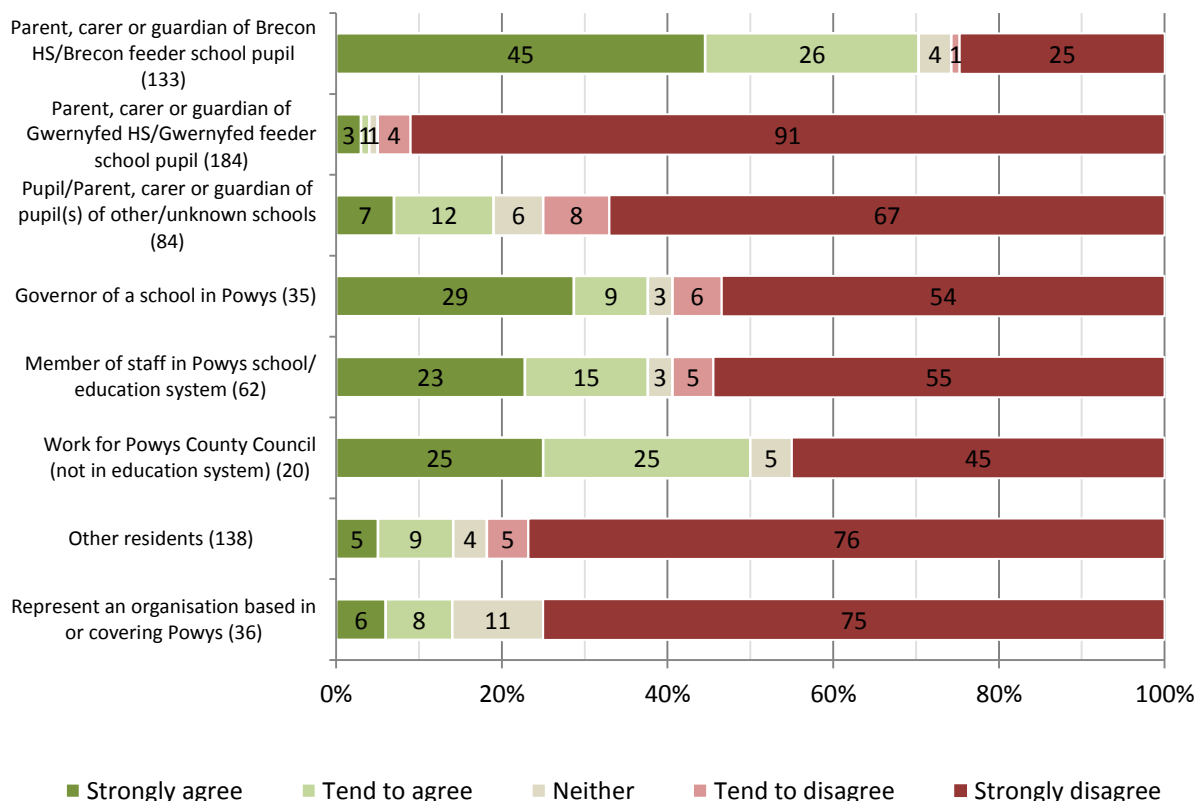
**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

- 3.46 Respondents with children in Welsh medium education (51%) and who live nearest to Brecon High School (51%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal to construct a new building for the proposed new secondary school and, to a lesser extent, as were those with children identified as having SEN (35%) or with children in nursery and primary school (34%).
- 3.47 Respondents aged under 25 (7%) and those living nearest Gwernyfed High School (5%) were least likely to have agreed.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

*To locate the new school building in Brecon as it is a population centre and to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport.*

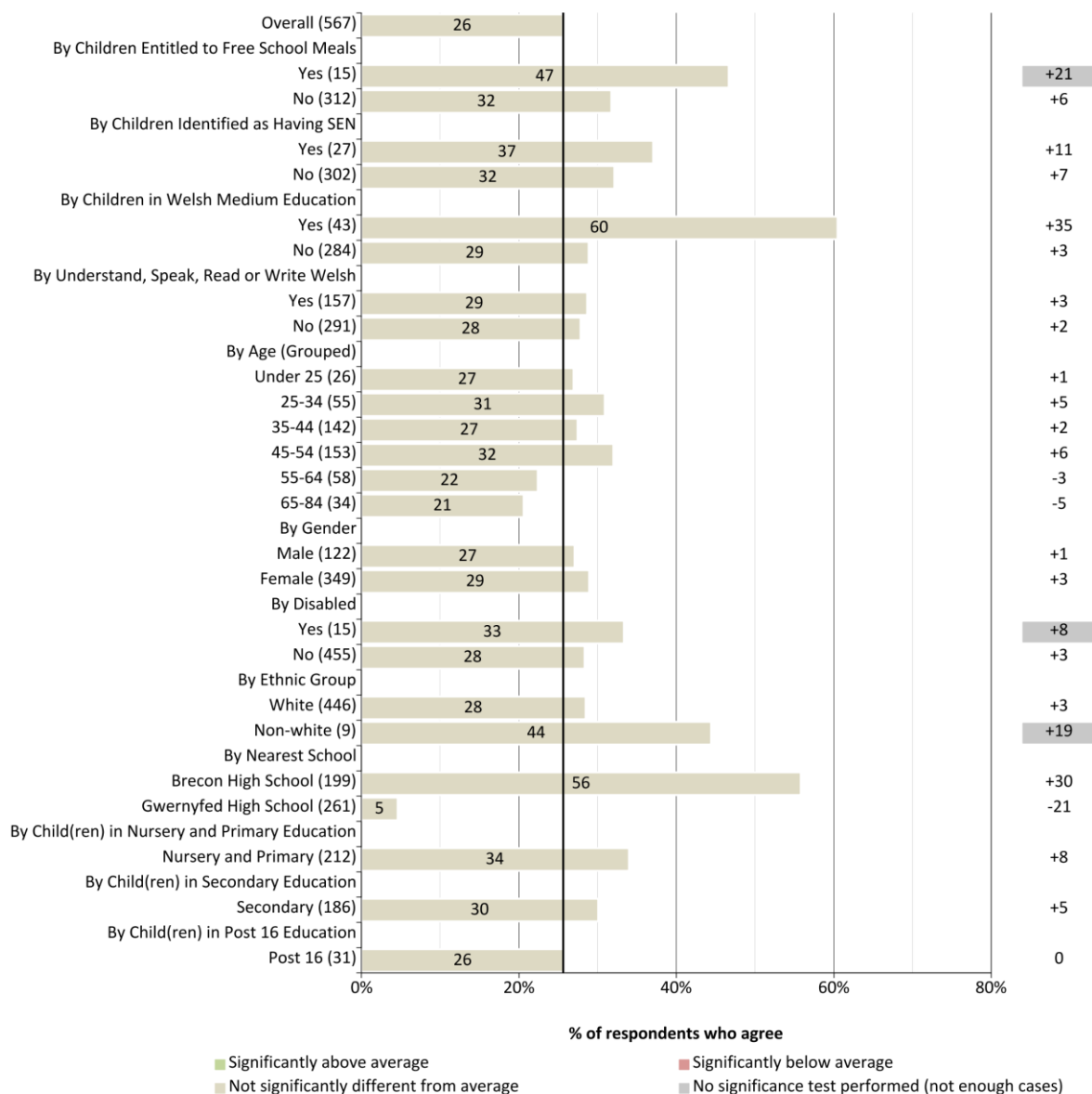
**Figure 8: Levels of agreement and disagreement for locating the new school building in Brecon as it is a population centre and to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

- 3.48 The third element of the proposal is to locate the proposed new school building in Brecon as it is a population centre and to minimise the overall number of pupils that require schools transport.
- 3.49 Again, parents, carers or guardians of Brecon High School/feeder schools pupils indicated higher support than other stakeholder groups. Almost three quarters of these respondents (71%) agreed with the proposal to locate the new school building in Brecon.
- 3.50 Half (50%) of those who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) also agreed with this element of the proposal. Almost two fifths of respondents who are members of staff in the Powys school/education system (37%) or Governors of a school in Powys (37%) also agreed.
- 3.51 Lower levels of agreement were found among respondents that represented an organisation based in or covering Powys (14%) and other residents (14%). While parents, carers and guardians of Brecon High School/feeder school pupils were most likely to agree with this proposal, parents, carers and guardians of Gwernyfed High School/feeder school pupils were least likely to do so. Just 4% agreed with this proposal, while 95% disagreed, including just over 9 in 10 (91%) who strongly disagreed.

**Figure 9: Levels of agreement and disagreement for locating the new school building in Brecon as it is a population centre and to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport (Demographic sub-group analysis)**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

3.52 Respondents with children in Welsh medium education (60%) were particularly to agree with the proposal to locate the proposed new school building in Brecon, as were those nearest Brecon High School (56%) and with children identified as having Special Educational Needs (37%).

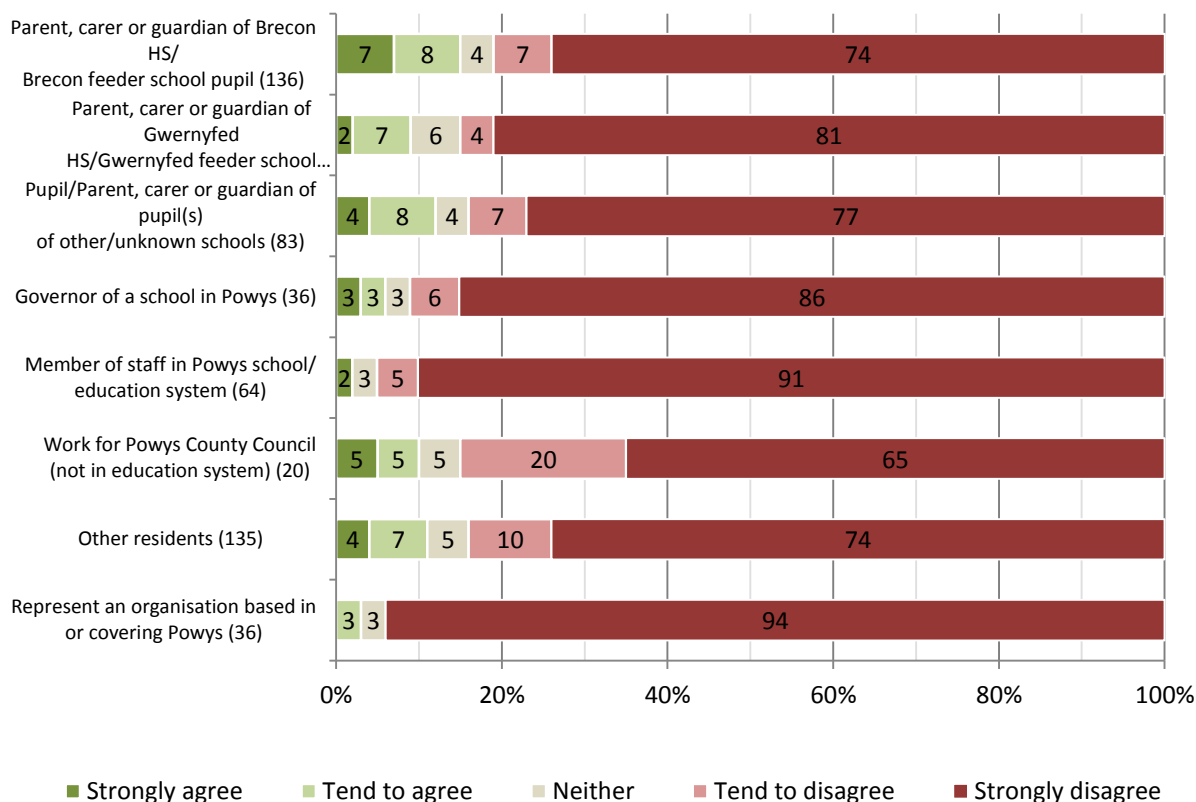
3.53 Respondents living nearest to Gwernyfed High School (5%) were least likely to agree with this.



**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

*For all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges.*

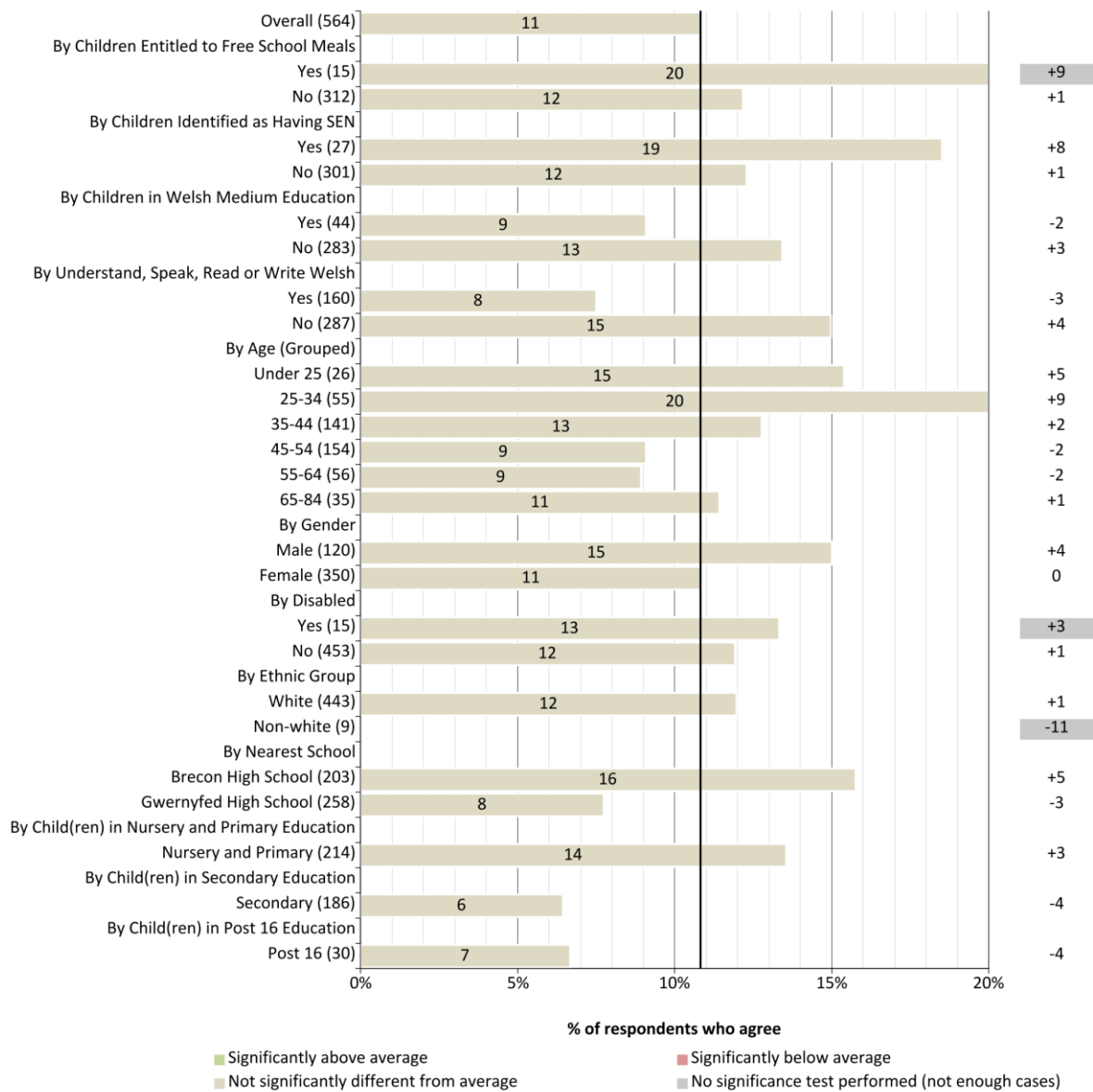
**Figure 10: Levels of agreement and disagreement for all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges**



**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

- 3.54 The fourth element of the proposal is for all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges.
- 3.55 At least four fifths of respondents in all stakeholder groups disagreed with this element of the proposal. Those who were most likely to agree were parents, carers or guardians of Brecon High School/feeder schools pupils (15%). Around 1 in 10 pupils and parents of pupils of other/unknown schools (12%), other residents (11%), employees of Powys County Council (not in education system) (10%) and parents, carers and guardians of Gwernyfed high school/feeder school pupils (9%) also agreed with the proposal.
- 3.56 Lower levels of support were found among Governors of schools in Powys (6%), respondents who represent an organisation based in or covering Powys (3%), and just 2% of members of staff in the Powys school/education system agreed with this proposal, while a large majority (95%) disagreed.

**Figure 11: Levels of agreement and disagreement for all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges (Demographic sub-group analysis)**



**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

3.57 While levels of agreement were low among all sub-groups, respondents aged 25-34 (20%), and those with children identified as having SEN (19%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal for all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges.

*If you disagree with any elements of the Proposal, please explain why.*

- 3.59 Respondents who expressed disagreement with any element the proposal were asked to explain why this was. All responses provided to the open-ended questions have been read, and then classified (coded) using a standardised approach (code frame). This approach helps ensure consistency when classifying different comments and the resulting codes represent themes that have been repeatedly mentioned in a quantifiable manner. The responses provided by a resident to a single text question may present a number of different points or arguments, therefore in many cases the overall number of coded comments counted in a particular question can actually be higher than the number of people responding to that open-ended question (i.e. each resident may have made comments about two or more different topics).
- 3.60 Of the 437 respondents who were asked this question, 3,045 different comments have been classified, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 12: Reasons for opposition to the various elements of the proposal**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	47%	204
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel times/distances	44%	191
Disagree as proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community	38%	164
Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools/don't want to lose our 6th Form	35%	154
Concerns over standards of education of NPTC in Brecon/lack of subject choice for Post-16 students/NPTC will not be accountable to anyone	34%	149
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	34%	147
Appreciate/agree that Brecon High School needs improvements, but not at the expense of Gwernyfed	29%	127
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington, etc.	28%	123
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	27%	120
Do not close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	27%	118
Proposals will negatively impact extra-curricular activities/clubs and groups will be limited	23%	100
Gwernyfed is valuable for its sports facilities/community facilities	18%	77
Proposal is biased/flawed/decisions already made	16%	71
Proposals will lead to fewer families remaining in the area/fewer 'new families' will move in	15%	67
I do not want to go to Brecon High School (non-specific)	14%	60
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	13%	58
Proposals will negatively affect pupils' health and wellbeing (i.e. make them tired, unhappy, inattentive in school)	13%	57
Proposals will negatively impact local businesses/local economy	13%	55
Proposals will not save enough money/savings will be minimal	12%	54
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	11%	50
Proposals are financially motivated/a 'money grab' by the council	11%	47
Proposals will negatively affects rural area/rural communities (non-specific)	10%	45

Disagree with proposals as they are just a ploy to write off Brecon's debts	9%	40
Disagree as we need to keep the Welsh language in Brecon/Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/ Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	9%	39
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	8%	37
Disagree that proposals will improve standards/proposals won't work	8%	37
Powys County Council have promised schools for years and never delivered/have no faith that this situation will be any different	8%	35
Sixth Form students needed in schools to provide guidance/inspiration/role models for younger students/being in the same school helps Sixth Formers to mature	8%	35
Disagree with proposed changes to Sixth Form as pupils need continuity/need to remain in the same school from 11-18	7%	31
Unhappy with Powys' lack of evidence for proposals i.e. being unable to answer questions in consultation meetings/figures in consultation document lacking anything to back them up	7%	31
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel costs	7%	30
Disagree with assertions that 600+ students is optimum for schools/believe smaller schools are better	7%	30
Disagree with proposals due to large number of housing developments planned in surrounding areas	6%	27
Any financial issues are due to the County Council themselves/Powys County Council are responsible for not intervening e	6%	26
Proposals negatively impact people living in Hay-on-Wye/distance will be too much	6%	25
Disagree with moving Brecon due to it negatively affecting people who live in the countryside/Gwernyfed specifically chosen due to countryside/want our children in a rural environment/don't want our children taught in town	6%	25
Disagree with removal of A-Level subjects from schools as it will negatively impact recruitment and retention of teachers	5%	24
Concerns over provision of Sciences in NPTC i.e. insufficient number of laboratories/no offer of Chemistry	5%	22
Disagree with proposals due to overcrowding of classes/there will be too many pupils per class	5%	20
Gwernyfed is valuable for its beautiful/historic/listed buildings	4%	17
Decisions are being made by councillors who do not understand/cannot relate to the issues	2%	10
Proposals are not in line with the Future Generations Act (2015)	1%	6
'Other'	39%	169

<sup>3.61</sup> Just less than half (47%) of respondents who disagreed with any elements of the proposal did so because they felt that 'Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed'. Typical examples of such comments are as follows:

*Gwernyfed High School must not be closed because it has a good standard of education and has robust financial credentials.*

*I strongly disagree with all aspects of the ill thought out proposal. Brecon needs a new high school but there is no problem Gwernyfed. Standards are good [and] budgets are kept.*

*Gwernyfed high school is an excellent school with fantastic exam result, great teachers and is within its budget and shouldn't be closed because of Brecon HS's failures.*

- 3.62 More than two fifths (44%) of respondents disagreed with the proposals due to concerns around increased travel times or distances. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*Having been a student of Gwernyfed who lived in Bryngwyn, it already took around 50 minutes each way to get to the school. Moving it [to] Brecon would more than likely double this travel time meaning children could have 9-10 hour days...*

*Gwernyfed should not close ... pupils in many cases already have a long commute to school and home without adding more miles to their journey it is not good for their health and wellbeing also after school clubs would make a child even later home in turn affecting their learning and studying time.*

*The travelling [the] majority of children will endure is not correct for any child.*

- 3.63 Around two fifths (38%) of respondents disagreed because they felt that 'proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community'. These concerns were often raised alongside concerns over the effect on the local economy of Gwernyfed.

*Gwernyfed is also a part of the community in the area - if you close this down many businesses will suffer, classes held at the school will be lost, and we will lose our sense of community!*

*Gwernyfed High School must not be closed because ... It is the hub of a diverse community, covering a large area, that relies heavily on the school's facilities for a wide range of activities. ... No meaningful investigation and assessment has been carried out into the socio-economic and cultural effects of closing Gwernyfed High School.*

*Gwernyfed is more than just a school it is an integral part of the community and its closure would be devastating.*

- 3.64 35% of respondents said that 'Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools/don't want to lose our 6th Form'. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*Post 16 education needs to be offered at the new school.*

*Crickhowell high has a sixth form, Builth will have a sixth form - why won't Brecon?!*

*Sixth form should be part of the school, not in a college where older people - some in their 70's - attend.*

- 3.65 Additionally, many respondents (34%) raising considerations around post-16 provision also expressed concerns about the standards of education of NPTC in Brecon, its accountability to the Council, or about the range of subject choice that would be available to Post-16 students.

*The college has a very poor reputation. They are known to pull courses part-way through. They are known to have poor quality teaching.*

*NPTC 6th form is not good enough and will not have the qualified teachers as Brecon 6th form already does. It is an incredibly stupid idea to get rid of the 6th forms already there and replace them with a new one with worse facilities, teachers, and other things.*

*I do not feel that NPTC will be able to fully implement all the subjects choice they say - the current building is too small, the laboratory is too small, there is no music provision or drama or arts provision.*

## Welsh Medium Education

- 3.1 As the proposed changes to Welsh medium education would affect stakeholders from across South/Mid Powys, respondents to the main Brecon and Gwernyfed consultation and Builth and Llandrindod consultation were asked identical questions regarding the proposals for Welsh medium education. Because of this, ORS has merged responses to questions regarding the Welsh medium proposals from both questionnaires into one all-inclusive dataset.
- 3.2 There is an additional break down by parents, carers and guardians of pupils who attend Brecon High School/associated feeder schools, Gwernyfed High School/associated feeder schools, and pupils and parents, carers and guardians of pupils from other/unknown schools (not including Builth Wells High School/feeder schools or Llandrindod High School/feeder schools).
- 3.3 Table 2 below provides a breakdown of the respondent profile from the 796 individuals who responded either online or by post to the main open consultation questionnaires for Brecon and Gwernyfed or Builth and Llandrindod. Figures for Powys's population are also outlined for comparison.

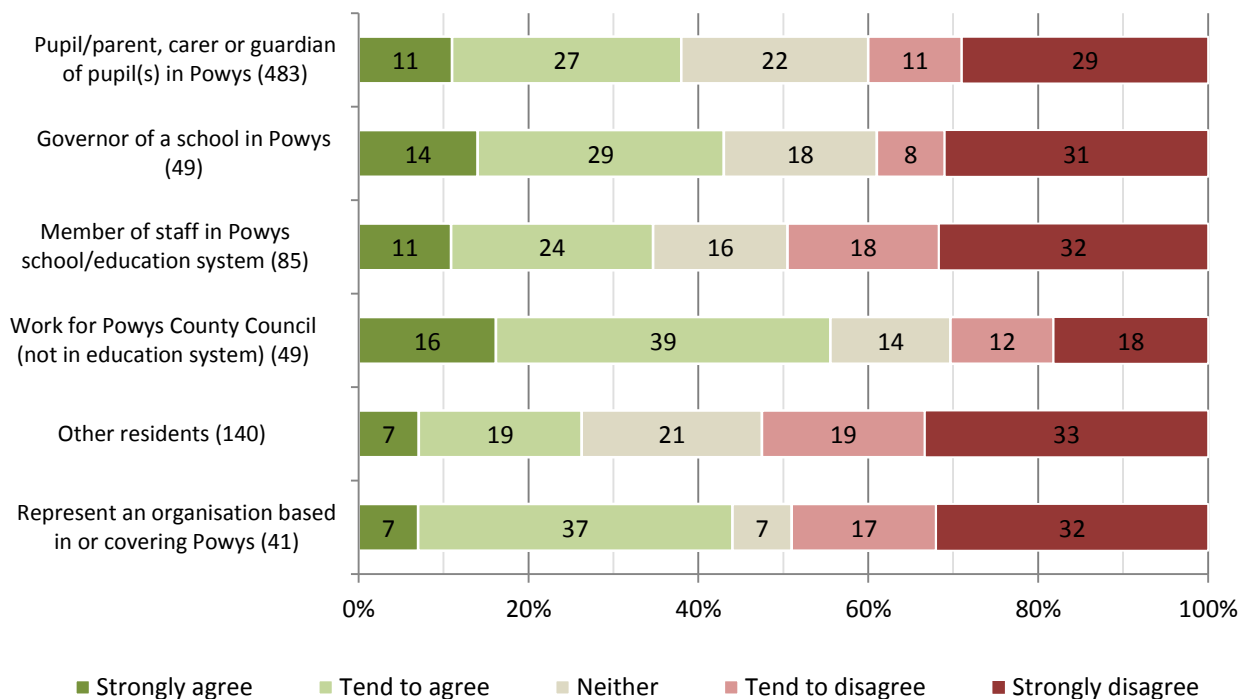
**Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics for the main consultation questionnaires and Powys's population**  
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

Characteristic	All Responses		Powys population 16+		
	Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses	Number of occurrences	% of population	
<b>BY AGE</b>	Under 25	30	4.9%	12,372	11.1%
	25 to 34	76	12.4%	12,230	11.0%
	35 to 44	197	32.1%	13,538	12.2%
	45 to 54	207	33.7%	19,506	17.6%
	55 to 64	67	10.9%	19,238	17.3%
	65 to 84	36	5.9%	29,611	26.7%
	85+	1	0.2%	4,547	4.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>111,042</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Not known</i>	182	-	-	-	
<b>BY GENDER</b>	Male	155	24.9%	54,573	49.1%
	Female	468	75.1%	56,469	50.9%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>111,042</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	173	-	-	-
<b>BY ETHNIC GROUP</b>	White	589	98.0%	108,539	98.6%
	Mixed or multiple ethnic	6	1.0%	453	0.4%
	Asian or Asian British	4	0.7%	890	0.8%
	Black, African, Caribbean, Black British	1	0.2%	109	0.1%
	Any other ethnic group	1	0.2%	92	0.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>110,083</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Not known</i>	195	-	-	-	
<b>BY DISABILITY</b>	With disability	22	3.6%	26,357	24.3%
	No disability	596	96.4%	81,971	75.7%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>108,328</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	178	-	-	-

	Characteristic	All Responses	
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses
<b>BY CHILDREN CURRENTLY IN SCHOOL, NURSERY OR COLLEGE IN POWYS</b>	Has children currently in school, nursery or college in Powys	478	75.6%
	No children currently in school, nursery or college in Powys	154	24.4%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	164	-
<b>BY CHILDREN ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS</b>	Has children entitled to free school meals	22	4.9%
	No children entitled to free school meals	426	95.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not applicable</i>	153	-
	<i>Not known</i>	195	-
<b>BY CHILDREN HAVING BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HAVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>	Has children with SEN	41	9.1%
	No children with SEN	410	90.9%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not applicable</i>	153	-
	<i>Not known</i>	192	-
<b>BY CHILDREN CURRENTLY RECEIVING A WELSH MEDIUM EDUCATION</b>	Has children receiving Welsh medium education	72	15.9%
	No children receiving Welsh medium education	380	84.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not applicable</i>	153	-
	<i>Not known</i>	191	-
<b>BY WELSH SPEAKER</b>	Speaks Welsh	210	35.5%
	Does not speak Welsh	382	64.5%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	204	-

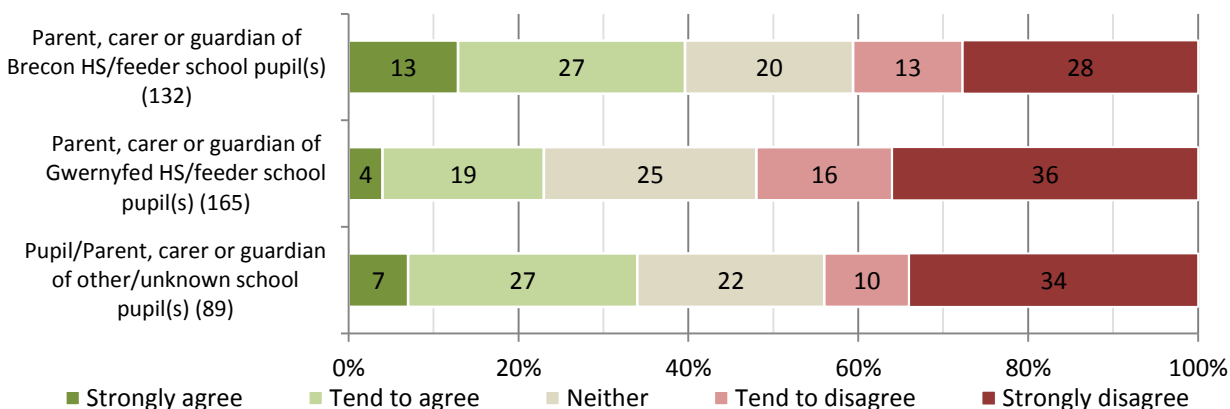
*In the context of the problems outlined above, Powys Council believes a number of changes are needed. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues?*

**Figure 13: Levels of agreement and disagreement that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues.**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

**Figure 14: Levels of agreement and disagreement that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues (separated by schools).**



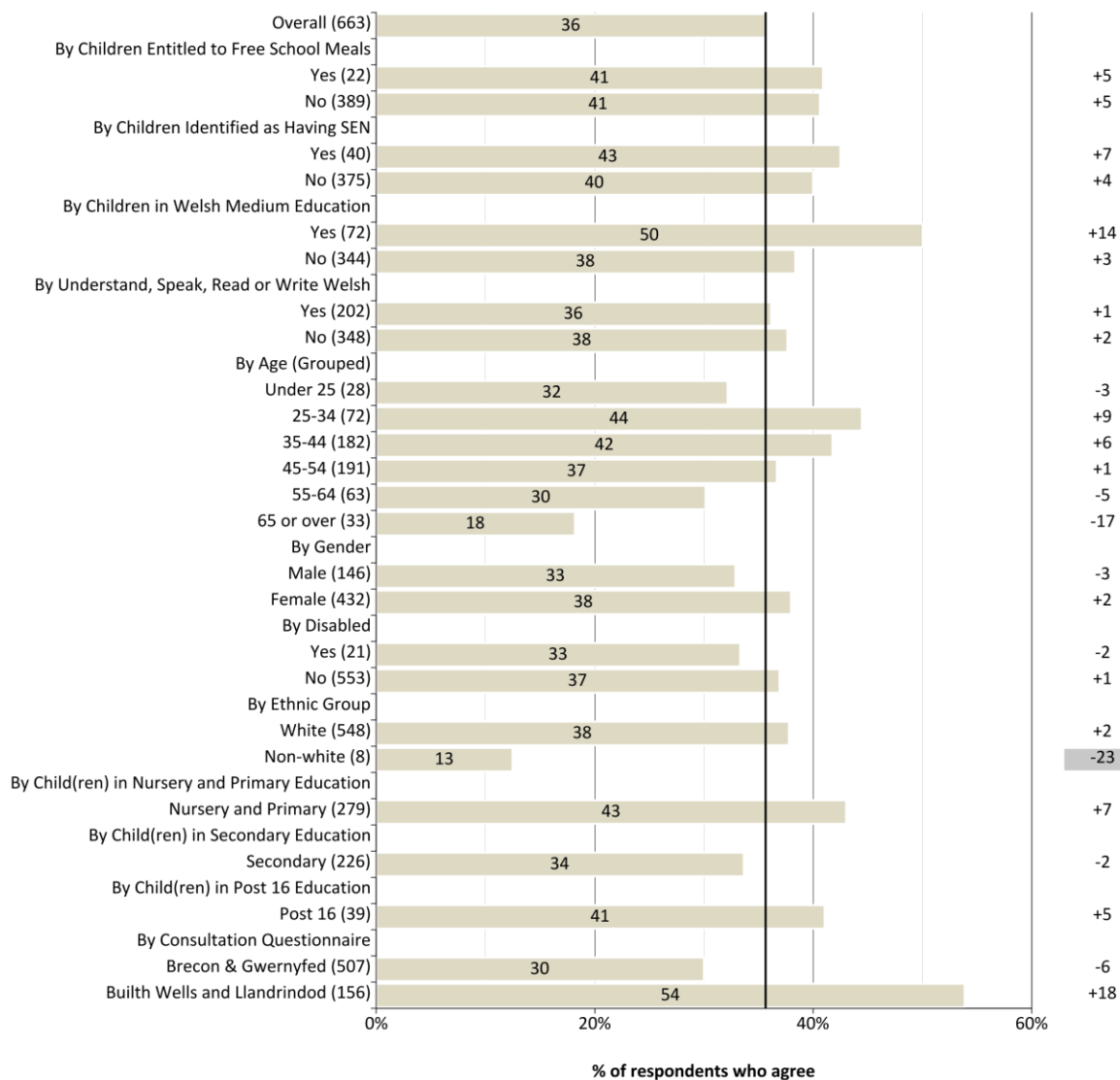
Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

3.4 More than half (55%) of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues in Welsh education. More than two fifths of those representing an organisation based in or covering Powys (44%) and Governors of schools in Powys (43%) agreed, as did around a third of members of staff in Powys school/education system (34%) and around a quarter (27%) of other residents.



- 3.5 While around two fifths (38%) of pupils and parents/carers/guardians of pupils in Powys overall agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the issues identified in Welsh education, and 39% of pupils/parents/carers and guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils specifically agreed, only around a quarter (24%) of pupils/parents/carers and guardians Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils agreed.
- 3.6 More than half of pupils/parents/carers and guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils (52%) disagreed.

**Figure 15: Levels of agreement and disagreement that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues (Demographic subgroup analysis).**



**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

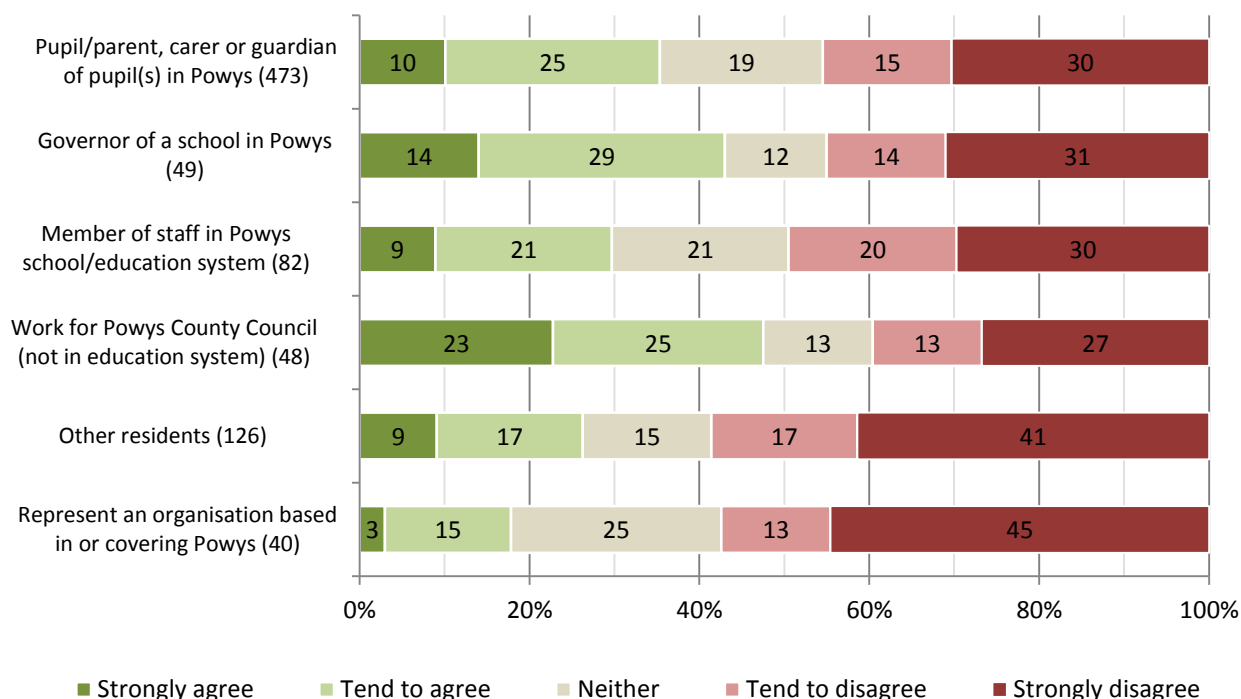
- 3.7 Respondents to the Builth Wells and Llandrindod Consultation Questionnaire (54%) and respondents with children in Welsh Medium Education (50%) are particularly likely to have agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues in Welsh education. Respondents aged 25-34 (44%), 35-44 (42%) and respondents with children in Nursery and Primary Education (43%) or with children who have Special Educational Needs (43%) were also particularly likely to agree.

3.8 Respondents aged 65 or over (18%) were particularly less likely to agree, as were respondents to the Brecon & Gwernyfed Consultation Questionnaire (30%).

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

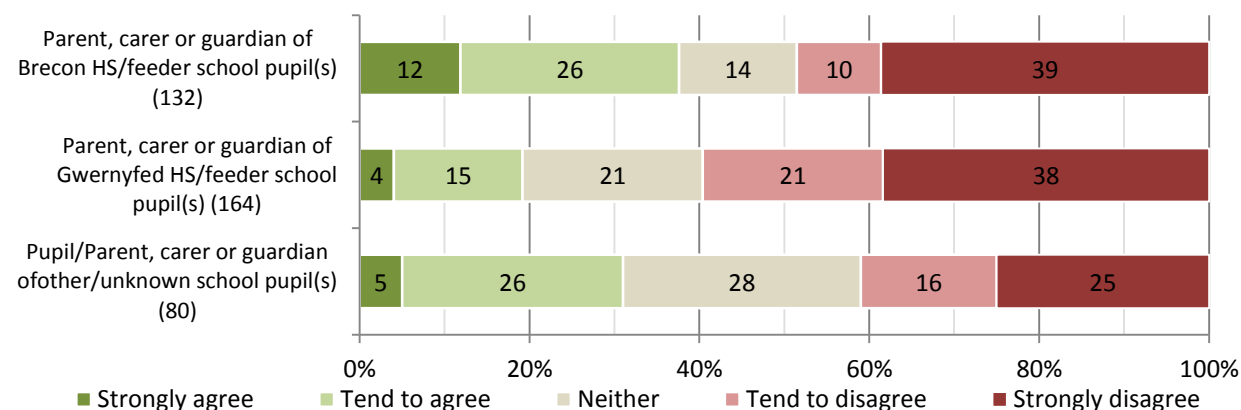
*To consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys to enable a wider range of subjects and a better learning and linguistic experience.*

**Figure 16: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys to enable a wider range of subjects and a better learning and linguistic experience.**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

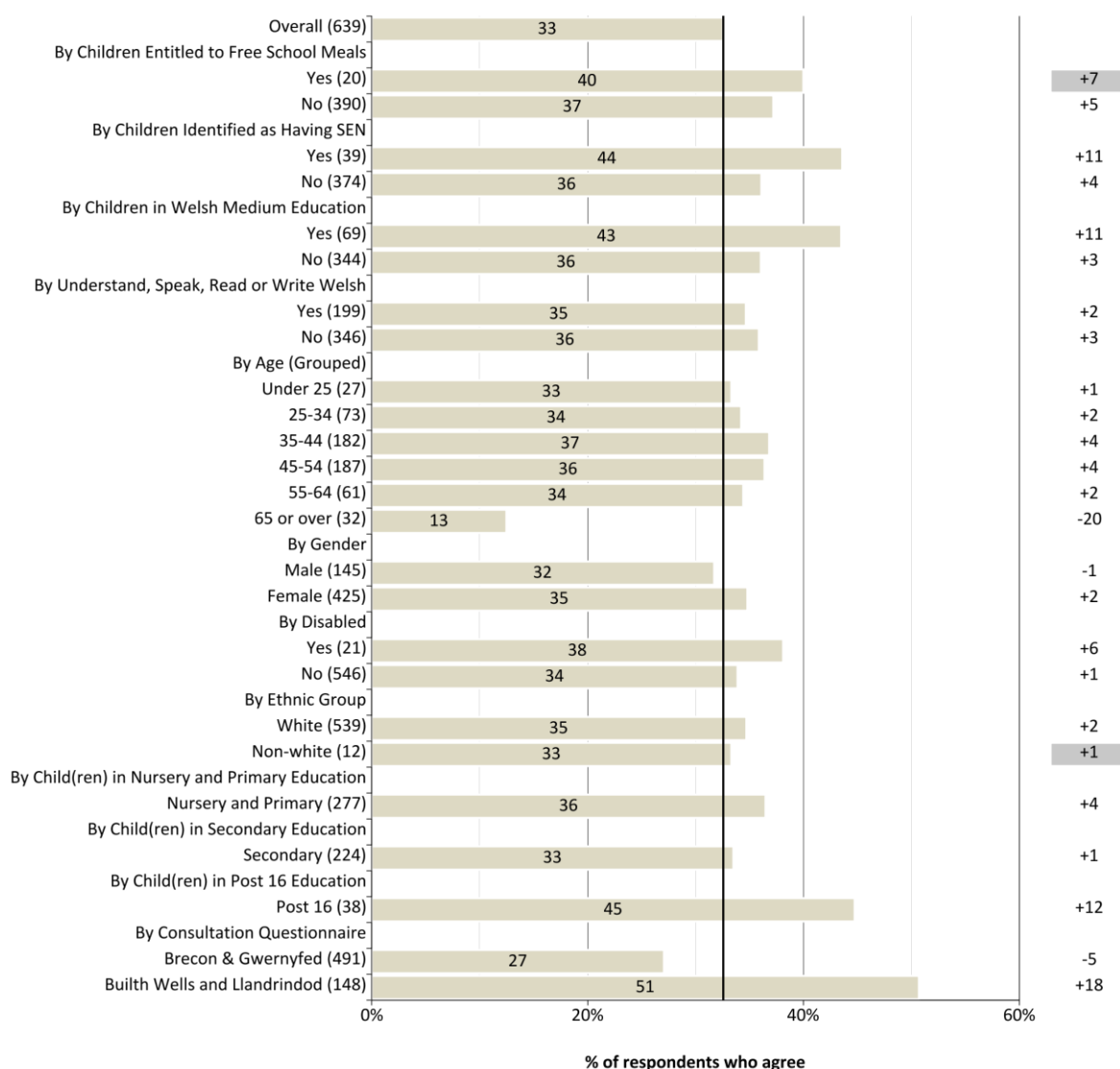
**Figure 17: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys to enable a wider range of subjects and a better learning and linguistic experience (separated by schools).**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

- 3.9 Almost half of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) (48%) and around two fifths of Governors of schools in Powys (43%) agreed with the proposal to deliver Welsh medium education from a single Welsh stream. More than a third (35%) of pupils, parents, carers or guardians of Powys pupils also agreed, while only around a quarter (26%) of other residents agreed.
- 3.10 Around two fifths (38%) of parents/carers and guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils agreed with the proposal to deliver Welsh medium education from a single Welsh stream, compared to only around a fifth (19%) of parents/carers and guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils.

**Figure 18:** Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys (Demographic subgroup analysis).

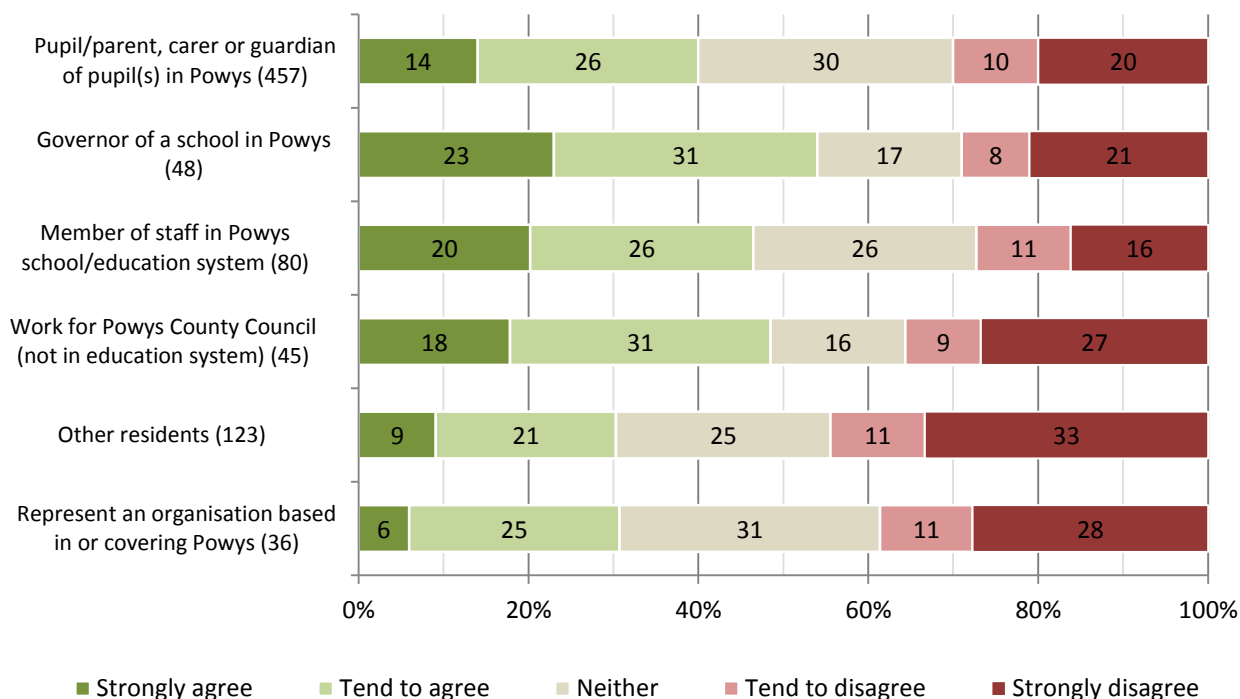


Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

- 3.11 Respondents to the Builth Wells and Llandrindod Consultation Questionnaire (51%) and respondents with children in Post 16 Education (45%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal to consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys. Respondents with children identified as having Special Educational Needs (44%) or with children in Welsh Medium education (43%) were also particularly likely to agree.
- 3.12 Those aged 65 or over (13%) were particularly less likely to agree.

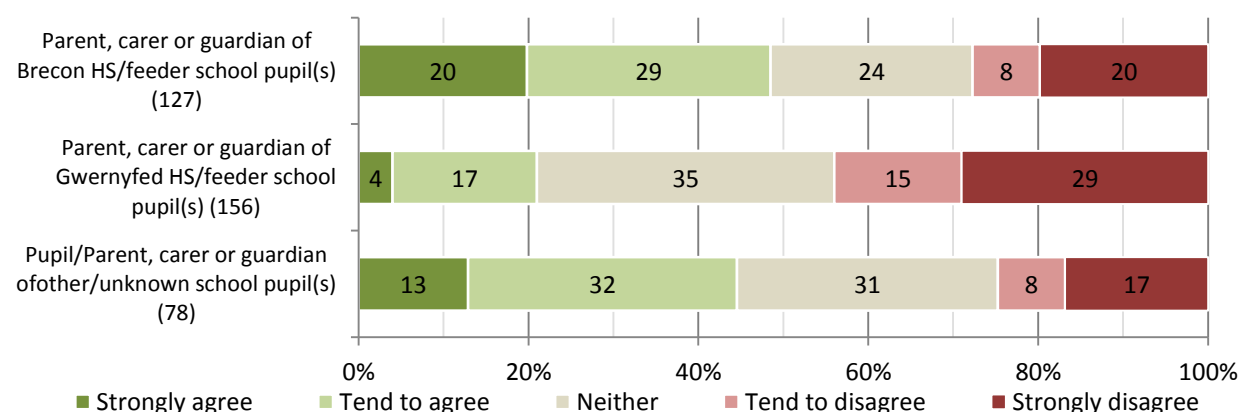
**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**  
 To provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school.

**Figure 19: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school.**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

**Figure 20: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school (separated by schools).**

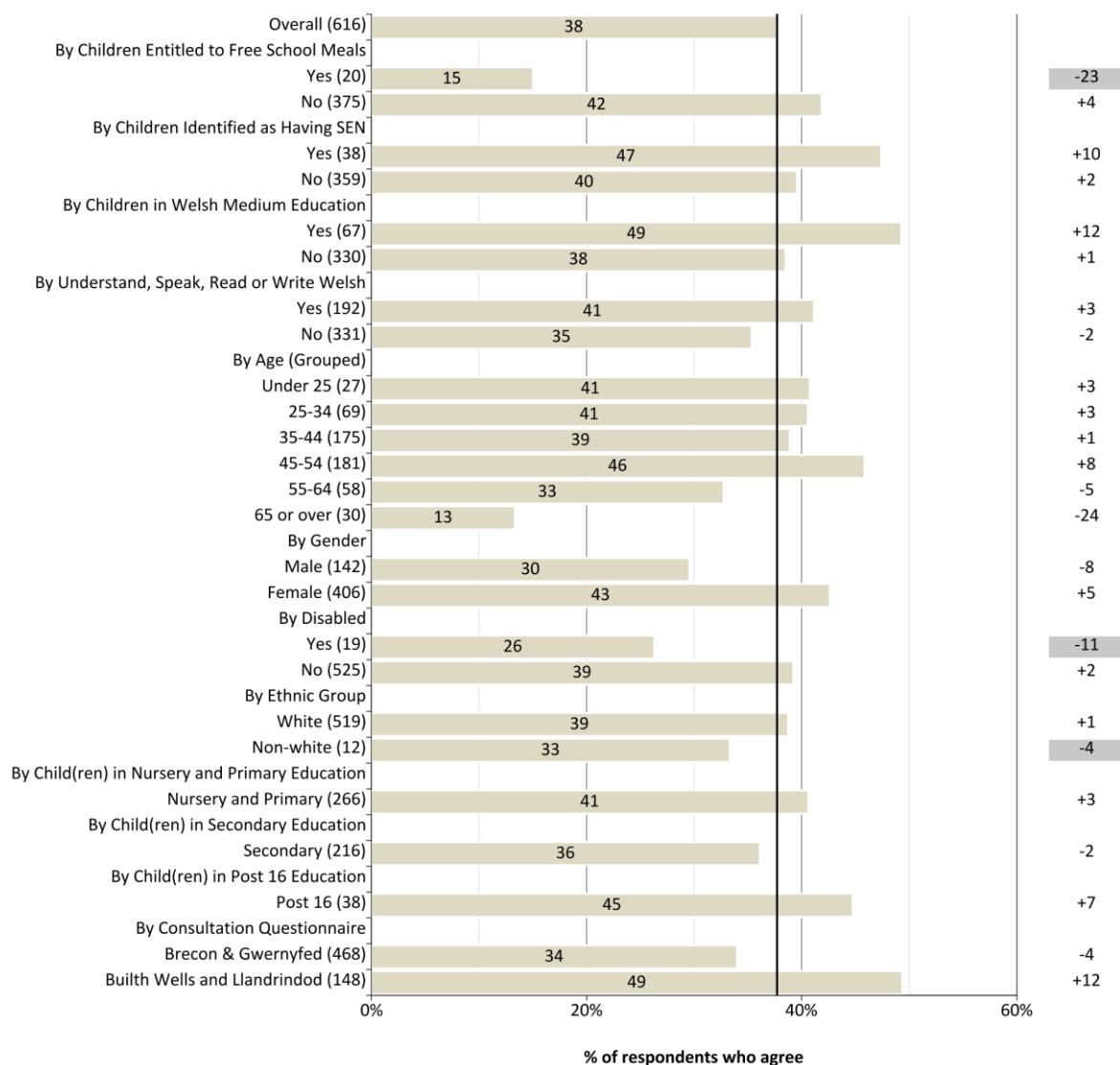


Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

3.13 Governors of schools in Powys were most likely to agree with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual category 2b/c dual stream school, with over half (54%) agreeing with this proposal. Almost half of respondents who work for Powys County Council (not in education system) (49%) and members of staff in Powys schools/education system (46%) also agreed.

3.14 While two fifths (40%) of pupils/parents/carers/guardians of Powys pupils overall agreed with this proposal, parents, carers or guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils had slightly higher levels of agreement (49%), while only around a fifth (21%) of parents, carers or guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils agreed with this proposal.

**Figure 21:** Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school (Demographic subgroup analysis).



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

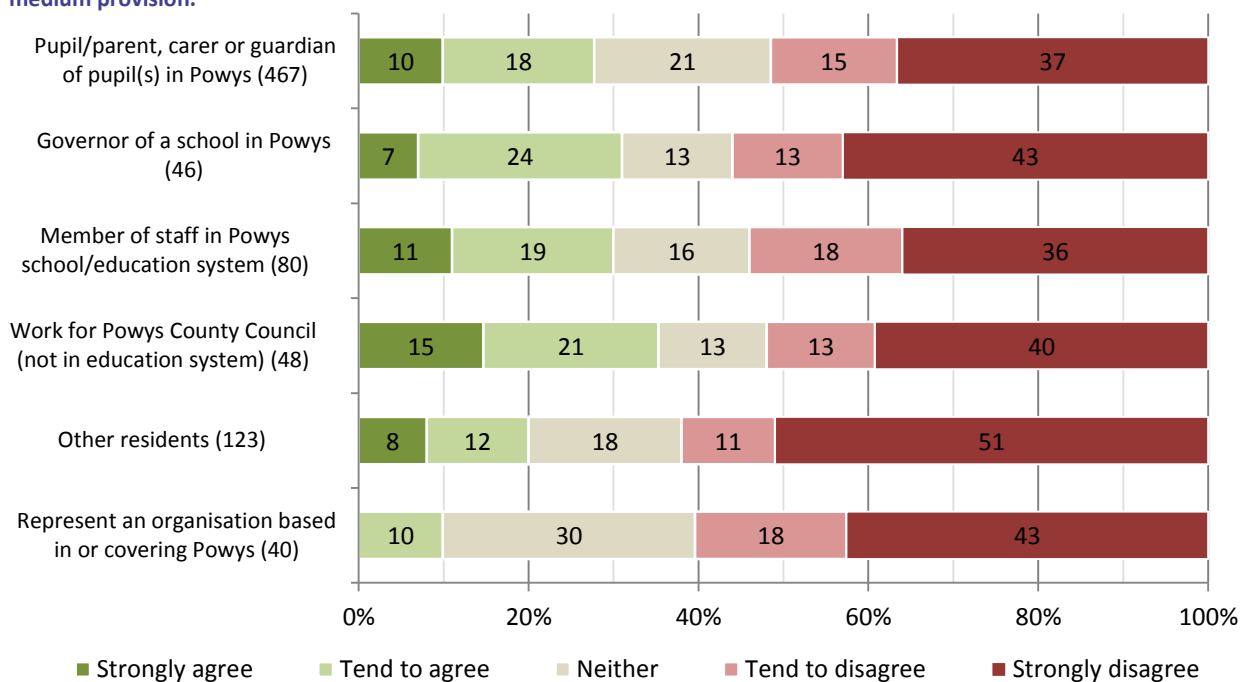
3.15 Again, respondents to the Builth Wells and Llandrindod Consultation Questionnaire (49%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school. Respondents with children in Welsh Medium Education (49%) or identified as having Special Educational Needs (47%) were also particularly likely to agree, along with respondents aged 45-54 (46%) and respondents with children in Post-16 Education (45%).

3.16 Male respondents (30%) and respondents aged 65 or over (13%) were particularly less likely to agree.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

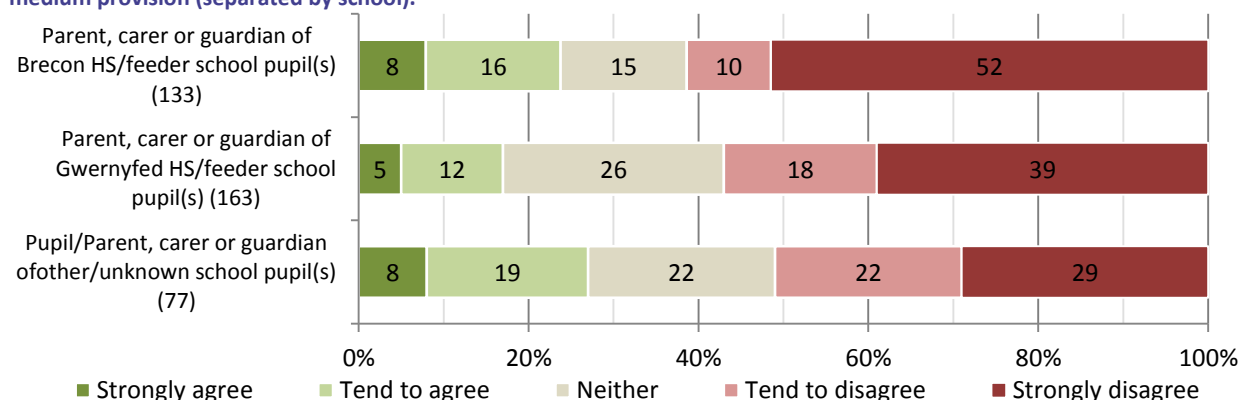
*To locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school (subject to secondary consultation) due to its central location and enhanced Welsh medium provision.*

**Figure 22: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school (subject to secondary consultation) due to its central location and enhanced Welsh medium provision.**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

**Figure 23: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school (subject to secondary consultation) due to its central location and enhanced Welsh medium provision (separated by school).**

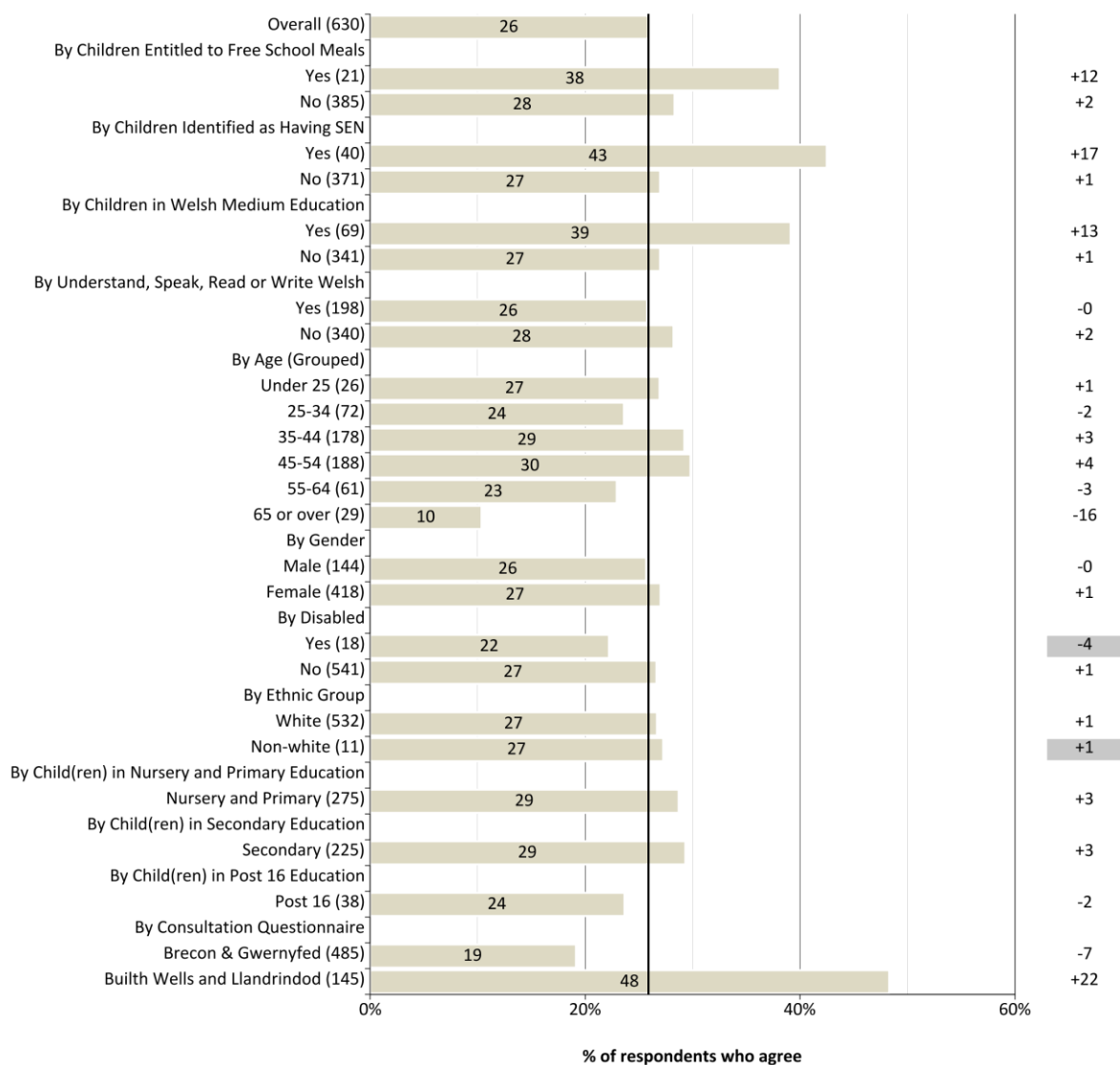


Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

3.17 Around a third of employees of Powys County Council (not in education system) (35%) and members of staff in the Powys schools/education system (30%) and Governors of schools in Powys (30%) agreed with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school.

- 3.18 However, more than half of all respondent groups disagreed with the proposal. Other residents (62%), representatives of organisations based in or covering Powys (60%), and Governors of schools in Powys (57%) were particularly likely to disagree, with well over half of pupils/parents/carers and guardians of Brecon (62%) and Gwernyfed (57%) HS/feeder school pupils disagreeing with the proposal.

**Figure 24: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school (Demographic subgroup analysis).**



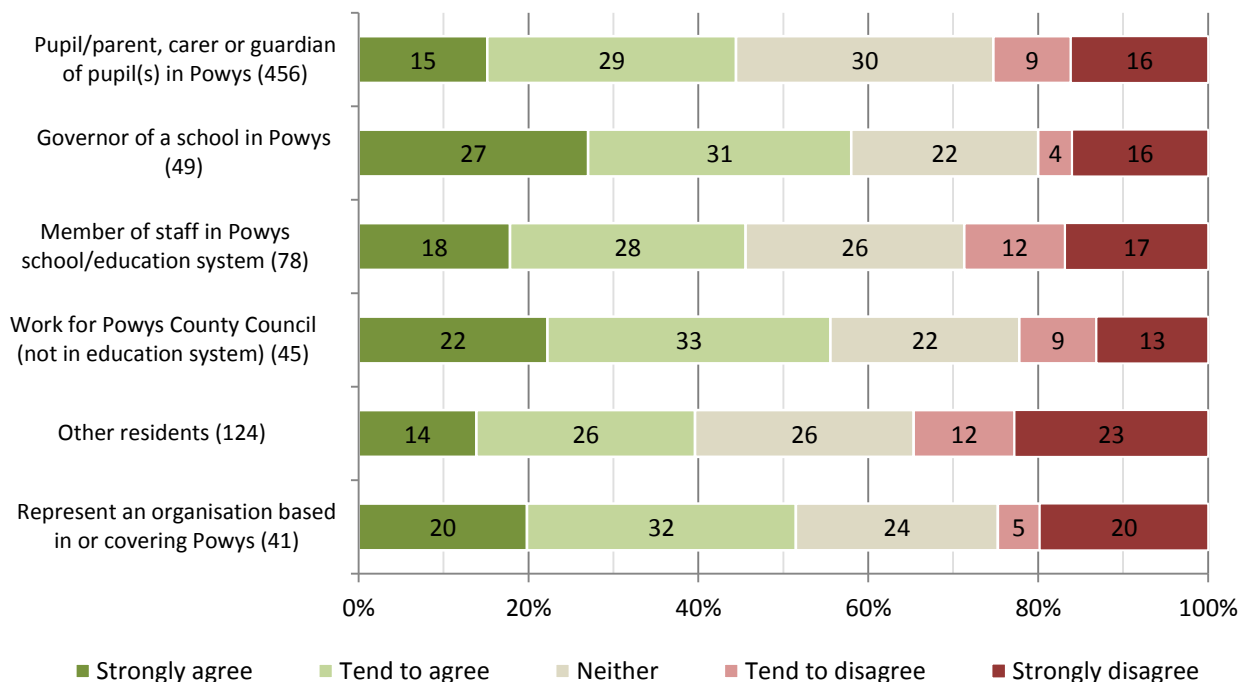
**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

- 3.19 Respondents to the Builth Wells and Llandrindod Consultation Questionnaire (48%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school. Respondents with children identified as having Special Education Needs (43%), in Welsh Medium Education (39%) or entitled to free school meals (38%) were also particularly likely to agree.
- 3.20 Respondents aged 65 or over (10%) and those who responded to the Brecon & Gwernyfed Consultation Questionnaire (19%) were particularly less likely to agree.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

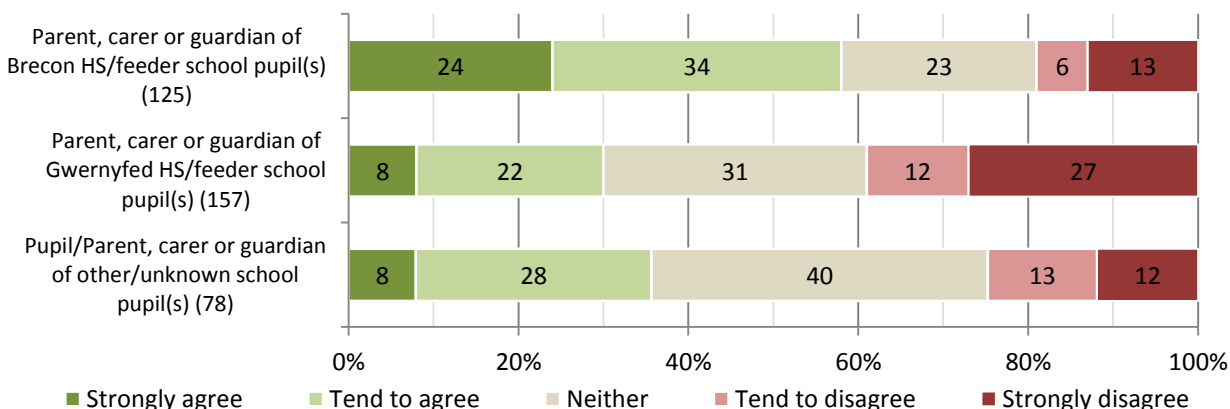
*To increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh.*

**Figure 25: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh.**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

**Figure 26: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh (separated by school).**



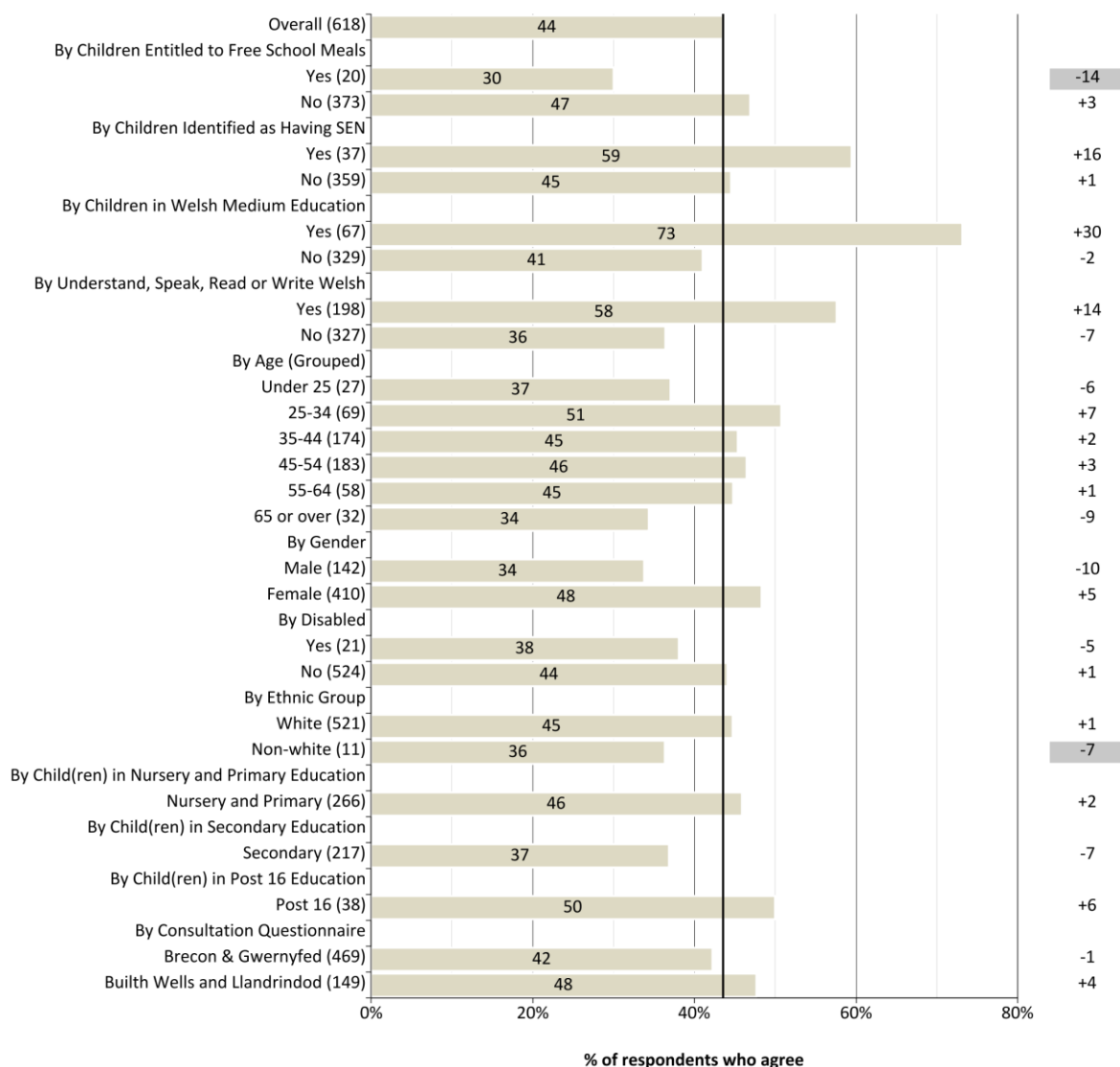
Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

<sup>3.21</sup> More than half of Governors of schools in Powys (57%), employees of Powys County Council (not in education) (56%) and representatives of organisations based in or covering Powys (51%) agreed with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh. Nearly half of members of staff in the Powys school/education system (46%) and pupils/parents/carers/guardians of Powys pupils (45%) also agreed.



3.22 Nearly three fifths of parents, carers and guardians of Brecon HS/feeder school pupils (58%) agreed, compared with 3 in 10 (30%) of parents, carers and guardians of Gwernyfed HS/feeder school pupils.

**Figure 27: Levels of agreement and disagreement with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh (Demographic subgroup analysis).**



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

3.23 Respondents with children in Welsh Medium Education (73%) were particularly likely to agree with the proposal to increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh. Respondents with children identified having Special Educational Needs (59%) and those who understand, speak, read or write Welsh (58%) are also particularly likely to have agreed.

3.24 Respondents with children entitled to free school meals (30%), male respondents (34%) and those aged 65 or over (34%) were least likely to agree.

*If you disagree with any elements of the Proposal for Welsh medium education, please explain why.*

- 3.26 Respondents who expressed disagreement with any element the proposal were asked to explain why this was.
- 3.27 Responses to this question have been filtered by consultation; only comments made by individuals in response to the Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools Consultation Questionnaire appear in the table below.
- 3.28 Of the 228 respondents who answered this question, 615 different comments have been classified, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 28: Reasons for opposition to the various elements of the proposal**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	42%	96
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	34%	78
Proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer	28%	64
Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	22%	51
Don't want Welsh provision to be moved to Builth (non-specific)	21%	47
Welsh should be available in all schools/to all pupils	14%	33
Maintain current provision/disagree with any school closures/disagree with proposals	11%	25
Pupils are entitled to a school within their local community	10%	23
Proposals will negatively affect the free time of students/time for extra-curricular activities	8%	19
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	7%	16
English is most pupils first language/most people need to speak English	5%	12
Proposals will negatively affect pupils from South Powys	4%	10
Disagree with being taught just in Welsh/don't want to be taught in Welsh/don't want my children speaking Welsh	3%	7
Proposals will negatively affect English speakers/English speaker's educations will suffer	2%	4
Proposals will negatively affect pupils who go on to study at University/higher levels	<1%	1
Schools are too close to the English border/don't need to learn Welsh due to proximity to English border	<1%	1
'Other'	44%	100

- 3.29 42% of respondents disagreed because they felt that 'proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*[It's] unfair for pupils to travel over 30 miles to attend welsh stream education.*

*I disagree simply on geography. Builth Wells is far too much distance for a child to travel to school every day, particularly if they live in the more rural areas and already have a long journey to school. How is the child supposed to attend extra-curricular activities, or maintain friendships outside of school, or even find time for homework and a bit of relaxation?*

*Families will be forced out of Welsh medium education, due to travelling times, health and wellbeing and finance. Welsh medium education would not be seen or be available to all it would create communities that have no Welsh medium education access.*

- 3.30 34% of respondents think the Council should 'Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School'. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*I believe Powys should be ensuring excellent standards of Welsh medium education in Brecon, to retain all those from Ysgol y Bannau and Pontsenni who currently switch to English medium, or go, at considerable expense, to Ystalyfera (and recently to Builth Wells, out of fear of the consequences of the proposals).*

*I understand the reason for change, but think Brecon is a more sensible place for Welsh medium education in the long term for the area, and would reduce the amount of pupils going out of county i.e. Ystalyfera.*

- 3.31 28% of respondents disagreed because they felt that 'proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer'. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*Parents, faced with a daily trek to Builth or Llandrindod will opt for English medium secondary education in Brecon and/or Gwernyfed. Thus the number of children being educated through Welsh will inevitably decline.*

*We are supposed to be developing the Welsh language across the county. Remove the Welsh stream from Brecon causing long commutes for pupils from the south of the county and you will see a decreasing concentration of Welsh language in the south Powys community.*

- 3.32 22% of respondents disagreed because they think 'Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol y Bannau will be negatively affected'. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*There is no sense removing the Welsh- medium stream from Brecon High School when Ysgol Y Bannau is across the road. Have you thought of the repercussions for this Primary school?*

*I think it's absolutely disgraceful to move the Welsh stream from a location right opposite a Welsh language primary school! There is also a Welsh stream primary school just 15 minutes down the road ... Builth have just one Welsh stream primary school - yet they are having preferential treatment!*

*Brecon has a strong tradition and proud history of Welsh medium education. It also has the only Welsh medium primary school, purpose built less than twenty years ago ... The numbers at Ysgol y Bannau will inevitably suffer as parents are unwilling to make the decision to bus their children all the way to Builth.*

## Equalities

*Are there any positive or negative impacts relating to equalities that you believe that the County Council should take into account in the decision making process?  
If so, are you able to provide any supporting evidence and suggest any ways to reduce or remove any potential negative impact and increase any positive impact?*

- 3.33 Respondents were asked whether there were positive or negative impacts relating to equalities were then asked if they had any supporting evidence or suggestions to reduce negative impacts or increase positive impacts.
- 3.34 150 responses were classified using a standardised code frame, from which 295 separate comments were coded. Once classified, only a small number of comments for this question were applicable to impacts relating to equalities, and codes raised from these comments have been presented below. Comments which did not relate to the question have been separated into an 'other/comments not relating to equalities' category.

Figure 29: Impacts relating to equalities

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Proposals will lead to increased travel times/costs	35%	53
Proposals will negatively impact Welsh Speakers	27%	41
Generally disagree with proposals/maintain current provision	12%	18
Proposals will negatively impact disabled children/proposals need to take disabled children into account	10%	15
Children have the right to quality education in their local area i.e. in the language they wish to learn	7%	11
Schools should be equal for English and Welsh speakers/shouldn't be biased towards English or Welsh speakers	7%	11
Proposals will result in pupils losing friends/negative impact on social life	5%	7
Proposals will segregate societies/divide communities	4%	6
Proposals will result in pupils losing time with family/negative impact on home life	3%	5
'Other/comments not relating to equalities'	85%	127

- 3.35 When asked if they believed there were any positive or negative impacts relating to equalities that the County Council should take into account in the decision making process, 36% of respondents commented on the fact that 'proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased costs'. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*Disadvantaged families from the Gwernyfed area will struggle to attend such events as parent's evenings and collect children from clubs with having to travel so far. Will they be given a bus too?*

*I believe there are negative impacts on pupils from Gwernyfed. Their physical and mental wellbeing will be affected by spending more time travelling, resulting in less free time to participate in other activities. Their mental wellbeing will be affected due to friendship groups being disrupted as pupils transfer to schools outside the catchment area, as well as how feelings of isolation will affect them when they return home to an area with no clubs or YFC.*

- 3.36 28% of respondents argued that ‘proposals will negatively impact Welsh speakers’. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*In order to access education in their native tongue some pupils will have to travel for excessive amounts of time under the new proposals. This will curtail social life, time with family and extra-curricular activities.*

*Excluding Welsh speaking and post 16 pupils and expecting them to make long journeys to receive an education - when you building a brand new school on their doorsteps is immoral. I hope those with the power to decide sleep well.*

*It is not equal in my view that the proposal is forcing Brecon learners to travel for their education away from a 21st century school, their friends & families when the English learners do not have to travel.*

- 3.37 10% of respondents suggest that ‘proposals will negatively impact disabled children/proposals need to take disabled children into account’. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*Long bus journeys to and from school discriminates against those with disabilities which make travel difficult. The provision of a new school and facilities for the people of Brecon, at the expense of ... those same facilities for the people in the Gwernyfed area, discriminates against the latter group based on geographical bias.*

*I can imagine for people with a disability, all the extra travel (an hour for some kids?!) will be too much.*

*I think families with disabilities/on low incomes would be unlikely to travel long distances to attend their children's parents' evenings.*

- 3.38 7% of respondents said that ‘Children have the right to quality education in their local area i.e. in the language they wish to learn’. Typical examples of these comments are as follows:

*People in Wales have the human right to be educated in their mother tongue. They also have the human right to live their lives using their mother tongue. By not providing the opportunity to learn through the medium of Welsh in their own community, children in Brecon are being denied this choice. I believe this is contrary to the Human Rights Act, the Welsh Language Act, and the Equality Act 2010.*

*Depriving school children in the Gwernyfed catchment area of their right to access a high quality education in their local area if the Proposal goes ahead.*

## Further Comments

*Are there any further comments that you would like to make, or any alternative proposals you feel the Council should consider?*

<sup>3.39</sup> Those responding to the questionnaire by post had the opportunity to enclose additional comments on separate sheets of paper. However, people responding online were limited in their responses to the open textboxes in the questionnaire. In order to give those responding online the opportunity to submit any additional comments, a ‘further comments’ question was included. Additional comments received by post tended to be longer and more comprehensive than those received online and they have been included in the ‘Written Submissions’ chapter of the report. Those received online are reported below. 174 respondents gave additional comments, from which 580 separate comments were coded.

Figure 30: Further comments

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Maintain 6th Form/don't want to lose our 6th Form	22%	38
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	18%	32
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	16%	27
Disagree as proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community	15%	26
Appreciate/agree that Brecon High School needs improvements, but not at the expense of Gwernyfed	12%	21
Agree with proposals for new school building/want a new school to be built	11%	20
Don't close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	11%	20
Powys County Council are disregarding public opinion/consultation is just a tick-box exercise/more notice needs to be ta	11%	20
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	11%	19
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	11%	19
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	10%	18
Proposals are financially motivated/a ploy to write off Brecon's debt	10%	18
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	10%	17
Concerns about standards of education of NPTC Brecon/lack of accountability to students from NPTC	9%	15
<b>Suggestion:</b> Brecon should become an all-through school/merge with a local primary school to provide education from 3-18	7%	13
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington, etc.	7%	13
Proposals will lead to fewer families remaining in the area/fewer new families will move in	7%	12
Proposal is biased/flawed/decisions already made	7%	12
Decisions are being made by councillors not local to the area/who do not understand the issues or areas involved i.e. cabinet is mostly from North Powys	6%	11
Proposals will negatively affect pupils' health and wellbeing (i.e. make them tired, unhappy, inattentive in school)	6%	10
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	5%	9
Proposals will lead to reduced free time/affect pupils home lives/time for after	5%	9

school activities/extra-curricular activities		
Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	5%	8
Proposals will negatively impact local businesses/local economy	5%	8
Proposals won't save enough money/savings will be minimal	4%	7
Proposals will negatively affects rural area/rural communities (non-specific)	4%	7
Proposals will leave schools unprepared for an increasing school population e.g. from local housing developments/increasing birth rate	3%	6
Proposals have caused uncertainty in the schools/futures of the pupils	3%	5
<b>Suggestion:</b> use a federated staff system/share teachers between schools, not students	2%	4
<b>Suggestion:</b> Gwernyfed should become an all-through school/merge with a local primary school to provide education from 3-18	1%	2
Gwernyfed is valuable for its sports facilities/community facilities	1%	2
'Other'	44%	77

- 3.40 More than a fifth (22%) of those making further comments mentioned 6<sup>th</sup> Form provision, requesting that provision be maintained or objecting to the potential loss of the 6<sup>th</sup> Form.

*If Brecon does not have a 6th form Powys will be threatening the education and prospects of students in the area.*

*Post 16 education in our county must surely be delivered through Sixth Forms. Students at both Gwernyfed and Brecon High Schools have made it clear that they will vote with their feet if faced with the uncertainties of NPTC rather than Sixth Form education; they will flock to Hereford or Merthyr.*

- 3.41 Around a fifth (18%) made comments suggesting that the proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning. These concerns ranged considerably, but often made references to the possibility of disruption caused by the changes affecting educational attainment, or lower standards of post-16 or Welsh education in the area.

*If this proposal goes ahead, my child will have had his entire KS2 career disrupted, his KS3 years uncertain with all the associated de-motivational & disruptive events and finally, just as he progresses into KS4, he will be physically moved into a new environment which will be struggling to establish itself at exactly the time he should be consolidating and succeeding. Education is best where individuals are valued, relationships made and paths to future are built on solid foundations. Bigger does not mean better...and new buildings do NOT guarantee stability and success. KEEP GWERNYFED HS OPEN.*

*I agree the schools do need improvement but to put huge numbers of children in schools to save money will not in the long term give our children a good education. Classes will be overcrowded and the teacher/child ratio will lack leaving children who are struggling or excelling will not be picked up upon.*

*I do not accept that the criteria that has been used to formulate the proposals are relevant to the local area. The so-called 'critical mass' of pupils/school size is an import from English urban models that are not relevant to a lower density rural location, I do not accept that offering 25 'A' level*



*subjects in a single location is desirable or practical. Given that it is proposed that a minimum of 12 students would be in each subject - this would require a critical mass of 300 students. However, there is no guarantee that even with this number students would choose to study subjects equally and the likelihood is that subjects would not be available to those who chose them. 'A' levels should be offered across a less broad range with other subjects restricted to Further or Higher Education. If my grandchildren were required to travel to Brecon their parents would opt to send them to a closer English school where they would not be offered opportunities for Welsh medium education or subjects.*

*If Powys is to be taken seriously and prove to be a viable option for young economically active young people and families there needs to be an inclusive 11-18 school within the Brecon catchment area. We are in danger of creating a hole in the middle of Wales where the educational experience is an inadequate preparation for life post 18, it doesn't offer parity with the experience of young people from other parts of Wales and our children are at a disadvantage before they have even entered adulthood. Powys must invest in the future before it is too late. Already many young people are being failed by system that does not work and in a modern 21st century Wales is sadly lacking.*

- 3.42 As with elsewhere in the consultation, a common concern here was that the proposals would lead to longer travel times or increased travel costs, and the effects that this could have on children's social lives and educational attainment.

*You think it is right to force pupils to travel vast distances to go to school, miss out on social and sporting opportunities and become exhausted.*

*The travel time for the children will have a really negative effect on the children's ability to concentrate and also have broad interests. A lot of children from farms love to help with the animals and farm chores, and many have animals such as horses that they love to look after. All this is excellent for responsibility and developing a work ethic. If the children are on the bus for 2 hours minimum per day there will be no time for these lovely family orientated activities that make rural life so wholesome.*

*My family have recently moved to Powys and one of the factors that drew us to Powys was the good education at Gwernyfed High School and that my children would be able to walk to school. I feel as a parent it is very important that my children are not stuck on a bus for a few hours in the morning and after school. Walking to school keep them active and means me as a parent could carry on with my work day fairly uninterrupted.*

*Does the council acknowledge that the proposed closure of Gwernyfed will - in addition to increased transport costs with associated environmental, have an impact on pupils who can no longer cycle or walk to school with the health and other benefits that this provides?*

- 3.43 15% objected due to perceived negative effects on the community, or made comments stressing that schools are a vital part of the community.

*Each school should be reviewed individually. These proposals would have a huge impact on the economic viability and sustainability of the Gwernyfed catchment area. Families with young children would not be attracted to the area without a local secondary school. Gwernyfed school is at the heart of the community and to lose the school would rip the heart out of the community. Powys CC*



*needs to come up with a dynamic plan to protect the future of Gwernyfed, as well as address the problems faced by Brecon.*

*Please consider the major impact that the closure of Gwernyfed would have on the local sports clubs available in our area. The loss of the Sports Hall, AstroTurf pitch, tennis courts, sports field etc would result in the closure of many of the clubs that currently use these facilities. Adults and Parents may not have the time and/or money to transport themselves or their children to similar clubs in Brecon. Merger of the two schools at a site in Brecon will also have a catastrophic effect on the feeling of being part of a community for those who live so far from the school. It is part of growing up to meet up with your school friends at local weekend events etc. However, if you live in, say, Rhosgoch and your best friend is from, say, Crai, your opportunity to continue your friendship outside of school hours will be at best severely restricted, if possible at all.*

- 3.44 However, over 1 in 10 respondents (12%) made comments which agreed that Brecon High School needs improvements, but felt this should not be done at the expense of Gwernyfed.

*John Williams and the management team at Gwernyfed have shown that it is possible to run a successful school and manage their budget effectively. Why has Brecon High School not been assisted to do the same? It has just been allowed to get further and further into debt. Brecon High School needs a lot of time and money spent on it, but not at the expense of a successful school like Gwernyfed, and its community. The reason for closing Gwernyfed is purely financial, to dig Brecon High School out of a mess of their own creating. I also have my doubts that we'll ever see this new 'super school' as PCC will never be able to find enough money to actually build it - just like our community is still waiting for the new primary schools that were promised several years ago*

*Brecon desperately needs a new building and has done for some years. This should not be confused with a plan to merge 2 schools that do not want to be merged.*

*Initially, I thought the idea of a 'superschool' with more subjects could be a good thing. But the more time has gone on and as more details have emerged such as:-Removing 6th form -Sacking all teachers and staff and making them reapply for their jobs -Making some pupils travel for an hour each way every day -Denying many Gwernyfed kids of access to after school activities -Creating prolonged uncertainty and worry in both schools, when kids and teachers have exams and Estyn monitoring to deal with I have completely changed my mind. Yes Brecon high needs a new building, but not to the detriment of Gwernyfed kids and future A level students.*

## Findings of the Young Persons' Consultation Questionnaire

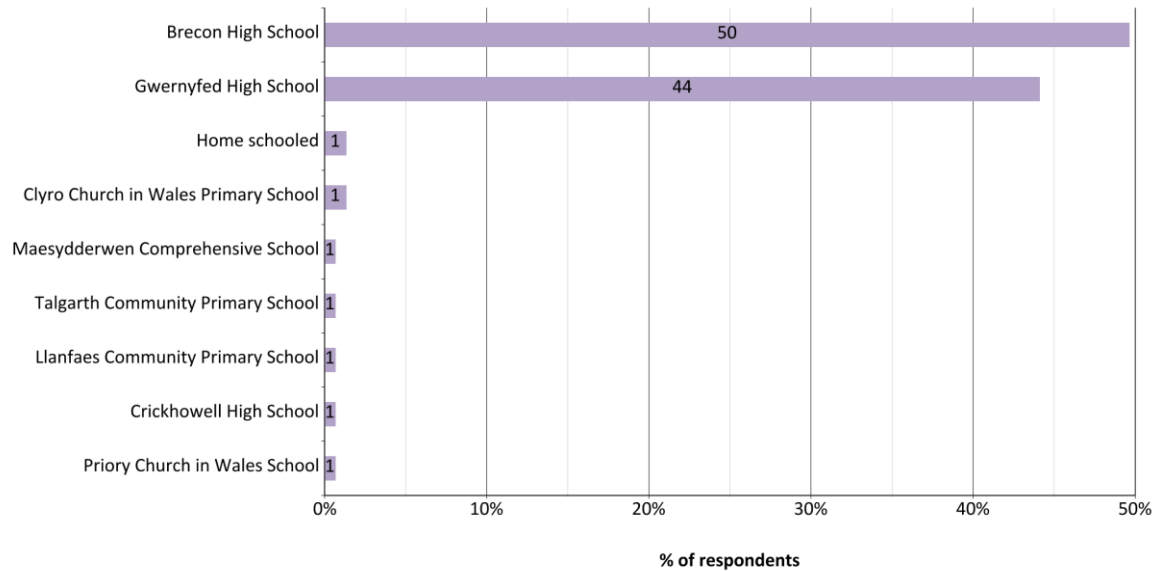
**Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics for the young persons' consultation questionnaire**  
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

	Characteristic	All Responses	
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses
<b>BY KEY STAGE</b>	Key Stage 1	1	0.7%
	Key Stage 2	5	3.5%
	Key Stage 3	67	46.5%
	Key Stage 4	51	35.4%
	Key Stage 5	20	13.9%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	4	-
<b>BY GENDER</b>	Male	58	43.6%
	Female	75	56.4%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	15	-
<b>BY ETHNIC GROUP</b>	White	128	94.8%
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3	2.2%
	Asian or Asian British	2	1.5%
	Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	2	1.5%
	Any other ethnic group	0	0.0%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	13	-
<b>BY DISABILITY</b>	With disability	6	4.4%
	No disability	129	95.6%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	13	-
<b>BY SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS</b>	With SEN	10	7.7%
	No SEN	120	92.3%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	18	-
<b>BY ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE FREE SCHOOL MEALS</b>	Eligible to receive free school meals	11	8.5%
	Not eligible to receive free school meals	119	91.5%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	18	-

## About Your Education

*Which school do you currently go to?*

**Figure 31: Which school do you currently go to?**



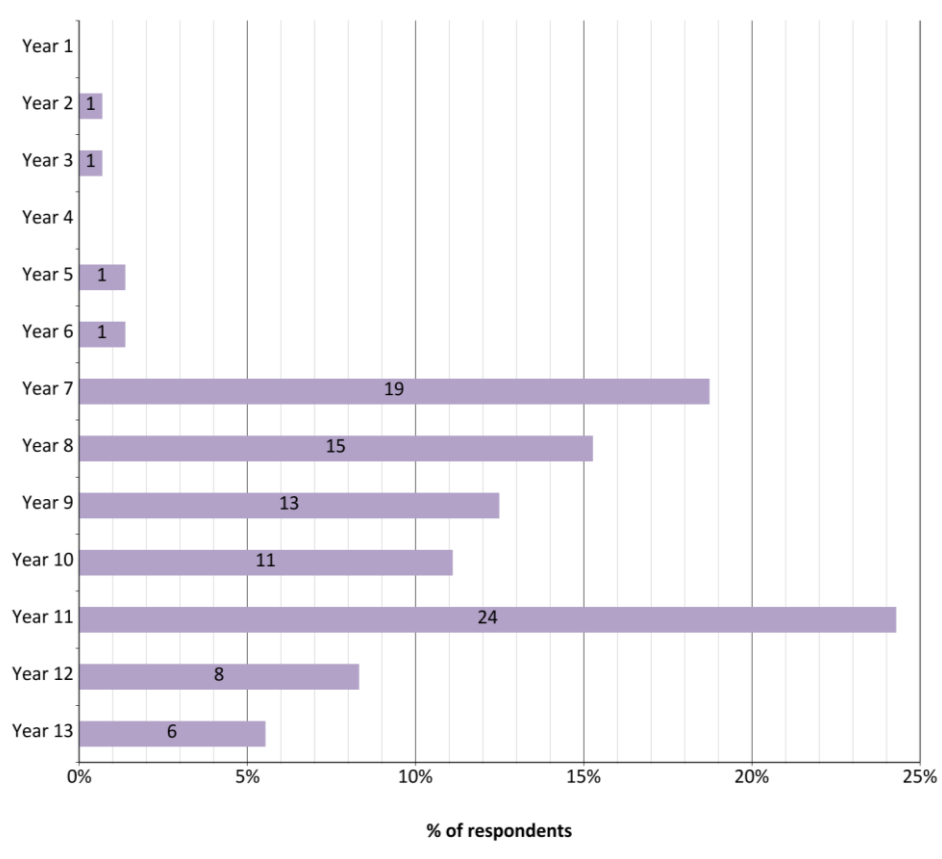
**Base: All Individuals (145)**

3.45 Half (50%) of respondents to the Young Person's consultation questionnaire were attending Brecon High School, while more than two fifths (44%) were attending Gwernyfed. Two respondents were home schooled, while two more responded from Clyro Church in Wales Primary School, accounting for 1% of responses. The consultation also received one response each from Maesydderwen Comprehensive School, Talgarth Community Primary School, Llanfaes Community Primary School, Crickhowell High School and Priory Church in Wales School.

3.46 Three individuals did not specify which school they attended.

### What year group are you currently in?

Figure 32: What year group are you currently in?

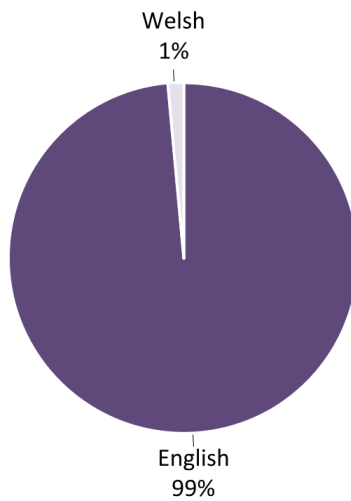


Base: All Individuals (144)

<sup>3.47</sup> The year group with the highest proportion of respondents was Year 11. Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) were Year 11 pupils. Almost a fifth (19%) were from Year 7, while 15% were from Year 8, and just more than 1 in 10 were in Year 9 (13%) and Year 10 (11%). Less than 1 in 10 (8%) respondents were from Year 12, while just over 1 in 20 (6%) were from Year 13 pupils.

*Are your lessons mainly in English or Welsh?*

**Figure 33: Are your lessons mainly in English or Welsh?**

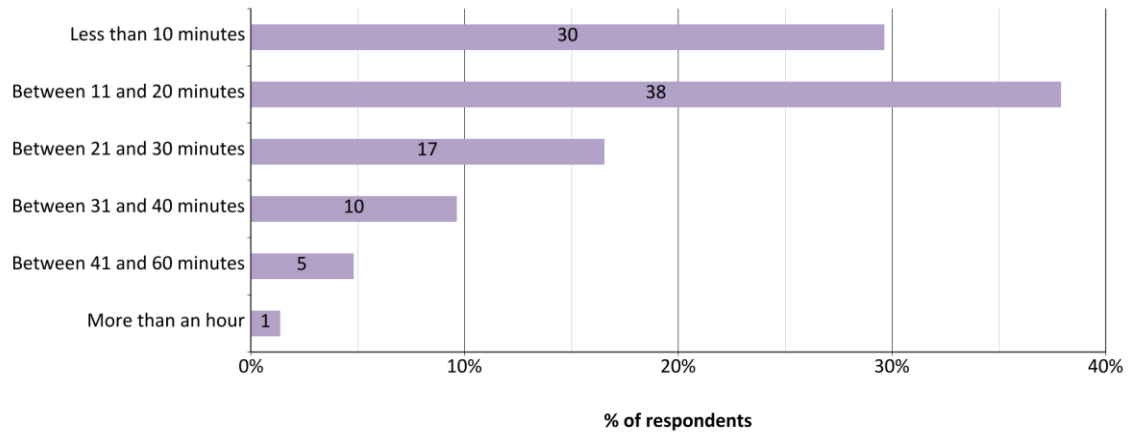


**Base: All Individuals (142)**

<sup>3.48</sup> Almost all respondents (99%) received their lessons mainly in English, while just 1% had lessons mainly in Welsh.

*How long does it normally take you to travel between school and home (one way)?*

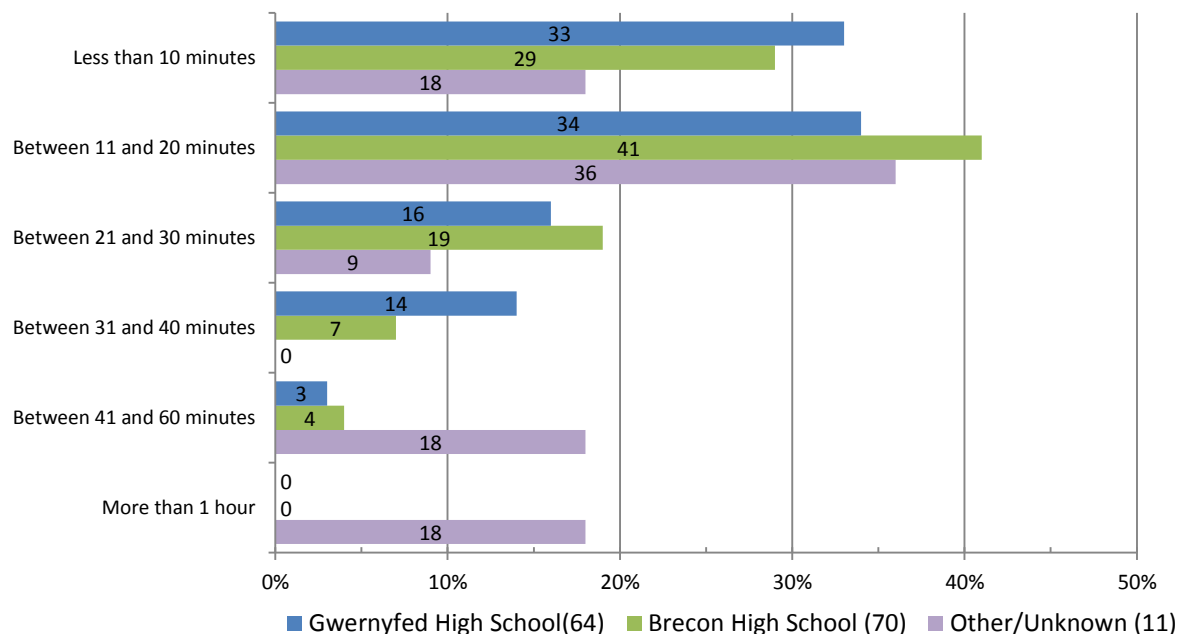
**Figure 34: How long does it normally take you to travel between school and home (one way)?**



**Base: All Individuals (145)**

3.49 Just less than a third (30%) of respondents' journeys between school and home are less than 10 minutes in duration, while more than two thirds (68%) are less than 20 minutes. More than four fifths (84%) of journeys are under half an hour, while just over 1 in 10 (14%) are between half an hour and an hour, and 1% of respondents spend more than 1 hour going to and from school (one way).

**Figure 35: How long does it normally take you to travel between school and home (one way)? Results by school**

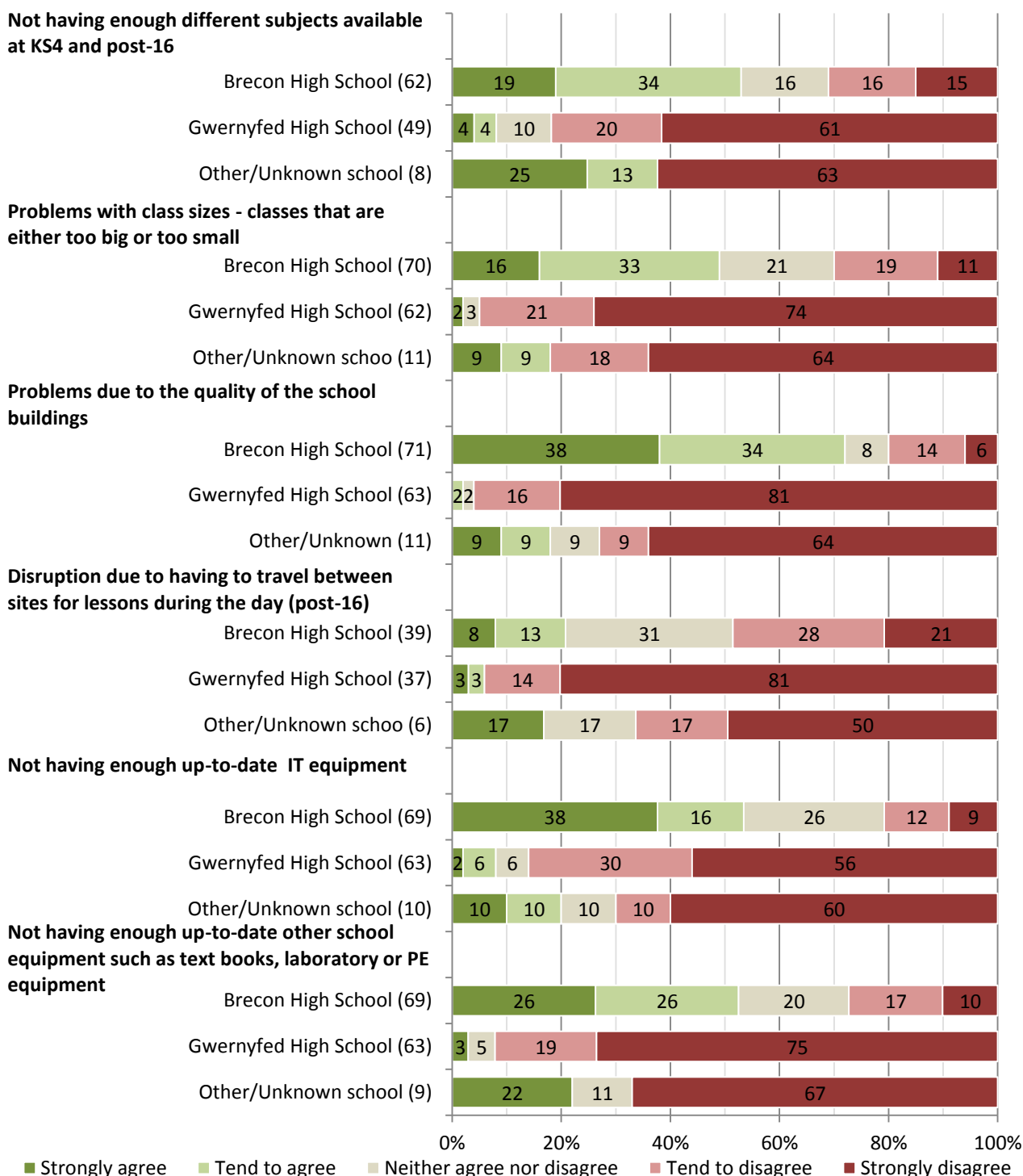


**Base: All Individuals (number of respondents shown in brackets)**

3.50 There was some variation in journey duration between the schools. More than four fifths (84%) of journeys are under half an hour, while just over 1 in 10 (14%) are between half an hour and an hour, and 1% of respondents spend more than 1 hour going to and from school (one way).

*Do you agree or disagree that your education is suffering because of any of the following?*

**Figure 36: Issues affecting education**



Base: All Individuals (number of respondents shown in brackets)

<sup>351</sup> The questions above were intended to identify whether students from Gwernyfed or Brecon High Schools felt that their education was suffering due to any of the issues identified by the Council. As a result, those who responded from feeder schools have been merged into the 'other/unknown' category for this question.

- 3.52 Fewer than 1 in 10 respondents (8%) who attend Gwernyfed High School agreed that their education is suffering from not having enough different subjects available at KS4 and post-16, while more than four fifths (82%) disagreed. Of respondents from Brecon High School, more than half (53%) agreed that their education is suffering because of a lack of different subjects available at KS4 and post-16, while less than a third (31%) disagreed.
- 3.53 Just 2% of students that attend Gwernyfed High School agreed that their education is suffering because class sizes are either too big or too small; almost all (95%) Gwernyfed students disagreed with this. Around half of Brecon High School students (49%) agreed that there are problems with class sizes, while less than a third (30%) disagreed that class sizes are a problem.
- 3.54 Similar to the proportion that agreed that there are problems with class sizes affecting education, only 2% of Gwernyfed students identified problems with the quality of school buildings that are causing their education to suffer. By contrast, almost three quarters (72%) of Brecon students agreed that their education is suffering because of problems due to the quality of school buildings.
- 3.55 When asked about disruption caused by having to travel between sites for lessons during the day, 1 in 20 (5%) Gwernyfed students agreed that their education is suffering because of this disruption. More than a fifth (21%) of students from Brecon agreed that disruption due to travelling between sites for lessons during the day causes their education to suffer.
- 3.56 Less than 1 in 10 (8%) Gwernyfed students agreed that their education is suffering from not having enough up-to-date IT equipment. Over half (54%) of Brecon students agreed that their education is suffering due to a lack of up-to-date IT equipment.
- 3.57 Again, only 2% of Gwernyfed students felt their education was suffering from not having enough up-to-date school equipment like text books, laboratory or PE equipment. This compared to more than half (52%) of Brecon students who felt that this was the case.

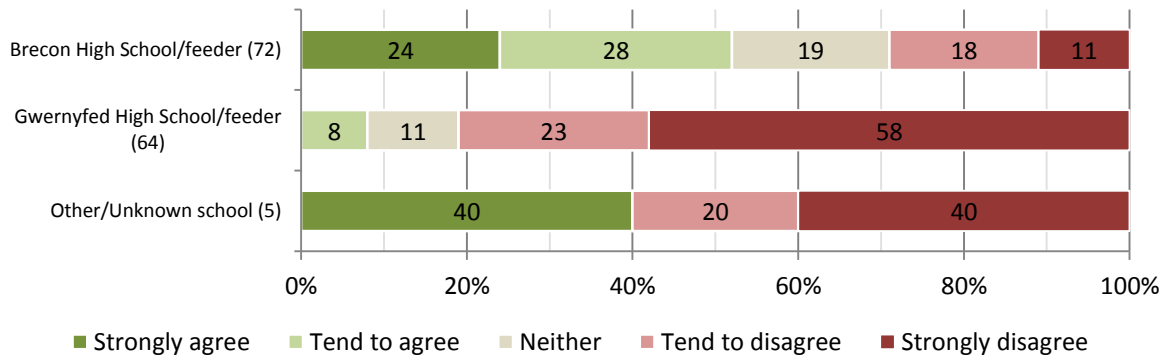


## English Medium Education

*In the context of the problems outlined on the previous pages, Powys Council believes a number of changes are needed.*

*To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues?*

**Figure 37: In the context of the problems outlined on the previous pages, Powys Council believes a number of changes are needed. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues?**



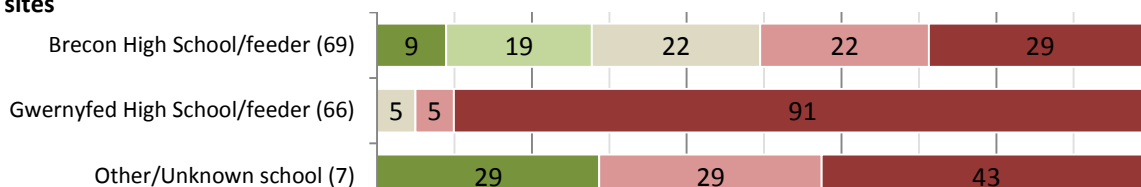
**Base: All Individuals (number of respondents shown in brackets)**

- <sup>3.58</sup> As in the main questionnaire, respondents to the Young Persons' questionnaire were given a short explanation of some of the general and post-16 specific issues that the Council had identified as affecting English medium secondary education in Brecon and Gwernyfed schools. Respondents were then asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the issues identified.
- <sup>3.59</sup> Less than 1 in 10 (8%) of Gwernyfed HS/feeder respondents felt that the Council is right to make changes in response to the issues with English medium education that it has identified. Meanwhile, 51% of Brecon High School and feeder school students agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues.

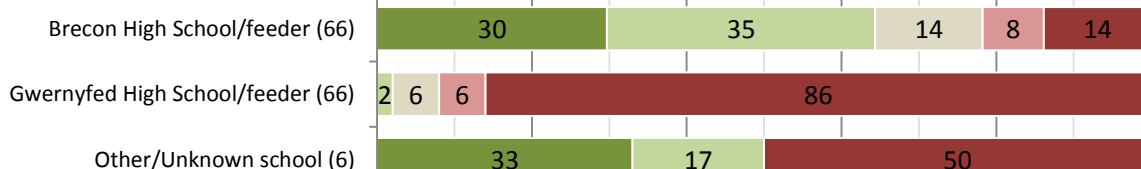
*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?*

Figure 38: Levels of agreement with various elements of the proposal

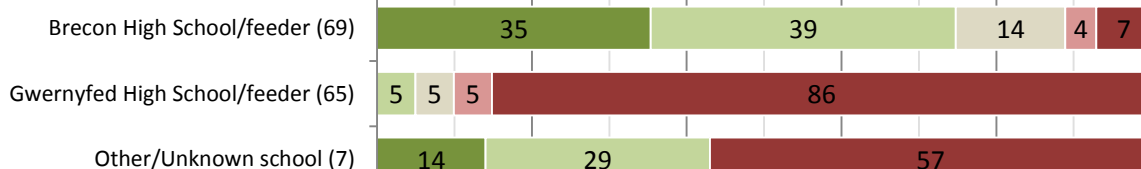
**To establish a new English-medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, which would continue to operate on the two existing sites**



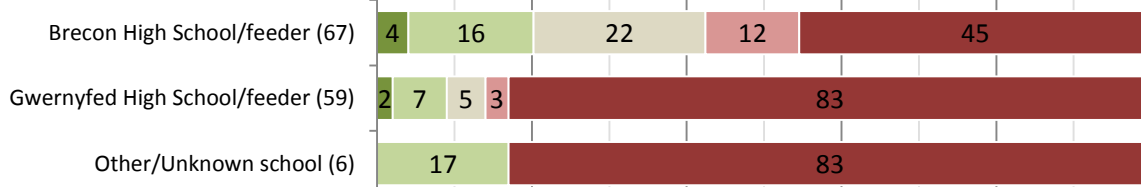
**To construct a new building for the proposed new secondary school, with an aim to open this in 2019/20**



**To locate the new school building in Brecon as it is a population centre and to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport**



**For all post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges**



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Base: All Individuals (number of respondents shown in brackets)

3.60 Respondents were provided with a description of the four elements of the Council’s proposal, as well as an explanation of how the Council believed the proposal would address the issues identified in the previous section. They were then asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the four elements of the proposal.

- 3.61 0% of Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed that a new English-medium secondary school should be established for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, while a large majority (95%) disagreed with this element of the proposal. More than a quarter (28%) of Brecon HS/feeder students agreed with the establishment of new English-medium school operating over the Brecon and Gwernyfed school sites to replace the existing schools.
- 3.62 The second element of the proposal is the construction of a new building for the proposed new secondary school to be opened in 2019/2020. Only 2% of Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed with this proposal, compared to more than 9 in 10 (92%) that disagreed.
- 3.63 While the proposal for opening a new school operating over both sites was only agreed with by 28% of Brecon HS/feeder students, the construction of a new building for the proposed new school was supported by two thirds (65%) of Brecon HS/feeder students.
- 3.64 1 in 20 (5%) Gwernyfed HS/feeder students supported the location of the proposed new school building in Brecon to minimise the number of pupils requiring school transport, while nearly three quarters (74%) of Brecon HS/feeder students supported locating the new school building in Brecon.
- 3.65 Less than 1 in 10 (8%) Gwernyfed HS/feeder students agreed with the provision of post-16 academic and vocational education to be provided by NPTC group of colleges. Somewhat higher levels of agreement were found among Brecon HS/feeder students, where more than a fifth (21%) of students supported the proposed provision of post-16 courses.

*If you disagree with any elements of the Proposal, please explain why.*

3.66 Respondents who expressed disagreement with any elements of the proposal were asked to explain why this was.

3.67 As responses differed between those who attended Brecon High School/feeder or Gwernyfed High School/feeder, these coded responses have been reported separately. The table below shows results for the 34 respondents from Brecon High School and associated feeder school pupils, from whose responses 93 separate comments have been coded according to the code frame.

**Figure 39: Reasons for opposition to the various elements of the proposal – Young people who go to Brecon HS/feeder**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools/don't want to lose our 6th Form	79%	27
Concerns over standards of education of NPTC in Brecon/lack of subject choice for Post-16 students/NPTC will not be accountable to anyone	35%	12
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	15%	5
Sixth Form students needed in schools to provide guidance/inspiration/role models for younger students/being in the same	15%	5
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel times/distances	12%	4
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	9%	3
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	9%	3
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	9%	3
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington, etc.	6%	2
Disagree with proposed changes to Sixth Form as pupils need continuity/need to remain in the same school from 11-18	6%	2
Disagree with proposals due to overcrowding of classes/there will be too many pupils per class	3%	1
Proposals are financially motivated/a "money grab" by the council	3%	1
Proposals will lead to fewer families remaining in the area/fewer new families will move in	3%	1
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	3%	1
Do not close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	3%	1
I do not want to go to Brecon High School (non-specific)	3%	1
Disagree with moving Brecon due to it negatively affecting people who live in the countryside/Gwernyfed specifically chosen due to countryside/want our children in a rural environment/don't want our children taught in town	3%	1
Concerns over provision of Sciences in NPTC i.e. insufficient number of laboratories/no offer of Chemistry	3%	1
Disagree that proposals will improve standards/proposals won't work	3%	1
'Other'	50%	17

3.68 Some of the most frequent comments which arose when Brecon HS/feeder school respondents were asked why they disagreed with the proposed changes related to post-16 education. Specifically, the most common comments expressed a desire for 6<sup>th</sup> form provision to be maintained. Some of these

comments pointed to the positive influence students in 6<sup>th</sup> form can have for younger students and the added value they can provide to schools.

*Without the older 6th form students, some of the productions, fundraising events and other activities would not happen as, at the moment, they organise or play an important role in the school activities.*

*It's very good and advantageous to have a 6th Form for the younger pupils in the school to look up to for help and guidance and they encourage the younger pupils to do well.*

- 3.69 Relatedly, some of these students voiced concerns over the standard of education at NPTC and more generally compared college education unfavourably to sixth form education.

*Post-16 provision is extremely important for a lot of pupils and the college is not up to standard.*

*I disagree that all post-16 education should be provided by NPTC because it would be better to continue to be taught by the same teachers from pre-16 because they will know my academic level and capability.*

- 3.70 Others felt that the proposed changes could negatively affect Welsh Speakers specifically, and conveyed the vital nature of Welsh provision.

*Welsh should be available for everyone*

*I feel the Welsh medium stream should be kept as it is a crucial part of our school environment.*

- 3.71 The table below shows results for the 59 respondents from Gwernyfed High School and associated feeder school pupils, from whose responses 361 separate comments have been coded according to the code frame.

**Figure 40: Reasons for opposition to the various elements of the proposal – Young people who go to Gwernyfed HS/feeder**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel times/distances	64%	38
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	49%	29
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	41%	24
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	36%	21
Proposals will negatively impact extra-curricular activities/clubs and groups will be limited	29%	17
Appreciate/agree that Brecon High School needs improvements, but not at the expense of Gwernyfed	25%	15
Gwernyfed is valuable for its sports facilities/community facilities	24%	14
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	22%	13
Concerns over standards of education of NPTC in Brecon/lack of subject choice for Post-16 students/NPTC will not be accountable to anyone	22%	13
Do not close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	22%	13
I do not want to go to Brecon High School (non-specific)	20%	12
Disagree with proposals due to overcrowding of classes/there will be too many	19%	11

pupils per class		
Disagree as proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community	17%	10
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington, etc.	15%	9
Proposals will negatively affect pupils' health and wellbeing (i.e. make them tired, unhappy, inattentive in school)	15%	9
Proposal is biased/flawed/decisions already made	12%	7
Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools/don't want to lose our 6th Form	12%	7
Concerns over provision of Sciences in NPTC i.e. insufficient number of laboratories/no offer of Chemistry	10%	6
Proposals negatively impact people living in Hay-on-Wye/distance will be too much	8%	5
Proposals are financially motivated/a 'money grab' by the council	7%	4
Proposals will negatively impact local businesses/local economy	7%	4
Proposals will lead to fewer families remaining in the area/fewer 'new families' will move in	7%	4
Powys County Council have promised schools for years and never delivered/have no faith that this situation will be any different	7%	4
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	7%	4
Gwernyfed is valuable for its beautiful/historic/listed buildings	7%	4
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel costs	5%	3
Proposals will not save enough money/savings will be minimal	5%	3
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	5%	3
Disagree with assertions that 600+ students is optimum for schools/believe smaller schools are better	5%	3
Disagree with proposals as they are just a ploy to write off Brecon's debts	5%	3
Disagree with removal of A-Level subjects from schools as it will negatively impact recruitment and retention of teachers	3%	2
Proposals will negatively affects rural area/rural communities (non-specific)	3%	2
Disagree with moving Brecon due to it negatively affecting people who live in the countryside/Gwernyfed specifically chosen due to countryside/want our children in a rural environment/don't want our children taught in town	3%	2
Any financial issues are due to the County Council themselves/Powys County Council are responsible for not intervening earlier	3%	2
Unhappy with Powys' lack of evidence for proposals i.e. being unable to answer questions in consultation meetings/figures in consultation document lacking anything to back them up	3%	2
Disagree with proposed changes to Sixth Form as pupils need continuity/need to remain in the same school from 11-18	2%	1
Sixth Form students needed in schools to provide guidance/inspiration/role models for younger students/being in the same school helps Sixth Formers to mature	2%	1
Disagree that proposals will improve standards/proposals won't work	2%	1
Disagree as we need to keep the Welsh language in Brecon/Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	2%	1
Proposals are not in line with the Future Generations Act (2015)	2%	1
'Other'	44%	26

3.72 One of the most frequently raised areas of disagreement involved the change in travel arrangements. 64% disagreed with the proposals due to increased travel times/distances.

*From school, it only takes about 5 minutes to get home, and then I have enough time to do all my jobs on the farm and fit my homework in.*

*My parents both work on the hay side of Gwernyfed, so if I missed the bus, I wouldn't make it to school.*

*If I went to Brecon, this would be 34 miles (17 miles one way) round trip for each after-school activity. This would add up to 170 miles per week, instead of 70, if I went to school in Brecon. This is not practical, due to the time and cost to me and my family, and what is it doing to the environment? My mum has to pick me up at the moment, as my dad has lost his driving licence due to health reasons. She would not be able to travel to Brecon there and back four times a week. I will lose approximately 2 hours a day of revision time, due to being on a bus. My exam results will deteriorate. My brother will be unable to attend after-school revision classes. Why don't they finish sorting out the primary schools before tackling the secondary schools? Why can't a new school at Brecon be built, combining mount street infants and juniors and Brecon secondary school? This could work.*

- 3.73 Gwernyfed HS/feeder students showed high levels of support for and satisfaction with the standards of their schooling. Around half (49%) of Gwernyfed HS and feeder students made comments which praised Gwernyfed High School, made reference to its financial stability in comparison to Brecon and/or opposed the closure of the school.

*It is simply ridiculous, Gwernyfed high school, a function, successful school with a high pass rate at both GCSE and a level, is being sacrificed for the complications and mistakes made at Brecon high. This proposal will solve short term problems but will create massive implications for the community and the education and welfare of the students. Powys is unrealistic and is only trying to reprimand the mess made by those in Brecon high school, nothing to do with Gwernyfed.*

*It doesn't make any sense to me that, under Powys' proposals, a school that has excellent results will have to close, and a school such as Brecon high school - which is in special measures and in massive debt (£1.4 million) - will be keeping a high school. Gwernyfed's standards of education are really good. For example, the GCSE results in 2014 showed 96% achieved 5 level A\*-C grades. Also in the same year, 100% of A-level students went to their first choice university. Is this the type of school that Powys should close? NPTC, who will be taking over A-levels, are only used to working in urban areas; it will struggle to provide all the choice of subjects that it says it will, because there won't be enough children going there. I don't want a lot of choice.*

- 3.74 Many respondents voiced concerns for the standards of education or learning under the proposals. There was a common belief that standards and performance would drop under the proposals due to the disruption caused by the changes, for example with teaching staff, and the provision for post-16 education.

*I am happy at Gwernyfed, have made friends, enjoy going to school and have a good relationship with teachers, all of which helps me to achieve good results. I do not want to spend year 10 and 11 in a school which is being closed down. A lot of my teachers would not stay on at the new school, nor would some of my friends. I do not believe I would get a good or consistent standard of teaching in this situation [...] I would like to have a sixth form in school, where the subjects I chose would be taught by teachers I know and trust, who also know me. NPTC might offer more subjects, but I have heard lots of stories about courses being changed and cancelled. Also they do not offer*

*the academic subjects I would expect to have at A-level, like chemistry. I heard they don't even have a lab that can be used. I know it is probably cheaper to have 25 people doing an A-level course in one place, rather than in two or three different places, but that doesn't mean that the students will achieve a better result – probably they will do worse. I thought this proposal was supposed to be about giving us better opportunities and better education, but it seems to me that it is just about what costs less.*

*It will be extremely disruptive to the pupils, and will interfere with their education. I also don't believe that a bigger school will provide education that is any better than smaller schools, and I don't believe that a larger school has any more reason not to be in special measures than smaller schools.*

*I believe the current teachers I have are very good and I would much prefer to have a slightly smaller variety of A-levels but taught to a higher quality allowing me to fulfil my potential.*

- 3.75 Nearly two fifths (36%) of Gwernyfed HS/feeder respondents to this question expressed support for the current provision of secondary education, expressing disagreement generally with the proposed changes.

*By impacting our education such a way, the proposal violates article 12 of the UNCRC and article 28. We have a right to be heard, and a right to education and pupils who would experience the move between sites would lose their right. Also, one of Powys's priorities is supposed to be the well-being of future generations act under which wales wants improved communities. Gwernyfed is a loving and interesting community.*

*I disagree with running the school on two sites as it will be disruptive for the pupils in the schools. The pupils who are doing GCSE's and A-levels would be disrupted due to changes that would have to be made.*

*I strongly disagree with all of the elements of the proposal, because it causes a massive concern with the pupils' education, in both high schools - particularly for young students who wish to study A Levels.*

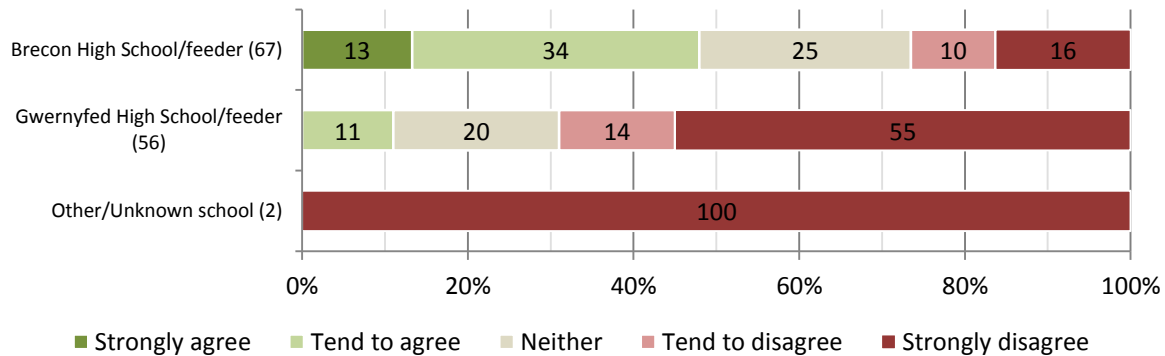


## Welsh Medium Education

*In the context of the problems outlined on the previous page, Powys Council believes a number of changes are needed.*

*To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues?*

**Figure 41: In the context of the problems outlined on the previous page, Powys Council believes a number of changes are needed. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these issues?**



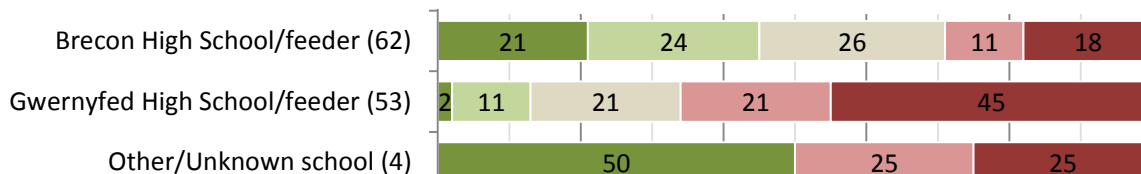
**Base: All Individuals (number of respondents shown in brackets)**

- <sup>3.76</sup> Just over 1 in 10 Gwernyfed HS/feeder students (11%) agreed that Powys County Council is right to make changes to respond to the issues they have identified with Welsh medium education, while around half (48%) of Brecon High School/feeder students agreed the Council is right to make changes.

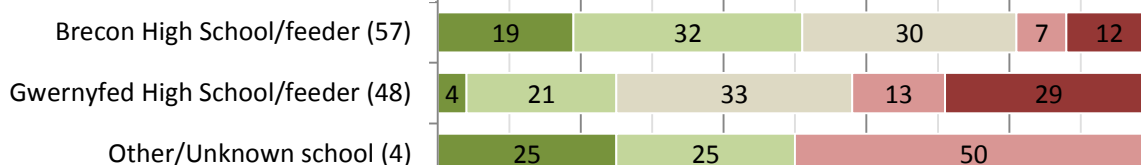
**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following elements of the Proposal?**

**Figure 42: Levels of agreement with various elements of the proposal**

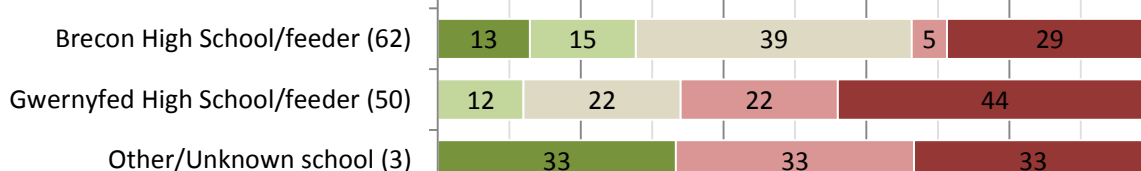
**To consolidate Welsh medium education and deliver it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys to enable a wider range of subjects and a better learning and linguistic experience**



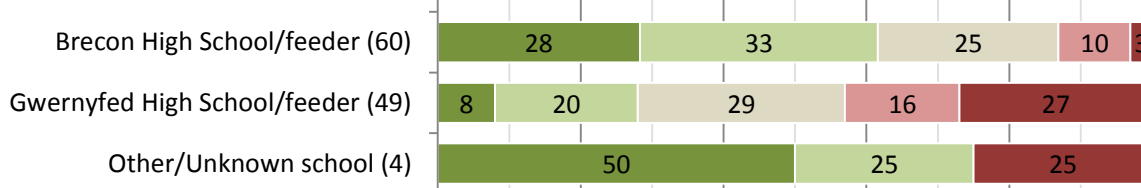
**To provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school**



**To locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school**



**To increase provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh**



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

**Base: All Individuals (number of respondents shown in brackets)**

3.77 When asked about the consolidation of Welsh medium education into a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys, just over 1 in 10 (13%) Gwernyfed High School/feeder students agreed, while more than two fifths (45%) of Brecon High School/feeder students agreed with this element of the proposal.

- 3.78 Around a quarter (25%) of Gwernyfed High School/feeder pupils agreed with the provision of Welsh medium education as part of a dual-stream school. This compares to around half (51%) of Brecon HS/feeder students who agreed with the provision of Welsh medium education in a dual-stream school.
- 3.79 The location of the Welsh medium stream school was the element of the proposal which received least support from both Gwernyfed and Brecon High School/feeder pupils. Just over 1 in 10 (12%) Gwernyfed HS/feeder pupils agreed that the Welsh medium stream should be located at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school, while just over a quarter (27%) of those in Brecon agreed with this proposed location.
- 3.80 The Welsh medium proposal which received the highest levels of support generally in the Young Persons consultation was to increase provision of subjects via the medium of Welsh. However, while this element of the proposal received support from more than three fifths (62%) of Brecon High School/feeder students, it only received support from less than a third (29%) of Gwernyfed High School/feeder students.

*If you disagree with any elements of the Proposal for Welsh medium education, please explain why.*

- 3.81 16 respondents from Brecon HS/associated feeder schools responded to this question explaining why they disagreed with elements of the proposal. From these responses, 35 comments were classified according to the code frame, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 43: Reasons for opposition to the various elements of the proposal – Young people who go to Brecon HS/feeder**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	50%	8
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	38%	6
Proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer	38%	6
Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	19%	3
Maintain current provision/disagree with any school closures/disagree with proposals	13%	2
Do not want Welsh provision to be moved to Builth (non-specific)	13%	2
Welsh should be available in all schools/to all pupils	6%	1
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	6%	1
Proposals will negatively affect the free time of students/time for extra-curricular activities	6%	1
'Other'	31%	5

- 3.82 8 of 16 respondents in Brecon HS/feeder schools wanted to keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School:

*The Welsh stream should be part of the school in Brecon. Welsh speaking students shouldn't have to travel to Builth. We should be encouraging the Welsh language in all our schools!*

- 3.83 6 respondents disagreed with the proposals due to longer travel times/increased travel costs.

*I disagree with the proposal to close the Welsh Stream because it will mean travelling a long distance. It will reduce the number of people speaking Welsh in Brecon. Ysgol y Bannau will not have enough pupils and could close.*

- 3.84 6 respondents argued that the proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh, and that Welsh as a language will suffer as a consequence.

*Better provision for Welsh medium students is clearly necessary, but doing this as a part of Brecon High School would be better for all of the students involved. It makes no sense to send all of the Welsh medium children from Ysgol-Y-Bannau all the way to Builth High School for an education system that should be possible to provide at Brecon, which is just across the road. Also, as part of a potential new build at Brecon, a bigger, better Welsh medium stream would be far easier, with more teachers and better facilities than at the moment, therefore making Welsh speaking students more welcome and even giving more students from further away, who have had to move as far as Ystalafera of change to learning in English, an opportunity to continue their education in a more sensible and practical way.*

- 3.85 From the 27 responses from Gwernyfed HS/associated feeder schools, 55 comments were classified according to the code frame, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 44: Reasons for opposition to the various elements of the proposal – Young people who go to Gwernyfed HS/feeder**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	33%	9
Maintain current provision/disagree with any school closures/disagree with proposals	26%	7
Proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer	19%	5
Disagree with being taught just in Welsh/don't want to be taught in Welsh	15%	4
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	15%	4
Do not want Welsh provision to be moved to Builth (non-specific)	11%	3
Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	7%	2
English is most pupils first language/most people need to speak English	4%	1
Pupils are entitled to a school within their local community	4%	1
Welsh should be available in all schools/to all pupils	4%	1
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	4%	1
Proposals will negatively affect pupils who go on to study at University/higher levels	4%	1
'Other'	59%	16

- 3.86 9 of 27 respondents who go to Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools are concerned that the proposed changes to Welsh medium education will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs.

*Builth is too far to travel for a lot of students in Gwernyfed area.*

*I believe the Welsh medium is important and is vital to those keeping the language alive - unfortunately, I would not be educated in the Welsh medium. However, having a single site at Builth wells high school will cause an increase in travel costs for those scattered around the Brecon area. I*

*am aware Ystalyfera is close, but for the students at Brecon being involved in this proposal, surely they would attend Builth?*

3.87 7 respondents want the Council to 'maintain current provision/disagree with any school closures/disagree with proposals'. For example:

*I believe that if you, the council are so hell-bent on building a school on the Brecon site, that you should offer a choice of whether the pupils would like to learn in Welsh or English.*

3.88 5 respondents fear that the proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer.

*Welsh speakers should have same chance as English speakers. It's only fair. Why can't it happen in the same school? just spend more money on teachers instead of stupid things like this consultation.*

3.89 However, 4 respondents 'disagree with being taught just in Welsh/don't want to be taught in Welsh'.

*Not many people enjoy doing Welsh therefore pupils will not want to go*

3.90 4 respondents from Gwernyfed HS/feeder schools stated that they want to keep Welsh provision at Brecon.

*The Welsh medium stream has been at Brecon High School for years and should not be removed as students will not be able to travel from Brecon to Builth every day. Ysgol Y Bannau is just across the road, and it makes sense for students from this primary school to move into the Welsh stream in Brecon High. Some students will be forced to give up the language after studying it for years, meaning less qualifications in the long run.*

## Equalities

*Are there any positive or negative impacts relating to equalities that you believe that the County Council should take into account in the decision making process?  
If so, are you able to provide any supporting evidence and suggest any ways to reduce or remove any potential negative impact and increase any positive impact?*

- 3.91 Due to the low number of responses to this question, all coded responses to this question from schools have been reported combined. Only 30 respondents to the Young Persons questionnaire gave a response when asked whether they believe that there are any positive or negative impacts relating to equalities that the Council should take into account in the decision making process.
- 3.92 Comments which did not relate to the question have been separated into an 'other/comments not relating to equalities' category.

Figure 45: Impacts relating to equalities – All coded responses

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Generally disagree with proposals/maintain current provision	23%	7
Proposals will result in pupils losing friends/negative impact on social life	13%	4
Proposals will lead to increased travel times/costs	13%	4
Proposals will negatively impact disabled children/proposals need to take disabled children into account	7%	2
Children have the right to quality education in their local area i.e. in the language they wish to learn	7%	2
Proposals will segregate societies/divide communities	7%	2
Proposals will negatively impact Welsh Speakers	3%	1
Proposals will result in pupils losing time with family/negative impact on home life	3%	1
Schools should be equal for English and Welsh speakers/shouldn't be biased towards English or Welsh speakers	3%	1
'Other/comments not relating to equalities'	80%	24

- 3.93 The most frequent coded responses refer generally to disagreement with the proposals or express a desire to maintain current levels of provision.

*Don't close the school!*

- 3.94 Many of the remaining comments about equalities expressed concerns more generally that bullying would result as a negative consequence of other equalities issues that they had raised. These concerns were often focussed on the mixing of children from different schools and the increase in pupil numbers.

*I would no longer be able to do after school extracurricular activities. The cultural difference between town kids and country kids would increase bullying.*

*With more children in a school, discrimination against others will be harder to control, and more pupils introduces a wider diversity of races/beliefs/sexual orientations which, in turn, opens up a gateway for bullying. I know we all like to think it won't happen but some children are careless, and do not know any better.*

- 3.95 Indeed, one respondent felt that the size of the new school could also impact on bullying.

*If people want to make the school bigger, there is a larger risk of bullying and discrimination towards different people. The bigger the school the more likely this is to happen.*

<sup>3.96</sup> 4 of the 30 respondents also raised the impact of increased travel times and costs to those living further from the school.

*I have a human right to attend a local school and not spend 3hrs a day on a bus*

*The proposed changes would require me to spend approximately one hour each way, so this will add two hours to a school day. It will also mean that I am unable to participate in any after school clubs as I wouldn't be able to get home. I am currently studying for my GCSE's and a number of my teachers kindly provide after school revision, I would not be able to attend if this were provided in Brecon.*

## Further Comments

<sup>3.97</sup> 18 respondents from the Young Persons' consultation gave further comments about the proposals. From these responses, 34 comments have been coded, the details of which are outlined below.

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	29%	6
Maintain 6th Form/don't want to lose our 6th Form	19%	4
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	14%	3
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	14%	3
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	10%	2
Agree with proposals for new school building/want a new school to be built	10%	2
Don't close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	10%	2
Concerns about standards of education of NPTC Brecon/lack of accountability to students from NPTC	10%	2
Disagree as proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community	10%	2
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	10%	2
Appreciate/agree that Brecon High School needs improvements, but not at the expense of Gwernyfed	5%	1
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	5%	1
Decisions are being made by councillors not local to the area/who do not understand the issues or areas involved i.e. cabinet is mostly from North Powys	5%	1
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	5%	1
Gwernyfed is valuable for its sports facilities/community facilities	5%	1
Proposals will negatively affect pupils' health and wellbeing (i.e. make them tired, unhappy, inattentive in school)	5%	1
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington, etc.	5%	1
Proposals will lead to reduced free time/affect pupils home lives/time for after school activities/extra-curricular activities	5%	1
Other	67%	14

- 3.98 6 of the 18 respondents expressed a preference for the current provision of schools or otherwise disagreed with the proposals.

*You messed around with all of my key stage 2 by closing my primary school, and promising new schools that never happened. Now you want to do the same to my high school time. It simply isn't fair or right.*

*I am disgusted with the behaviour of the council. I am not prepared for my education to be affected by the decisions they make. The teachers at Gwernyfed are excellent, they understand the way we learn and help us develop our learning by helping us in the way that we understand. If Gwernyfed was to close then I would not go to Brecon sixth form, I would go to Hereford or Merthyr college, as they can guarantee my education. I know that the majority of my year would make the same decision as we had a discussion in class and we all decided that Brecon college will not fulfil our potential. My sister has been in Gwernyfed since year 7 and has successfully finished school with 1 A and 11 A stars and 2 distinctions in GCSE's and 1 B, 2 A stars and 1 A in A level. She is now in York University studying Chemistry. She would not have been able to have achieved those results without the supportive nature of the teachers. I did not choose to come to Gwernyfed to then be merged with a school I clearly avoided when I made my decision of what High school to go to.*

- 3.99 A further 4 respondents were concerned specifically with the provision of 6<sup>th</sup> form education.

*If there was no 6th form in Brecon high school, I would not be able to be Head girl. Also I want to do science A-levels and I'm worried that the college would not do them.*

*Brecon needs a sixth form that isn't NPTC - when I looked at going there, they were unreliable and quite frankly useless in providing information about courses and exactly what subjects were on offer. A sixth form in a high school gives students more of a familiar surroundings and enables a better education. A massive "super school" will disrupt students' education, as there will be less one-on-one teaching, and teachers will have more workload - therefore education will decrease in standard. Gwernyfed should not be brought into this at all, as that is the high school for the Three Cocks area and should have nothing to do with Brecon's closure.*



## Findings of the Primary Consultation Questionnaire

<sup>3.100</sup> In addition to the Main and Young Persons' consultation questionnaires, a questionnaire was developed with simplified questions and explanations that were more appropriate for Primary School children.

**Table 4: Socio-demographic characteristics for the primary consultation questionnaire**  
(Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding)

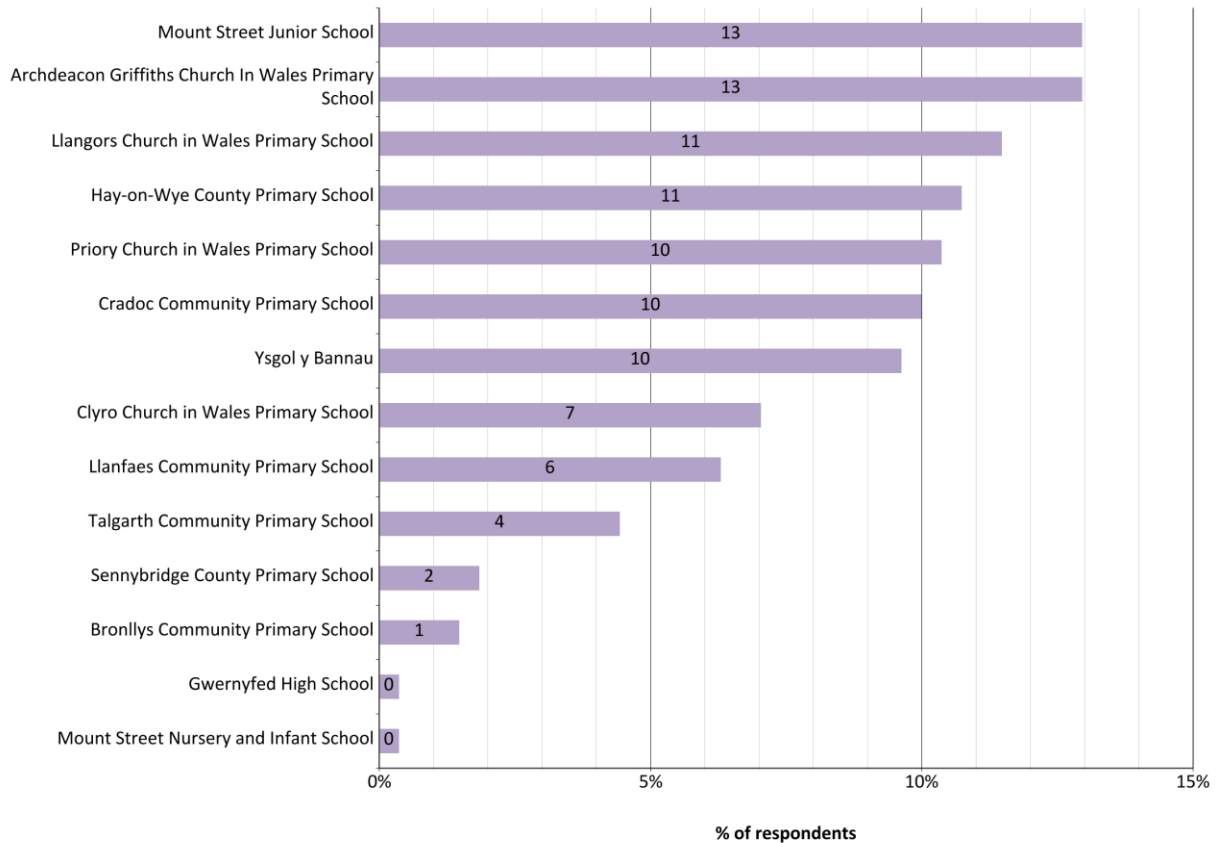
	Characteristic	All Responses	
		Number of Responses	% of Valid Responses
<b>BY KEY STAGE</b>	Nursery/reception	16	6.0%
	Key Stage 1	34	12.7%
	Key Stage 2	210	78.4%
	Key Stage 3	0	0.0%
	Key Stage 4	1	0.4%
	Multiple	7	2.6%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	6	-
<b>BY GENDER</b>	Male	120	46.0%
	Female	141	54.0%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	13	-
<b>BY ETHNIC GROUP</b>	White	247	96.9%
	Asian or Asian British	6	2.4%
	Any other ethnic group	2	0.8%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	19	-
<b>BY DISABILITY</b>	With disability	5	1.9%
	No disability	252	98.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	17	-
<b>BY SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS</b>	With SEN	10	3.9%
	No SEN	246	96.1%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	18	-
<b>BY ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE FREE SCHOOL MEALS</b>	Eligible to receive free school meals	28	11.0%
	Not eligible to receive free school meals	227	89.0%
	<b>Total valid responses</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
	<i>Not known</i>	19	-

<sup>3.101</sup> It is worth noting that many of the responses to the primary consultation questionnaire appear to have been completed by parents of primary school children. Some of these were giving answers on behalf of their primary school age child, but others voiced their own concerns as parents. ORS identified as many as 35 responses where this appeared to be the case, although in reality this number may be higher. These responses have been included in the analysis.

## About Your Education

*Which school do you currently go to?*

**Figure 46: Which school do you currently go to?**



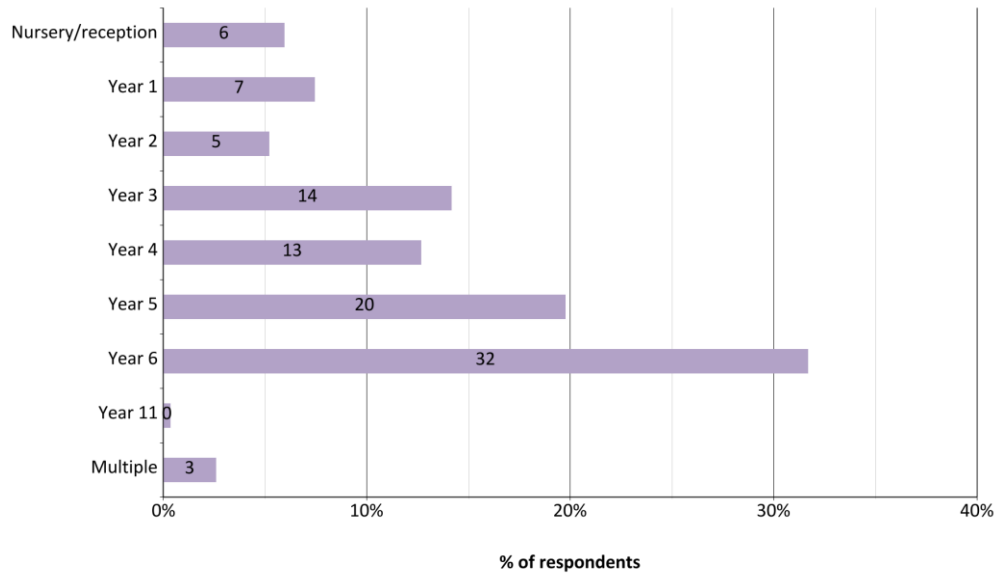
**Base: All Individuals (270)**

<sup>3.102</sup> Around 1 in 10 respondents currently attend Mount Street Junior School (13%), Archdeacon Griffiths Church in Wales Primary (13%), Llangors Church in Wales Primary (11%), Hay-on-Wye County Primary (11%), Priory Church in Wales Primary (10%), Cradoc Community Primary (10%) and Ysgol y Bannau (10%). Less than 1 in 10 pupils attend Clyro Church in Wales Primary (7%), Llanfaes Community Primary (6%) and Talgarth Community Primary (4%). ORS also received 5 responses from Sennybridge County Primary (2%), 4 responses from Bronllys Community Primary (1%), and 1 respondent each from Gwernyfed High and Mount Street Nursery and Infant School.

<sup>3.103</sup> 4 individuals did not answer this question.

### What year group are you currently in?

Figure 47: What year group are you currently in?

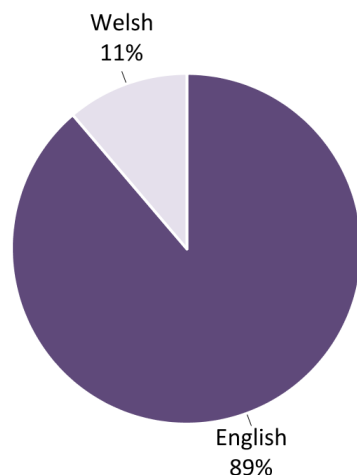


Base: All Individuals (268)

- 3.104 Almost a third (32%) of respondents are currently in Year 6, while 2 in 10 (20%) are in Year 5. More than 1 in 10 respondents are in Years 3 (14%) and 4 (13%), and less than 1 in 10 are in Years 1 (7%) and 2 (5%) or in nursery/reception (6%).
- 3.105 1 student in Year 11 responded to the primary consultation, while 7 respondents submitted multiple year groups. This may have been due to parents completing the questionnaire on behalf of multiple children, or students writing down their current year group as well as the year group they were moving into. 6 respondents did not answer this question.

### Are your lessons mainly in English or Welsh?

Figure 48: Are your lessons mainly in English or Welsh?

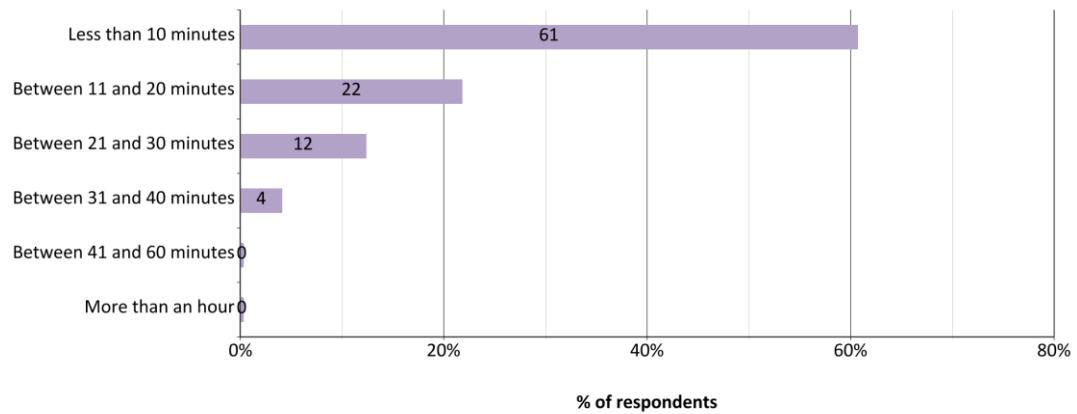


Base: All Individuals (267)

3.106 Almost 9 in 10 (89%) respondents are taught mainly in English, while 11% are taught mainly in Welsh.

*How long does it normally take you to travel between school and home (one way)?*

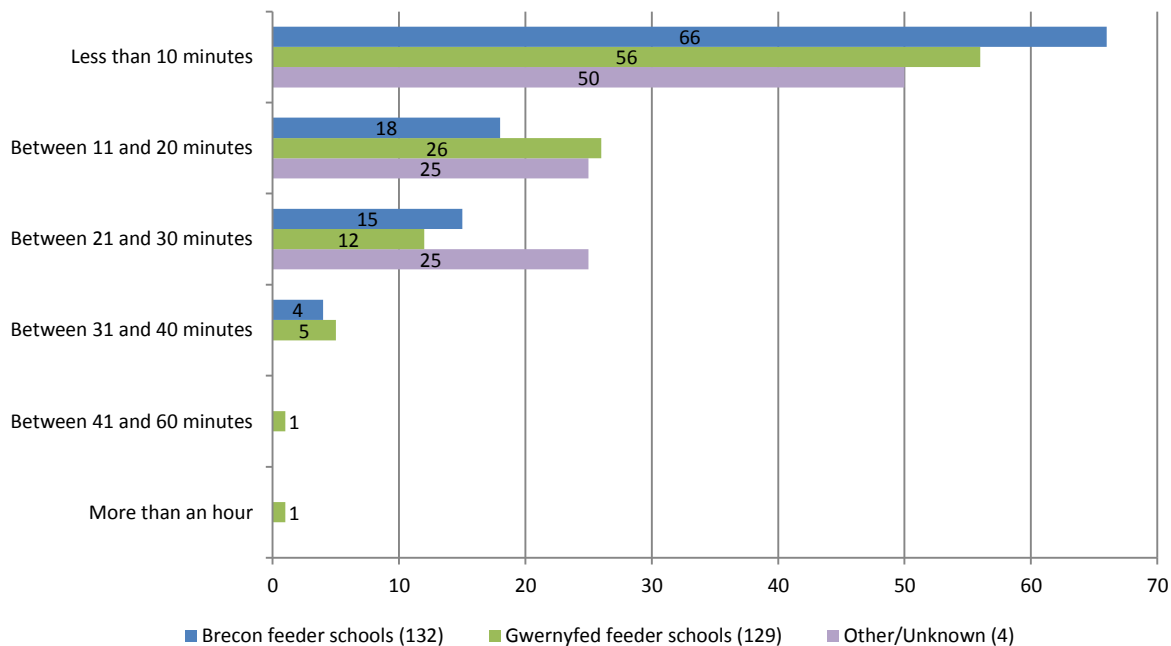
Figure 49: How long does it normally take you to travel between school and home (one way)?



Base: All Individuals (265)

3.107 Around three fifths (61%) of respondents said that it takes them less than 10 minutes to travel between school and home (one way). More than four fifths (83%) of respondents travel for less than 20 minutes. 1 in 10 (12%) travel for between 21 and 30 minutes, and just 4% of respondents travel for between 31 and 40 minutes. Only 1% of respondents travelled for more than 40 minutes between school and home (one way).

Figure 50: How long does it normally take you to travel between school and home (one way)? Results by school type



Base: All Respondents (number of respondents shown in brackets)

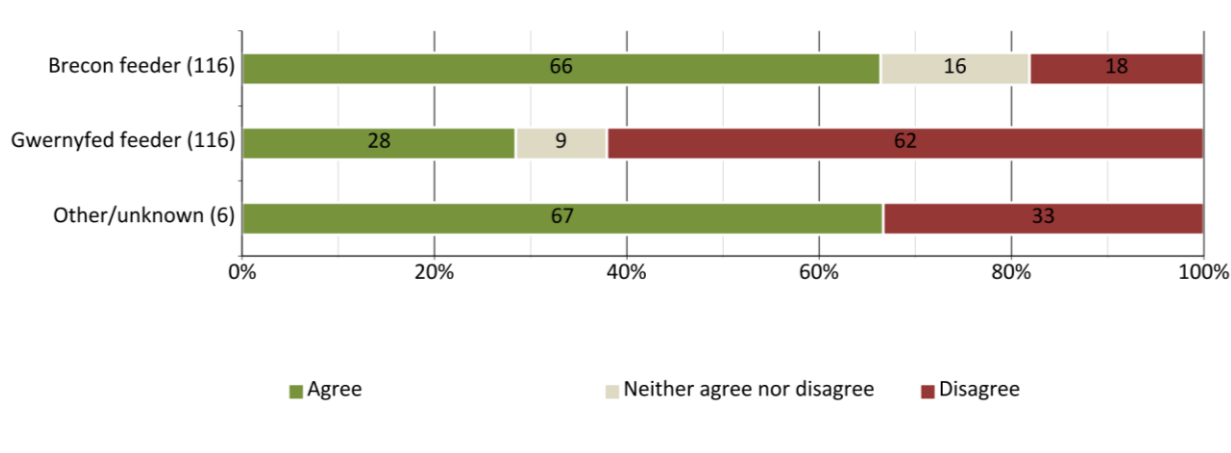
3.108 Around two thirds of respondents in Gwernyfed (66%) and over half of those in Brecon (56%) feeder schools travel for less than 10 minutes to/from school (one way).

## English Medium Education

*Thinking about the problems on the previous page, the Council believes a number of changes are needed.*

*Do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these problems?*

Figure 51: Do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these problems?



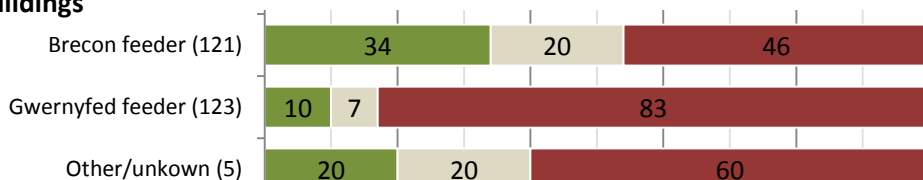
Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

- 3.109 Respondents were given a short list of current problems with English education in Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools. Respondents were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed that Powys County Council is right to make changes to respond to these problems.
- 3.110 Due to differences in responses between pupils attending schools which act as feeder schools to Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools, these results have been reported separately for comparison. 6 responses to the primary school consultation either did not fall into these categories or did not specify which school they attended, and so have also been reported separately into an 'other/unknown' category. Due to the low level of response from this 'other/unknown' category, these results should be treated with caution, and these have been reported as numbers, rather than percentages, in the text.
- 3.111 Two thirds (66%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed while less than 3 in 10 (28%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools agreed.
- 3.112 More than 6 in 10 (62%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed that the council is right to make changes to respond to the problems listed; only 2 in 10 (18%) of those from Brecon feeder schools disagreed.
- 3.113 4 of the 6 respondents from other or unknown schools agreed.

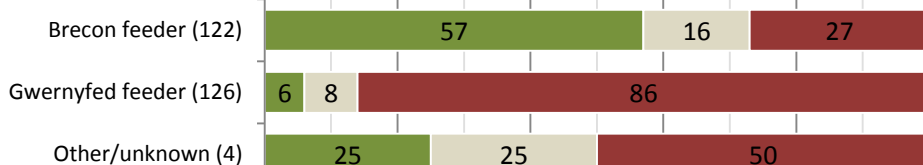
*Do you agree or disagree with the following proposed changes?*

**Figure 52: Do you agree or disagree with the following proposed changes?**

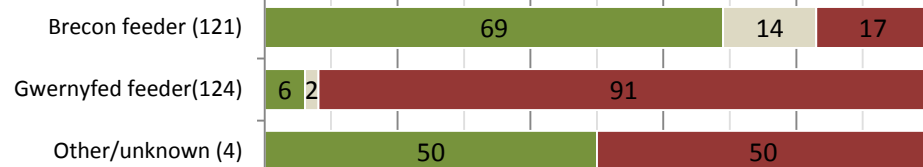
**To create a new English-only secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, which would continue to operate from the two existing school buildings**



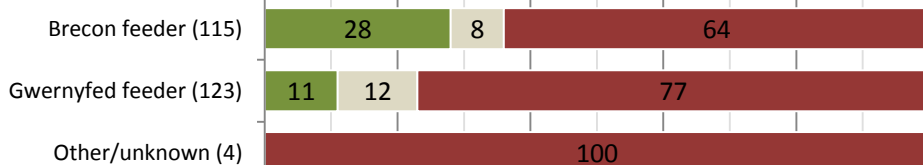
**To construct a new building for the proposed new secondary school, with an aim to open this in 2019/20**



**To locate the new school building in Brecon to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport**



**For 16+ education to be provided by the college in Brecon**



■ Agree      ■ Neither agree nor disagree      ■ Disagree

**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

<sup>3.114</sup> Respondents were provided with a description of the four proposed changes, as well as an explanation of how the Council believed these would address the issues they had identified. Respondents were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed with these 4 elements of the proposal.

<sup>3.115</sup> Results are described overleaf.

- 3.116 Respondents from Brecon feeder schools are more likely to have agreed with each of the proposed changes than those from Gwernyfed feeder schools. More than three quarters of respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed with all elements of the proposal.
- 3.117 A third (34%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to establish a new 11-16 English-only school to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed. Only 1 in 10 (10%) of respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools agreed with the proposed changes.
- 3.118 8 in 10 (83%) Gwernyfed feeder respondents disagreed with this proposed change, along with nearly half (46%) of Brecon feeder respondents (46%).
- 3.119 While over half (57%) Brecon feeder respondents agreed with the proposed change to construct a new building for the proposed new school, only 6% of Gwernyfed feeder respondents agreed.
- 3.120 Nearly 9 in 10 (86%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed with this proposed change, and over a quarter (27%) of Brecon feeder respondent disagreed also.
- 3.121 More than two thirds (69%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to locate the new school building in Brecon to minimise the overall number of pupils that require school transport. Only 6% of Gwernyfed feeder respondents agreed.
- 3.122 Almost all (91%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed, compared with less a fifth (17%) of those from Brecon feeder schools.
- 3.123 The proposed change of 16+ education being provided by the college in Brecon was opposed by at around two thirds (64%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools, and more than three quarters (77%) of those from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed.
- 3.124 More than a quarter (28%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with this proposed change, and only around 1 in 10 (11%) of respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools agreed with post 16 education being provided at the college in Brecon.

*If you disagree with any of the proposed changes, please explain why.*

3.125 Respondents who expressed disagreement with the proposed changes were asked to explain why this was.

3.126 As responses differed between those who attended Brecon feeder or Gwernyfed feeder schools, these coded responses have been reported separately. The results below show the 69 respondents from Brecon feeder schools who answered this question, from which 189 different comments have been classified according to the code frame.

**Figure 53: Reasons for opposition to the proposed changes (Brecon feeder schools)**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools/don't want to lose our 6th Form	36%	25
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	35%	24
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	19%	13
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	12%	8
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel times/distances	10%	7
Gwernyfed is valuable for its sports facilities/community facilities	10%	7
Proposals will not save enough money/savings will be minimal	9%	6
Proposal is biased/flawed/decisions already made	9%	6
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	9%	6
Concerns over standards of education of NPTC in Brecon/lack of subject choice for Post-16 students/NPTC will not be accountable to anyone	9%	6
Disagree with proposals due to overcrowding of classes/there will be too many pupils per class	7%	5
Proposals are financially motivated/a money grab by the council	7%	5
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	7%	5
Proposals will negatively impact extra-curricular activities/clubs and groups will be limited	6%	4
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington etc.	4%	3
Do not close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	4%	3
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	3%	2
Proposals will lead to fewer families remaining in the area/fewer new families will move in	3%	2
Appreciate/agree that Brecon High School needs improvements, but not at the expense of Gwernyfed	3%	2
I do not want to go to Brecon High School (non-specific)	3%	2
Disagree with assertions that 600+ students is optimum for schools/believe smaller schools are better	3%	2
Proposals will negatively impact local businesses/local economy	1%	1
Powys County Council have promised schools for years and never delivered/have no faith that this situation will be any different	1%	1
Disagree as proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community	1%	1
Disagree with proposed changes to Sixth Form as pupils need continuity/need to	1%	1



remain in the same school from 11-18		
Gwernyfed is valuable for its beautiful/historic/listed buildings	1%	1
Disagree as we need to keep the Welsh language in Brecon/Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	1%	1
Other	57%	39

3.127 Some of the most frequent responses, made by more than a third of respondents (36%) in Brecon feeder schools, concerned the loss of 6<sup>th</sup> form provision. Examples of such comments include:

*I want to stay in school, not go to a college.*

*A Levels should be taught in schools with highly qualified teachers. I do not believe that a Further education College will provide the same level of teaching or accountability as it is privately owned.*

*I would rather stay in the same school to do everything, I don't want to go anywhere else to do my a-levels.*

3.128 More than a third (35%) of respondents said that they 'Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools'. Typical examples of comments include:

*I think both schools should just be kept as they are.*

*I want to remain in Brecon, and continue to learn Welsh.*

*I feel that the money would be better spent in building a new school in Brecon and keeping the 2 schools as they are.*

3.129 Around a fifth (19%) respondents said that the proposals will 'negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools'. For example:

*I don't want to travel nearly 2 hours every day so I can continue to learn in Welsh!*

*My next school must talk to me in Welsh. It must be in Aberhonddu town [Brecon]. I don't want to go to Builth.*

3.130 Around 1 in 10 respondents (12%) in Brecon feeder schools showed support for the current provision at Gwernyfed High school. Typical examples of such comments include:

*I want to go to school in Gwernyfed, I had a look around the school when my brother went for an open evening and it looks like a really good school. I like the idea of a smaller high school as it won't be as scary a move from primary to high school.*

<sup>3.131</sup> Of the 95 respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools who answered this question, 383 different comments have been classified, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 54: Reasons for opposition to the proposed changes (Gwernyfed feeder schools)**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel times/distances	64%	61
Gwernyfed is a good school/is financially stable/and should not be closed	37%	35
I do not want to go to Brecon High School (non-specific)	33%	31
Do not close Gwernyfed school/keep Gwernyfed open	31%	29
Proposals will negatively impact extra-curricular activities/clubs and groups will be limited	26%	25
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	20%	19
Proposals will result in fewer students attending Powys schools/more students will go elsewhere for their education i.e. to England/Kington etc.	20%	19
Disagree with proposals/schools are fine as they are/need to maintain current provision of schools	17%	16
Gwernyfed is valuable for its sports facilities/community facilities	14%	13
Sixth Forms should stay at all High Schools/don't want to lose our 6th Form	13%	12
Disagree with proposals due to overcrowding of classes/there will be too many pupils per class	9%	9
Appreciate/agree that Brecon High School needs improvements, but not at the expense of Gwernyfed	9%	9
Disagree as proposals will negatively affect the community/schools are a vital part of the community	9%	9
Proposals will result in a lower standard of education/learning (non-specific)	6%	6
Proposals will lead to fewer families remaining in the area/fewer new families will move in	6%	6
Concerns over standards of education of NPTC in Brecon/lack of subject choice for Post-16 students/NPTC will not be accountable to anyone	5%	5
Invest money into current facilities/spend the money for new sites on current school buildings	5%	5
Gwernyfed is valuable for its beautiful/historic/listed buildings	4%	4
Proposal is biased/flawed/decisions already made	3%	3
Negatively affect Welsh Speakers/Welsh as a language/Welsh needs to be taught in schools	3%	3
Disagree with proposals due to increased travel costs	2%	2
Proposals are financially motivated/a money grab by the council	2%	2
Proposals will negatively impact local businesses/local economy	2%	2
Powys County Council have promised schools for years and never delivered/have no faith that this situation will be any different	2%	2
Proposals negatively impact people living in Hay-on-Wye/distance will be too much	2%	2
Proposals will negatively affects rural area/rural communities (non-specific)	2%	2
Disagree with moving Brecon due to it negatively affecting people who live in the countryside/Gwernyfed specifically chosen due to countryside/want our children in a rural environment/don't want our children taught in town	2%	2
Proposals will not save enough money/savings will be minimal	1%	1
Disagree with proposed changes to Sixth Form as pupils need continuity/need to remain in the same school from 11-18	1%	1
Proposals will negatively affect pupils' health and wellbeing (i.e. make them tired, unhappy, inattentive in school)	1%	1
Unhappy with Powys' lack of evidence for proposals i.e. being unable to answer	1%	1

questions in consultation meetings/figures in consultation document lacking anything to back them up		
Other	41%	39

3.132 Nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents in Gwernyfed feeder schools said that they ‘disagree with proposals due to increased travel times/distances’. For example:

*Making primary school children travel to a high school at least 10+ miles away with a journey lasting at least 30-45 minutes at the beginning and end of each day will have a detrimental effect on their ability to concentrate on their learning. They will certainly be at a disadvantage compared to other children living locally.*

*I think Brecon is too far from Talgarth to travel every day.*

3.133 Nearly two fifths (37%) of respondents praised Gwernyfed High School and/or showed opposition to its closure.

*Gwernyfed is doing perfectly fine in debts and results.*

*Gwernyfed is a brilliant school and they are doing well on their own.*

*I think Gwernyfed is a good school. I would like to go there.*

3.134 A third (33%) of respondents simply expressed that they did not want to go to Brecon High School.

*I don't want to go to Brecon because I want to go to the same school that my brother, my sister, and my mum went to.*

*My friends don't live near Brecon and I don't want to be in Brecon.*

3.135 Nearly a third (31%) of respondents in Gwernyfed feeder schools state that they want to keep Gwernyfed High School open.

*Why can't Gwernyfed stay open and Brecon School have a new building on its own?*

*I go to gymnastics every night on a Monday and I wouldn't be able to do it anywhere else. So please don't shut it down!*

3.136 Around a quarter (26%) of the Gwernyfed feeder school pupils who responded to this question raised concerns about the potential negative impact to extra-curricular activities.

*If Gwernyfed closed I would have to travel over 1 hour on a bus to school in Brecon. My parents think that this is too much time spent travelling and I would be very tired and bored when I could be doing after school clubs or sports.*

*What will the plan be for the sports centre at Gwernyfed? The council say there will be discussions around this, but really we know that the council will sell the land and the leisure centre will not be relocated nearby as finances are not available.*

3.137 Around a fifth of respondents (20%) said that the proposals would negatively impact on their friendships or social lives, and a further 20% said that the proposals would result in fewer students attending Powys schools.

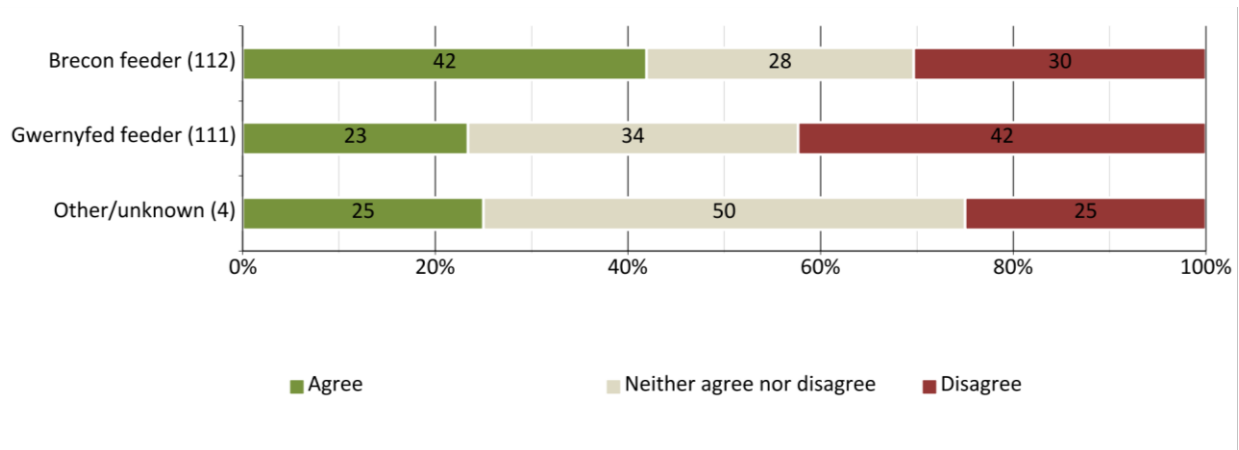
*I may have to go to Kington school instead as it is closer. My friends would all be split up and go to different school such as Builth, Fairfield and Brecon. We would spend very little time with each other. This would really upset me.*

## Welsh Medium Education

*Thinking about the problems on the previous page, the Council believes a number of changes are needed.*

*Do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these problems?*

Figure 55: Do you agree or disagree that the Council is right to make changes to respond to these problems?



Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)

- 3.138 Respondents were given a brief overview of issues with Welsh education in South Powys and in Brecon High School specifically. Respondents were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed that Powys County Council is right to make changes to respond to these problems.
- 3.139 Two fifths (42%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed, while just over a fifth of respondents from Gwernyfed feeders (23%) agreed that the Council is right to make changes.
- 3.140 Just over two fifths (42%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed, as did 3 in 10 (30%) of those from Brecon feeders.
- 3.141 Around 3 in 10 or more respondents from Brecon (28%) and Gwernyfed (34%) feeder schools neither agreed nor disagreed.

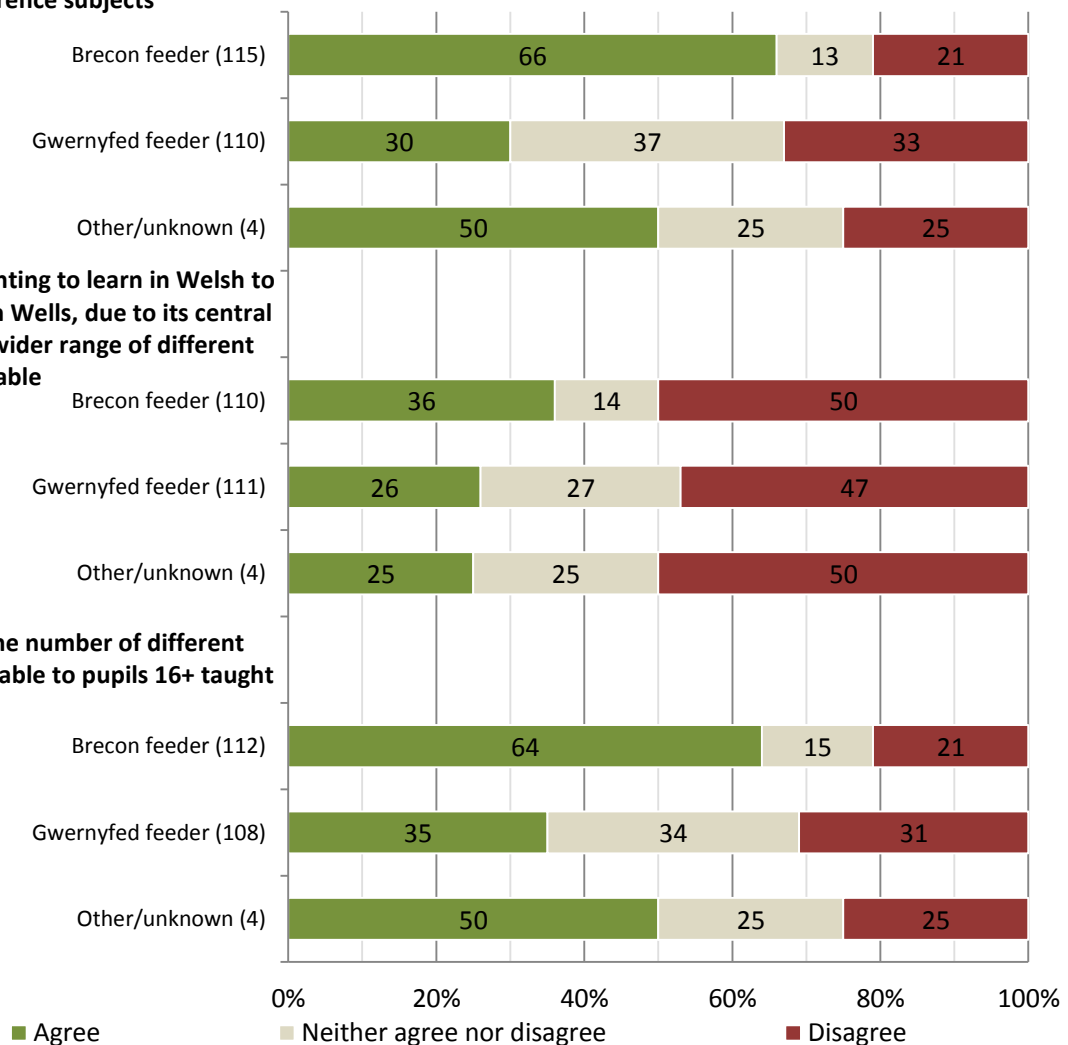
*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposed changes?*

**Figure 56: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposed changes?**

**To teach pupils wanting to learn in Welsh from a single school to allow a wider range of difference subjects**

**For pupils wanting to learn in Welsh to do so in Builth Wells, due to its central location and wider range of different subjects available**

**To increase the number of different subjects available to pupils 16+ taught in Welsh**



**Base: All Individuals (number of individuals shown in brackets)**

3.142 Respondents were then given a brief description of the proposed changes to Welsh education, and were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each proposed change.

3.143 Two thirds (66%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to teach pupils wanting to learn in Welsh from a single school. Less than a third (30%) of Gwernyfed feeder respondents agreed.

3.144 A third (33%) of respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed, as did around a fifth (21%) of Brecon feeder respondents.

3.145 Around half of respondents from Brecon (50%) and Gwernyfed (47%) feeder schools disagreed with the proposed change to situate a single Welsh medium school in Builth Wells.

- 3.146 Over a third of those from Brecon feeder schools (36%) agreed with this proposed change, as do around a quarter of those from Gwernyfed feeder schools (26%).
- 3.147 Nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents from Brecon feeder schools agreed with the proposed change to increase the number of different subjects available in Welsh to pupils 16+. A third of Gwernyfed feeder respondents also agreed.
- 3.148 3 in 10 (31%) respondents from Gwernyfed feeder schools disagreed with this, as do 2 in 10 (21%) of those from Brecon.

*If you disagree with any elements of the proposed changes to learning in Welsh, please explain why.*

- 3.149 Respondents who expressed disagreement with the proposed changes to Welsh medium provision were asked to explain why this was.
- 3.150 Due to low response rates and similar concerns raised both Brecon and Gwernyfed catchment areas, responses to this question are reported together. Of the 47 respondents who answered this question, 99 different comments have been classified, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 57: Reasons for opposition to the proposed changes (Brecon feeder schools)**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Do not want Welsh provision to be moved to Builth (non-specific)	38%	18
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	34%	16
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	28%	13
Maintain current provision/disagree with any school closures/disagree with proposals	9%	4
Welsh should be available in all schools/to all pupils	6%	3
Proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer	6%	3
Welsh needs to stay in Brecon due to the Welsh Primary School/Ysgol Y Bannau will be negatively affected	6%	3
Disagree with being taught just in Welsh/don't want to be taught in Welsh/don't want my children speaking Welsh	4%	2
Proposals will negatively affect the free time of students/time for extra-curricular activities	4%	2
English is most pupils first language/most people need to speak English	2%	1
Pupils are entitled to a school within their local community	2%	1
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	2%	1
Proposals will negatively affect English speakers/English speaker's educations will suffer	2%	1
Other	45%	21

- 3.151 Around two fifths (38%) of respondents said that they opposed Welsh provision being moved to Builth. Typical examples of comments include the following:

*I think to put Welsh in Brecon High + not go to Builth*

*The children who learn in Welsh should not go to Builth because it's too far away*

3.152 Relatedly, almost a third (34%) of respondents also said that the Council should 'keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School'; for example:

*This year I will be representing Powys in the Urdd Eisteddfod. Please support me by keeping the Welsh in Brecon so I can carry on entering Urdd Eisteddfod in high school. Closing Brecon Welsh stream will stop me.*

*I do not think that the council have been fair on Brecon High School because they have made people think that the Welsh stream was closing for a long time so mums and dads have put their children in different schools. I really want to carry on my Welsh education in Brecon.*

3.153 More than a quarter (28%) of Brecon feeder school respondents said that 'proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs':

*Builth is miles away from my home. I will spend a long time on a bus every day. After school clubs will be impossible to attend!!*

*It is unfair to make children who currently go to school in Ysgol Y Bannau travel to Builth daily to go to school, it is too far.*

3.154 Of the 31 Gwernyfed feeder school respondents who expressed disagreement with the proposed changes to Welsh medium education, 50 different comments have been classified, the details of which are outlined below.

**Figure 58: Reasons for opposition to the proposed changes (Gwernyfed feeder schools)**

Coded comment	% of respondents	Base
Proposals will lead to longer travel times/increased travel costs	32%	10
Welsh should be available in all schools/to all pupils	29%	9
Disagree with being taught just in Welsh/don't want to be taught in Welsh	10%	3
Proposals will negatively affect English speakers/English speaker's educations will suffer	10%	3
Maintain current provision/disagree with any school closures/disagree with proposals	6%	2
Keep Welsh provision at Brecon/maintain Welsh stream at Brecon High School	6%	2
Do not want Welsh provision to be moved to Builth (non-specific)	6%	2
English is most pupils first language/most people need to speak English	3%	1
Pupils are entitled to a school within their local community	3%	1
Proposals will deter parents from educating their children in Welsh/Welsh as a language will suffer	3%	1
Proposals will negatively impact the friendships/social lives of students	3%	1
Proposals will negatively affect pupils who go on to study at University/higher levels	3%	1
Schools are too close to the English border/don't need to learn Welsh due to proximity to English border	3%	1
Other	42%	13

- 3.155 10 of the 31 Gwernyfed feeder school respondents (32%) felt that the proposed changes would lead to increases in travel times or costs.

*They would be spending a long time travelling, which would make them tired. Why can't you do it over two sites?*

*The Welsh pupils in Brecon and Gwernyfed High schools will have to travel further to get to school.*

- 3.156 9 respondents argued that Welsh medium provision should be available at all schools or be available to all pupils.

*Pupils should be able to learn in Welsh in whatever school they go to, and there should also be the same range of subjects in Welsh as there is in English in every school.*

## Further Comments

- 3.157 17 respondents to the primary consultation made further comments about the proposals. Most commonly, responses voiced support for continued provision at Gwernyfed and reiterated general opposition to the proposals.

*Could not the available money be spent on a new school for Brecon and upgrading the Gwernyfed site? It seems that the council has embarked on a plan and does not have the ability to listen and change direction.*

*Why should a big school with large grounds for the children have to stop and just sit there doing nothing because a school doesn't have the right support to keep itself up? Gwernyfed has lasted longer than Brecon's old school and it will probably outlast long after the new school. This is because Gwernyfed has a better construction than Brecon. My parents say that Brecon is a bad school with no character and if Brecon will build another one then it will probably have no character as well.*

- 3.158 Others raised concerns specifically regarding Welsh provision in the area.

*Keep Welsh in Brecon please. Ysgol y Bannau - Welsh school, is just across the road from the high school! It's important to learn in Welsh, the language of our country.*

*I am worried about the effect on Ysgol-y-Bannau if the Welsh stream is removed entirely from Brecon. I think that wherever there is a Welsh language primary school, there should be secondary education in Welsh nearby too.*

*I am going to waste over a quarter of a day every week for the remainder of my school life to be able to keep learning Welsh! It's stupid! I live in Wales and learning to speak Welsh is something I'm proud of but you're making it almost impossible for me to do this becoming the Welsh stream to Builth. You're not giving me or my mum a lot of choice either with taking the A-levels out of a school environment in GHS and BHS. You are also breaking up friendship groups from primary school too!!*



## Suggested Alternative Proposals

- 3.159 Many respondents from the Main, Young Persons and Primary consultation questionnaires suggested alternative proposals to those put forward by the Council among their responses to open response questions. Some of the suggestions were alternatives to elements of the proposal, while others suggested entirely different approaches. The content of these alternative proposals has been summarised below.
- 3.160 While there was some support among alternative proposals for the merging of schools, many suggested that alternate schools should be merged together. Commonly, respondents suggested that there was a demand for the merging of primary and secondary provision in one site. Some suggested that this should be done at the proposed site for the new school in Brecon, while provision at Gwernyfed could be maintained or also merged into a through school.

*[T]he Gwernyfed building needs work but why can't this Capital be met by a more considered approach at Primary level with Gwernyfed being an all through school. I have never understood the need for 2 major financial projects which will result in 2 schools a mile apart in Hay and Clyro. Where is the sense in that. It still leaves a gap in the middle of the catchment area with no primary at all which could be accommodated at Gwernyfed perhaps. Why can't Brecon become all through and leave Gwernyfed alone? Major work is needed on the 2 Mount Street schools just down the road from Penlan and there are 2 other schools in Llanfaes and Priory. Why can't some thought go into one all through school in Brecon instead of maintaining all the current sites?*

*The existing school should be added to provide an all through school 3-18 years for the area. That would negate the building of a new primary school in Hay and Talgarth, allowing the spare capacity at Gwernyfed to be utilised.*

*...there should be provision of 11 to 18 year old provision - or younger, if you bring in pupils from other primary schools to the one location.*

*Brecon could provide an all-round school, closing the primary schools and make the savings required to raise the money the council needs.*

*Leave Gwernyfed high school alone. Build a new school in Brecon which incorporates Mount Street Primary school. 4-18 school in Brecon. 11-18 school in Gwernyfed.*

*PCC should give serious consideration to a through school model in Brecon - a 4 to 18 provision on a new site, which includes a WM stream. It meets the needs to establish new buildings for 2 schools in need of new buildings; it can still create a capital receipt on 2 sites; it keeps more pupils in the local area, who will benefit from new facilities; it will mean WM pupils do not have increased travel; it will reduce the travel implications of the current proposal.*

*Why not merge Ysgol y Bannau with Brecon High School as the Welsh language stays in Brecon, Brecon will have their new building and no loss to the communities of the Gwernyfed catchment area.*

*Build a new school in Brecon but not at the expense of Gwernyfed. Combine Brecon high with a primary school from Brecon.*

- 3.161 Others suggested that 6<sup>th</sup> form provision should be considered in any new school building, citing the benefits that 6<sup>th</sup> forms can have for pupils and the school in general, as well as expressing reservations about post-16 provision at NPTC, and some suggest a sixth form over the two existing sites.

*I agree that there needs to be a new school ... However, I feel strongly that the new school should be an 11-18 provision. I believe that any new school should be 11-18 for many reasons. I am unsure of the academic quality offered by NPTC College.*

*Brecon needs a new secondary school, and there is opportunity to access Welsh Government funding. However, it should be on the basis of 11-18 provision. This would leave learners to choose an FE route if most suitable, but would not force them. Sixth form retention is good for the school and for staff. The Cabinet has not presented any compelling case that a tertiary model will be best for Brecon learners.*

*I think the school sixth form should still be an option - should be enough pupils if they are from the 2 schools.*

*If NPTC can provide 25 a/as levels, then so can the schools: by all means, combine Brecon and Gwernyfed sixth forms - some subjects in each school.*

*We agree that Brecon High School urgently needs a new school building to make it fit for purpose. However, we think that the new school should be 11 to 18 and include a Welsh medium stream. A sixth form within a school has considerable benefits to both the sixth form pupils, in terms of teacher support, both academic and pastoral, and to other pupils within the school in terms of role modelling. If going to the considerable expense of building a new school with a wide range of facilities, such as science laboratories, why not make those new facilities available to sixth form students as well? It seems wasteful to duplicate these facilities in a separate sixth form college just next door.*

*Can BHS and Gwernyfed not share a sixth form - staff/pupils move between the two sites. Gwernyfed is much nearer than Crick/Builth, where pupils currently travel to. This would help with the costs/range of academic subjects offered for a-levels.*

*Why cannot both Gwernyfed and Brecon be able to have a joint provision, to offer the range of subjects to its pupils? This will help to ensure pupils will stay in the local area, with a reduced transport requirement, compared with what is being proposed.*

- 3.162 Often made in addition to demands for 6<sup>th</sup> form provision at the new school, several respondents put forward the case for maintaining Welsh medium provision in South Powys. Some comments from pupils at Ysgol y Bannau suggested that teachers at Ysgol y Bannau might be willing to help teach subjects at Brecon High School in Welsh.

*Why haven't you considered an 11-18 bilingual transformational school in Brecon?*

*South Powys (and I mean South Powys!) needs a proper facility for educating its children through the medium of Welsh in their local area. It helps them to keep their identity and join in local activities that supplement their education. I feel the council are flogging a dead horse here. Why not consider a Welsh unit within Gwernyfed to age 16?*

*Make Brecon Welsh stream, develop a new Welsh and SEN school there - this change should be enough to call it a new school and have the debt written off.*

*I feel Welsh medium education would be better served by the creation of more Welsh streams in Brecon's catchment primaries, to run in conjunction with the fully immersive Welsh medium education currently on offer at Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon's Welsh medium primary, situated across the road from Brecon High School and in fact opposite the site of the proposed new school. This would achieve the aim of creating a "critical mass" of pupils to go onto secondary education more successfully than the option proposed, which would effectively curtail the growth of the Welsh language in the Brecon area for good.*

*I think the new Welsh medium stream should be included in the new "super school" being built in Brecon. This way Welsh medium pupils can also benefit from the glossy new environment and the higher standards of teaching you believe will be achieved there. Builth is currently in special measures, is no better than Brecon high, and the only reason they have higher numbers of pupils in the Welsh stream is because PCC scared Brecon based parents into sending their children there by saying the stream was closing in Brecon high. Brecon high school has a Welsh medium primary school directly opposite. Utilise this! Stop spending money transporting pupils to Ystralyfera and Builth. Insist these pupils go to Brecon high. Don't feed pupils from Sennybridge to Ystralyfera, send them to Brecon. Invest the money from transport into some new teachers at Brecon high and you will soon have a thriving Welsh stream again.*

*Only those who are really passionate about the Welsh language, only those whose first language is Welsh, will send their children to Builth. A lot of parents who currently have children in Ysgol y Bannau will not send their children to the Welsh stream once they reach secondary school age. So it needs to be carefully considered whether the savings made can justify that the Welsh language will slowly die out in this region or whether the provisions should be made here in Brecon up to the age of 16 at least and to then provide a 6th form in Builth, if not possible any other way. Only this way there is hope that more and more people will send their children to the Welsh stream.*

*Why not have Welsh medium education in both Brecon and Builth, but share the teachers, so that a few teachers spend some days in each school, saving hundreds of thousands of pounds on bussing children around?*

*Brecon is central and it has been for 40 years [...] teachers from Ysgol Y Bannau will help at Brecon High School.*

*Brecon was the first Welsh medium centre. Teachers from Ysgol Y Bannau are offering to teach subjects at BHS through the medium of Welsh.*

- <sup>3.163</sup> One respondent offered an alternative suggestion regarding the management of the proposed new school.

*Why involve Gwernyfed High School in your closure plans? By all means build a replacement school in Brecon for Brecon pupils but do not close a successful, thriving, rural school to bail out a failing one. I suggest that the Governing Body of Gwernyfed should be asked to take over as Governing Body of the new Brecon school too, as they have a proven track record of ensuring that a tight rein is kept on the finances to keep within budget, which would avoid Brecon school having to be bailed out yet again!*

- <sup>3.164</sup> Some proposed different options for where and at what point in the process the new school should be built. Multiple respondents to the primary consultation suggested that a new school site should be situated between Gwernyfed and Brecon.

*I feel that the new school build should occur prior to the school merger, so staff and pupils can all move across together rather than wait for an indefinite time.*

*I have my doubts that running a school on two sites so far apart will be practical. I think the new school should be built in Brecon first, so that all parents in the area can choose if they want to send their children to Brecon. This should help stop the falling numbers at Brecon.*

*By moving the Brecon Children to an out-of-town campus, their attendance would improve and, supposedly, their education.*

*Why should it be in Brecon? Why not halfway between the two schools, which would be Talgarth or Bronllys?*

- 3.165 Many different combinations of school closures were suggested as an alternative to the Council's proposals. Some suggested the merging or closure of Builth and Brecon, while others wanted investment in Gwernyfed High School instead.

*Close Builth and leave Llandod open and offer Welsh for those who want it at these schools. It is unreasonable to expect Llandod catchment to travel to Builth. Close Builth. Obvious.*

*Close Brecon and demolish site. Invest in and expand Gwernyfed. Bus Brecon pupils to Gwernyfed.*

*Gwernyfed is a successful school and unique in its character. Why not consider the site at Gwernyfed to expand?*

*Gwernyfed is functioning. Brecon school is falling apart. Close Brecon 12-15 year department and split the pupils between Gwernyfed and Crickhowell. Replace the buildings for a sixth form college A-level site.*

*Brecon and Builth should be merged, they're the lower performing schools.*

*PCC should consider closing Crickhowell school and moving the pupils to an upgraded Brecon school as it was previously. Currently many of the Crickhowell pupils are coming to the school from out of County and do not live in this Council's area. PCC should be considering the needs of pupils living within Powys.*

- 3.166 Others suggested other ways that the schools themselves could raise or save money, including tendering out work involving the schools to local or competitive contractors, raising funds by finding alternative uses for existing school buildings, or better advertising the Welsh stream.

*Costings need to be made on keeping Gwernyfed open - I understand that it is an old building, but I think the council puts too much emphasis in finding 'one contractor' these days. Money is tight, and there are some brilliant local tradesmen in the surrounding area - why do we not source quotes for competitive rates?*

*Has the council considered alternative uses for a new school building in Brecon that could enhance its financial viability - e.g. meeting space(s) for government and others (especially public and business partners who might contribute to learning), leisure facilities, evening meeting spaces for community groups - how about even a day care centre as part of the complex for elderly patients that pupils (especially in 16+ groups) could help support - improving social cohesion and empathy and understanding for the whole community?*

*They should still be able to go to a Welsh school here, in Brecon, but maybe the council can make sure that more children go to the Welsh stream by advertising the school. If more children go to the school, then it's not so expensive to run.*

<sup>3.167</sup> Additionally, there were some calls to make savings elsewhere, either by making cuts to other public services, cuts to salaries and expenses of Council workers, merging the Local Education Authority with other Councils, privatising 'back office' work or lobbying the Welsh Government for additional funding.

*Other local authorities have faced similar financial challenges to Powys and have made difficult decisions leading to wholesale cuts to public services, but have recognised that some services (education being one) are fundamentally crucial to the long term economic and social fabric of the county, and have protected funding for those services. Powys must do the same, and make cuts elsewhere to solve its financial problems.*

*To cut spending in the council to make the necessary changes. Cut expense budgets, drastically reduce paid holidays - council workers going on month long holidays to the Caribbean - who do they think they are rock stars? Cut salaries to what they are actually worth, ensure a 37.5 hour week is actually worked, cut final salary pensions - basically make pay & conditions in the council - especially in the higher echelons in line with other industries - i.e. fair and commercial. Council workers are paid as if they deserve danger money!*

*Privatise all secretary work and any non-teaching work to save pension. Merge LEA with other councils to save paying for too many big wigs salaries. Don't give teachers fuel allowance to travel to place of work.*

*If finance is the problem, then I suggest that the Council should lobby the Welsh Assembly Government to increase the amount of money allocated for education; if that is still insufficient, then the Council should persuade the government in Westminster to increase the funds given to Wales - the Barnett formula is outdated and discredited. We citizens, who elect the Councillors, expect a more determined approach based on the needs of the local community, and we expect our wishes to be carried out by the Council - that is why we elect them in the first place.*

<sup>3.168</sup> Throughout the consultation, some respondents suggested that the Council should invest in a new school in Brecon for current pupils of Brecon HS only, and leave Gwernyfed as it is.

*I feel that the money would be better spent in building a new school in Brecon and keeping the two schools as they are.*

## Organisation Responses

3.169 Each response from an organisation typically represents the views of many individuals, and feedback from these organisations has therefore been reported separately in this report.

### Overview

3.170 Organisations that responded were informed on the questionnaire that their views may be published, and were asked to provide further details about their organisation, including what the organisation represents, the specific group or department, the area the organisation covers and how the views of members were gathered. Not all organisations supplied this information, but the names of organisations have been included in the report where provided.

3.171 Results for the closed questions have been presented below to provide a contrast between views from organisations and individuals. As it is not appropriate to report percentages where the sample size is so small, responses from organisations have been summarised to provide an outline of their views and feedback, and counts – rather than percentages – of responses to the closed questions of the consultation questionnaire are provided below.

### Brecon & Gwernyfed Organisation Responses

3.172 Of the 625 total responses to the main Brecon & Gwernyfed open consultation questionnaire, 6 indicated that they had been submitted on behalf of an organisation.

3.173 2 of 6 organisations agreed that the Council is right to make changes to respond to the identified issues with English medium education.

3.174 In terms of the specific elements of the proposal, 5 organisations responded to the question of establishing a new English medium secondary school for pupils aged 11-16 to replace Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools from August 2017, operating on the two existing sites. All 5 organisations that responded to this question disagreed with this element of the proposal.

3.175 2 of 6 organisations agreed with the proposal to establish a new building for the proposed new secondary school, with an aim to open this in 2019/20, while 4 of 6 disagreed with this proposal.

3.176 Minimising the number of overall pupils requiring school transport by locating the new school building in Brecon was also supported by 2 of 6 organisations, while 4 of 6 organisations disagreed with this location.

3.177 5 of 6 organisations disagreed that all post-16 academic and vocational education should be provided by NPTC Group of Colleges, while 1 organisation gave a neutral answer.

3.178 Regarding Welsh medium education, 1 of the 5 organisations that gave a valid answer to this question agreed that Powys County Council is right to make changes by responding to the issues identified in the consultation document. However, 2 of 5 disagreed that the Council was right to make changes, and a further 2 organisations neither agreed nor disagreed.

3.179 4 organisations responded to the question of consolidating Welsh medium education, and delivering it from a single Welsh medium stream in South/Mid Powys. 1 organisation agreed, while 1 organisation disagreed and 2 organisations gave a neutral response.



- 3.180 The proposal to provide Welsh medium education as part of a Bilingual Category 2B/C (dual-stream) school was agreed with by 2 of 4 organisations, while 2 organisations neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 3.181 Only 3 organisations responded to the proposal to locate the Welsh medium stream at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school (subject to separate consultation) due to its central location and enhanced Welsh medium provision. 1 organisation disagreed with this proposal while the remaining 2 organisations gave neutral responses.
- 3.182 1 of 4 organisations agreed with the proposed increased provision of post-16 subjects via the medium of Welsh, while 1 organisation disagreed with this proposal and 2 neither agreed nor disagreed.

## English Medium Education

### 3.183 Post 16 education

*Brecon Town Council recognises the need for a sixth form. Provision should be for ages 11-18. Sixth form provision should be at Brecon High School and not at NPT college.*

**Brecon Town Council**

*Brecon / Gwernyfed services need new school in Brecon but it must be 11-18 as college provision is not up to standard on that site. That should be principle in Brecon as it is in rest of Powys. If the 2 schools amalgamate the number would be sufficient for a good sixth form.*

**School governor / member Powys County Council**

### 3.184 After school clubs/activities

*I represent at least 20 adults who play football regularly on a Monday night. Many of us are in our 40's and 50's without this resource many would not be able to continue to be both physically and socially active.*

**Monday night football, Hay and Clyro**

*[R]eputable research has proven, time and time again, of the educational, social and emotional value of play, leisure and recreation through after-school and holiday activities for young people, who spend two-thirds of their lives out of school. There is scant reference to this in the consultation document, and therefore, if the proposal to close Gwernyfed is taken forward, because of distance and lack of public transport, young people will effectively be denied these valuable activities after school*

**Penyrheol Baptist Chapel and stable refurbishment group**

*In April 2015, as a result of responsibility for the Sports Hall transferring to Gwernyfed High School, the Club actively explored alternative options for facilities should this be necessary. As a result of these enquiries we can confirm that the Club would be forced to fold should the High School close and the sports facilities no longer be available. ...[T]he Brecon venue was not available on any weekday evenings and is prohibitively expensive making it unaffordable to many Club members which would again cause the Club to close.*

**Brecon Volleyball Club.**

## Welsh Medium Education

### 3.185 Welsh medium provision in South Powys.

*Brecon High School should offer full Welsh medium provision in order to nurture and enhance the Welsh language and culture in the community.*

**Brecon Town Council**

*The biggest cohort of Welsh speaking community in south Powys is Brecon - Cray - Trecastle - Sennybridge area, not Builth. Pupils living in Cray or Trecastle would have to travel 31 miles to Builth to receive Welsh medium education.*

**School governor / member Powys County Council**

## Equalities

### 3.186 Welsh language

*Welsh language act. Now local authorities have a duty to have policies in place and provide services accordingly to choice of language. I am sure Powys would not be fulfilling that responsibility if pupils have to travel 2 (31 miles) to access Welsh medium education.*

**School governor / member Powys County Council**

*The closure of Gwernyfed will have a detrimental effect upon the Welsh Language as many parents have indicated that they will send their children to England for their education.*

**Hay Castle Trust**

### 3.187 Impacts on community

*It will also mean that we find it difficult to attract skilled workers and young families to the area.*

**Hay Castle Trust**

## Further Comments

*Brecon Town Council recognises the urgent need for the development of modern, fit-for-purpose secondary educational facilities in Brecon to serve the town and its young people, and calls on Powys County Council to do all it can to access the opportunities available under the Welsh Government's Twenty First Century Schools Programme.*

**Brecon Town Council**

## Interesting Comments

*Smaller, local community schools are the way forward in this rural economy. Creating a framework where schools have to have a minimum of 600 pupils seems ridiculous as well as a false economy. Economic models created to deal with urban situations should not be applied to rural areas. These models are destructive and suffer from short term economic vision. We are also concerned that the closure of Gwernyfed School will have a severe negative impact upon the growth and encouragement of Welsh learners in the area.*

**Hay Castle Trust**



## 4. Governors Meetings

### Main issues and themes from the Governors meetings

#### Overview of the Meeting Process

- 4.1 The governors meetings were held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Gwernyfed) and Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Brecon) at the respective high schools. Each meeting received a standard presentation from PCC on the proposed changes, which was followed by a question and answer session between participants and a panel of PCC officers. 24 governors attended the two sessions; 10 at Brecon and 14 at Gwernyfed.
- 4.2 This chapter is in two parts: the first provides an overview of the governors meeting process and the second is a concise review of the main issues raised by participants.

#### Main Themes Raised at the Governors Meetings

##### Quality of Education

- 4.3 Governors at both meetings felt aggrieved that the consultation document fails to acknowledge the positive improvement trajectory of their schools in terms of both educational standards and leadership:

*There has been no recognition of the progress the school has made. It could be perceived to be deliberate; almost to put the school down... (Brecon Governors)*

*It's a school that has a head now that everyone supports. We're in a very different position... (Brecon Governors)*

*On the basis of improving standards you would agree that the Fisher Family Trust's figures have us as the eighth most improved school in Wales. (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.4 Indeed, those at Gwernyfed were particularly keen to understand PCC's concerns in relation to educational and leadership standards:

*One of the particular points drawn out in the Estyn revisit is the strong progress that's been made by the school to improve the consistency of middle leadership...the restructuring of the middle leadership team has led to well defined roles and responsibilities, opportunities for professional development ...the middle leadership of this school is strong and increasing in strength. So I have to ask, therefore, 'what's wrong with the leadership team as it stands in this school at the moment?' We've picked up and we've got the leadership that will drive us forward into the future... (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*I was concerned that this document is overall predicated on the changes that it is proposing to our high school on the need to improve learning and educational outcomes and I was interested to find out what the Cabinet felt were the reasons for it (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*This school is quite clearly on an improving journey...we are trying to understand the concerns that you at the Council have about the areas where we are obviously not coming up to expectations. (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.5 Moreover, many took offence at what they saw as an implicit assumption in the document that teaching quality needs to improve - and there was some scepticism that this would indeed happen within a larger school, or at least that it would not happen in Gwernyfed's case given it has recently been outperforming Brecon:

*You talk in the document the Shadow Governing Body being expected to appoint high quality teaching and support staff to be able to supply an excellent learning experience. Could you explain to us then any concerns you may have about the quality of teaching here with the staff that we have in Gwernyfed? The implication is that by saying you will be appointing high quality teaching and support staff is that you haven't got them at the moment... (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*What we're trying to establish...is that the implication that comes through the documentation is that current standards in learning outcomes and in teaching are not how they ought to be...we would be keen to understand the areas in which we have fallen short in managing the quality of teaching. We think, and we've had some Estyn reports, and a county council core visit report that indicate that the level of teaching is good. But clearly it isn't because if it were then you wouldn't want to improve it or you wouldn't be putting forward such drastic proposals (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*You are talking about improving standards and quality of teaching and about linking that directly with pupil numbers...how can you guarantee that the quality of teaching and experience for the Gwernyfed pupils will be better than it is now? It is important to prove that our pupils benefit as well as the Brecon pupils (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*You talked about distributed merit and making the best of the resources but we're looking at a situation where we're going into a larger school. Now that distribution could, you'll be arguing, mean the quality coming towards this school...increased expertise will be coming in this direction. However, the implication is also clearly where this school has been performing higher than the other half of the equation, then that quality would be being exported. Now, do you see any situation in which the process of exporting the quality available in this school might impact negatively on the learning experience of the pupils here? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

## Finance and Funding

- 4.6 The Gwernyfed Governors were keen to understand PCC's concerns about the financial management of their school given it is currently in surplus:

*We are managing our finances...so what concerns do you have about the financial management of Gwernyfed? I would suggest that if you look at the finances and the standards and staff improvement and retention, that despite falling pupil rolls and the financial climate for this school, we have continued to deliver on the loan measure and on staff improvement. In this document you record that in 2019/20 whilst we will have a very small surplus; Brecon will have a deficit of nearly £1.9 million. So looking at how this school is managed financially, you have no concerns about the management of this school? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.7 They also sought clarity around how funding arrangements for both schools would be organised if the proposals are approved - especially in the context of how school budgets are presently managed and ongoing concerns around the implications of the historical debt burden at Brecon:

*I understand that the debt burden will be wiped clean...the cost base in Brecon would not be worked out which means that going forward to the new phoenix school would have one campus already*

*poised to run a balanced budget and another half of the school not in that position. Now do you recognise that there may be impact? Obviously that new school would instantly be required to make savings because its cost base would be inherited (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*Brecon High School has got a deficit budget and loan. Will all the high school's finances and arrangements be wiped clean when it closes or will anything be carried forward? What will happen with that loan position? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

There was particular concern around what the Governors termed 'parity of educational opportunity'. They worried that Brecon's resources would be significantly higher than Gwernyfed's under any new arrangement because of historical circumstances whereby the former has 'lived outside its means' to maintain a larger staffing structure, whereas the former has made reductions to ensure a balanced budget:

*One school on two sites and you have to allow a parity of educational opportunity...you will have one school that has a pared back staffing structure to allow a balanced budget, and Brecon are operating with a larger budget which will be ring-fenced - is that parity? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*If you're delivering both key stages on both sites and you have to deliver a parity of educational opportunity and the students in this school are working with a teaching staff that have been pared back to balance the budget and Brecon is operating with a generously funded teaching body which is all ring-fenced, will there be parity of educational opportunities? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.8 Concerns around the capital funding being spent on developing NPTC facilities at Brecon were prevalent at the Brecon meeting:

*The document says the estimated cost of a new school building is approximately £20 million. The paragraph below for the beacon school campus project is approximately £44 million. So what are we spending the £24 million on that's not to do with the schools? So the college benefits from a £24 million of benefit and the school gets £20 million! (Brecon Governors)*

*If you're going to spend £24 million on a college with 150 pupils, it's an awful lot of money per pupil isn't it? How many vocational students would you expect to have? (Brecon Governors)*

## Governance and Staffing of a New School

- 4.9 Governors at Gwernyfed were keen to understand the relationship between PCC, the Shadow Governing Body and Senior Management Team in implementing any possible changes - and stressed that the former should maintain an advisory role and not seek to involve itself in the day-to-day running of the school:

*From a professional point of view there's a concern in the document that the roles are getting very mixed. My understanding is that Powys County Council is there to support and advise the Governing Body and the head teacher in the decision-making process...the shadow governing body will make the decisions in line with the new head teacher about what subjects are offered and where staff will be based. There's a little bit of a mist in that document. It's the clear definition of roles which isn't there at the moment...there's a strategic day-to-day running of the school and we've got to clear that up I think (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*You're going to have a new top leadership team; you can't define how that team will be led... (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.10 They were also concerned about maintaining standards during the transitional period, the potential for staff redundancies and the process for making any redundancies should they be necessary:

*You don't evidence; it's aspirational and it's vague. I don't see how you can guarantee us that as the leadership team struggles to find its feet that the quality and drive and standards that we are producing here will be produced across two sites in the first instance by a new team who will be working out how to make two sites in a new school - unpopular in the community - work (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*Can you confirm whether jobs would be ring-fenced for the staff in the two schools? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*If there are compulsory redundancies within the new structure...would the redundancy come back to the Council in both phases or will it come back to the Governing Body? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

## Pupil Impacts

- 4.11 Gwernyfed Governors suggested that one of the most tangible impacts of the proposals for their school's pupils will be the unequal opportunity to take part in extra-curricular activities at the Brecon campus due to transport difficulties – an inequality that will be most keenly felt by the most disadvantaged families:

*There are some sacrifices that become impossible when a journey ceases to be an additional six miles...to a twenty mile round trip. That impacts on very many things (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*As soon as you ask parents from here to be picking up from after-school activities in Brecon you begin to discriminate against those who either can't afford the time or the fuel to make that journey. There's no further discrimination other than the basic rule of poverty against the parents in Brecon. The situation does not change for them. But the situation changes significantly for numbers of parents and children (from Gwernyfed) and you acknowledge that in this document. You suggest that will be made up by doing everything at lunchtime but children have to eat and have to relax and they can't spend every lunchtime and they can't fit it all into an hour either. So why do you choose to discriminate against some pupils and particularly the poorer pupils and families? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*You refer in your SWOT analysis to this new school being an opportunity to develop an inclusive educational model meeting the needs of vulnerable learners. In 2013 Estyn did their full inspection and judged that all pupils at Gwernyfed had equal access to the curriculum and to all aspects of school life irrespective of ability. In the document you also indicate that there would be a disadvantage to Gwernyfed pupils in accessing particularly after-school activities (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*Whilst I reflect on the desirability of social, artistic, sporting out of school activities, my family's experiences have been central to their academic achievements. My daughter's attendance at the art club contributed to her A\* result at GCSE. Her attendance at mathematics vision club contributed essentially to her achievement of a grade C at GCSE. My belief in the essential nature of after-school activities...it's about achieving their potential academically. You may believe it's only another four miles but if you are reliant on the school bus this is irrelevant. You can't stay. That is bound to be discriminatory...exclusively against the economically disadvantaged parents in this catchment. (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.12 Governors at Brecon raised the threat of losing the best teachers if A-levels are removed, which would then impact upon the quality of teaching and support available to all pupils:

*There is a definite worry that we will lose some of our best teachers because they like teaching at A-Level... So the under-16 provision would not be as high as it is (Brecon Governors)*

*Are you potentially going to lose some of the best teachers or not be able to retain the teachers? (Brecon Governors)*

- 4.13 They also noted the excellent example sixth form students set to younger pupils - and that pupil support (both educational and pastoral) is generally far superior when provided by teachers with knowledge of those they have educated for many years:

*You also lose the culture of younger children learning from older children being role models and mentoring the younger ones. It would be a total disaster if we lose the sixth form... (Brecon Governors)*

*Its knowledge of your pupils isn't it? If you have a through line, you know their strengths and weaknesses and you know them all the way through the school so when they get to choose their subjects at A-level you know which pupils are going to do well in your subject. And you can support them. I have nothing against a sixth form college, but the ones that are best that I've come across are ones that are a building; they're part of a community. And that's what we're talking about isn't it? Schools are not just there to turn out grades and people pass...they are part of a greater community but they're also a community in themselves. And the sixth forms provide that cohesion for that community. They are a hugely important part of a school. (Brecon Governors)*

## Post-16 Education

- 4.14 The main argument put forward by both sets of governors is that the proposals discriminate against Brecon and Gwernyfed learners by removing parental/learner choice at post-16 level. It was frequently said that, if the proposal is approved, BHS and GHS pupils alone in Powys will lose the choice between sixth form and tertiary education - and indeed the ability to 'mix and match' their subjects. This is particularly important in the context of the apparent value placed on the sixth form system in the area and the fact that tertiary education may not suit all pupils, some of whom value the structure of a sixth form:

*I'm interested to know why you think you will be able to get away with discriminating against some of the learners when aspiring to an inclusive education model (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*Brecon is being relegated to a localised post-16 black hole, when Crickhowell's sixth form is presumably expanding; Builth is retaining its sixth form... (Brecon Governors)*

*I'm not suggesting that a college option isn't an option but it should be one of a mixed economy as it is currently rather than the only option. It would be different if you were suggesting that's what you're going to offer to Builth, Llandrindod, Crickhowell and Ystradgynlais - and, indeed, Montgomeryshire too. Because currently you are limiting the choices, the options to just two groups of learners (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*Why are you prepared as a Council to bring forward a proposal that deliberately discriminates against post-16 learning pupils within the catchment areas of Gwernyfed and Brecon High Schools by withdrawing from them, alone in the whole of the County, the option of taking their A-Levels in a school environment? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*Regardless of the relative merits of tertiary versus sixth form, the overwhelming opinion of parents in this area is that they value the sixth form system; they see it as an absolute asset. It's not what the parents of this area or the pupils actually want... (Brecon Governors)*

*There is a real worry about removing the choice for our pupils regarding sixth form provision. If you remove it the ability to mix and match disappears... The pupils of Brecon and Gwernyfed will lose the choice that Builth pupils will retain; that Crickhowell pupils will retain. For me that choice is really important because one of the outcomes here is about retaining learners within Powys and not losing them over-the-border. And I don't think this model is going to achieve that because pupils are saying to us they would prefer to go to Hereford, Merthyr or Abergavenny. They didn't want to go down to NPTC and if that was their only choice ... We've been prepared to mix and match and I can't see why that model can't continue into the future... (Brecon Governors)*

*It's not just a question of choice in terms of number of subjects. It's also about the type of provision. A tertiary college doesn't suit all pupils. Some of our young people when they reach sixth form are not ready for the more independent style of learning and would rather stay in a school environment. We won't have that choice if we lose (the sixth form). (Brecon Governors)*

- 4.15 Many concerns were raised around the perceived poor quality of NPTC's post-16 provision - as well as the College's capacity to offer as many subjects as stated, deliver courses from beginning to end and offer adequate pastoral support to pupils:

*The fact remains that there is a big quality assurance mark hanging over our local tertiary college provision in this area. Whether it's earned or not there is a problem with perception in this area regarding post-16 provision... (Brecon Governors)*

*What happens if NPTC say 'we've taken the hit for too long and we're out of here' - do you have any assurances from NPTC that they will be here forever? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*I wonder whether anyone can guarantee that there will be the breadth of subjects on offer? And will there be staff here not only to deliver the course from beginning to end but also to offer support. Or will they be coming in on the bus from Neath Port Talbot to deliver the lectures and then buzzing off somewhere else? (Brecon Governors)*

Indeed, there was significant worry that, should NPTC fail to retain enough students on particular courses (or lose the staff members delivering them), those remaining would have to travel to Neath to continue their education - which would again be potentially difficult for disadvantaged families and those living in very rural areas:

*If you don't get the numbers for some of the options... then the pupils will have to go down to Neath Port Talbot. Some will be able to do that, because they'll be supported but here again we are in potential discrimination territory because there will be families who cannot afford a student being able to (travel). There has been one instance I'm aware of where a course has been withdrawn in Brecon and the students have been told they have to go to Neath (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*I'm fully supportive of the Brecon campus. I went there as a girl so I am really proud of the college in Brecon but I've got really grave concerns about delivering the number of A-Levels at that campus. I don't believe there are any biology and chemistry labs; that's just one example. We're talking about mechanics, builders, hairdressers, cooks etc. I know that campus and where are you going to put all the bodies? I would like to see expansion for that type of education in our area. I'd like to see electricians and plumbers...but I have concerns with the proposal that if we're not running the A-*



*Levels that are appropriate and if students end up having to go down to Neath, how are they actually going to get there? Are we going to pay for people to go on the bus down to Neath? Because my children can't get there from my village on public transport because we haven't got any (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*I live in an area with no public transport and I want to know that if the children from my ward have to end up going to somewhere else like Neath, to obtain their A levels will their transport be paid for by Powys County Council as it is at present to go to the Brecon campus? It's important to know that the people from my area won't end up in rural deprivation because a decision has been taken by PCC. (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.16 The suggested implication of these concerns is that Powys learners will be lost to other Welsh counties or to England because of their reluctance to entrust their post-16 education to NPTC:

*You are convinced that NPTC will attract, from the start, 150 post-16 learners? Learners said they won't choose it. Out of 117 pupils (Year 10) polled across both Brecon and Gwernyfed last year, 27 students would choose to access Brecon, 70 in Hereford and a small minority would choose not go into post-16 education at all as they would not feel confident in doing so outside the school environment. What happens if NPTC say 'we've taken the hit for too long and we're out of here' - do you have any assurances from NPTC that they will be here forever? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

- 4.17 Finally in terms of post-16 education, Governors in both areas suggested that replacing the current successful and well-regarded South Powys consortium model with an untested provider is a risk to pupils' education:

*You want to change the system for Brecon and Gwernyfed and so you are clearly of the opinion that what is currently being delivered post-16 in Gwernyfed is not working. Are you aware that every student in Gwernyfed last year and for at least the previous three years went to their first choice university without going through clearing? I think that works. And in the consortium, the pupils have the choices they want (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*In the context of the South Powys consortium they are providing the range and number of A-Levels required...have you asked the pupils what they think of that, because we have and they say it enhances their learning experience. So they don't see it as a problem... (Gwernyfed Governors)*

## Welsh Medium Education

- 4.18 Brecon Governors were angry that PCC has not developed a long-term vision to support the development of Welsh medium education in their area - and argued that the proposals will negatively impact on the likelihood of local parents choosing Welsh medium education in the future, thus in turn impacting on the future sustainability of primary feeder schools such as Ysgol Y Bannau:

*A number of pupils in Year 8 last year didn't want to move to Builth so they moved into the English stream (Brecon Governors)*

*It might lead to slightly more sustainability but my worry is that there are no plans in terms of being able to grow the Welsh medium provision. And related to this is the real risks that parents will decide, actually I'm not prepared for my child to travel, and are they then going to leave and go back to the English medium and that goes back to the point, well what's the point of going into Welsh medium in the first place? This poses a risk for Ysgol y Bannau... Why is it there's been no*

*thought about increasing the Welsh medium provision in this area to make it more sustainable? We haven't had a hope have we? (Brecon Governors)*

*Brecon High School hasn't had a hope in the last few years because of the numbers in Ysgol y Bannau and Sennybridge... (Brecon Governors)*

*We are going to lose people going into the Welsh medium education because of these proposals, which I'm sure you don't intend (Brecon Governors)*

*[Parents] may not [choose Ysgol y Bannau] if they're not going to get the continued benefits of an ongoing Welsh education. If they live in Llanfaes they might say 'I'll send them to Llanfaes then'. (Brecon Governors)*

- 4.19 Furthermore, they suggested that the proposals will do nothing to stop the flow of local pupils accessing Welsh medium education out-of-county (at Ystalyfera in Neath Port Talbot for example), and that this can only be arrested through the provision of quality education through the medium of Welsh at BHS - or, for some, through the provision of a Welsh medium secondary school to serve mid and South Powys:

*I represent the Sennybridge area, which is a feeder school for this school and the Welsh medium stream there is doing well and is consistently around 38 to 40 children... I was the one who got transport to Ystalyfera about eight years ago and it was the right and proper thing to do at that time because this school wasn't providing sufficient subjects. Now since that time, as far as I'm aware, parents of Welsh medium pupils in secondary school have never been consulted as to where they want to go. At the moment there are about 30 pupils from Sennybridge and one or two from Ysgol y Bannau going down to Ystalyfera. It concerns me that are we going to continue to insist, through lack of consultation, that the children have to travel down to Ystalyfera? And some of the parents have sent emails to me loud and clear that they would prefer to educate their children through the medium of Welsh here in Brecon...it's leaching money out of the county and also massive transport bills. Where are we going to go from that? Are we going to continue forever and a day down that line or are we going to say enough is enough, we've got to support education in the County? (Brecon Governors)*

- 4.20 As a result of these two factors and low pupil numbers in general, the Governors questioned the assumption in the consultation document around creating a critical mass and increased Welsh medium offer at Builth Wells High School:

*How many more pupils do you think there are going to be going through Ysgol y Bannau per academic year? What does ten pupils per year translate to in terms of increasing the breadth of Welsh medium education at Builth Wells High School? (Brecon Governors)*

*The consultation document states that KS4 will increase in breadth and as a consequence also the KS5... If the council thinks this is going to lead to increased provision, it's not. The reality is the number of pupils who want to study in the Welsh medium already have the opportunity to go to Builth Wells (Brecon Governors)*

*How many A-levels are being provided at year 12 this September in Builth Wells High School? I know the answer and it's two. And both of those courses are being run back-to-back...year 12 and year 13 are going to be in the same lesson... I also know that they are going to add a third. They're going to put Cymraeg in. How are the numbers going to allow for any kind of increase when it's so small now? (Brecon Governors)*



- 4.21 The Governors also complained about the tenor of the consultation document, arguing strongly against the insinuation that the standard of Welsh medium education at Brecon is comparatively poor. Moreover, they suggested that if the Welsh stream at Brecon could be maintained and expanded to include only a few more subjects, local parents (including those from Sennybridge) would be happy to send their children there for reasons of convenience and that quality is better than quantity:

*I'm concerned that the tenor of the document is that the standard of Welsh medium education here is not as good; that we're not able to provide the number of subjects - because we haven't got the number of children - as what would be provided in Builth. That is quite insulting to our very good Welsh medium teachers. We may not be able to provide subjects across the board but we have been trying to develop [and] a lot of parents have made it quite clear that they were happy with the quality and the quantity wasn't so important and if we could provide a number of subjects through the medium of Welsh they would be more than happy...rather than sending their children to Builth. It sounds like it will be counter-productive...it's not going to be the critical mass that you had hoped for. I can see that on paper it looks like a good idea but in reality it's not what the parents and pupils themselves want. So in the end if we have two smaller units and we can persuade children to come from Sennybridge and if we get some certainty, then the parents will decide to come over the road to the High School. That's why a lot of them went there in the first place because it sorts out their logistics. The school is next door; they don't have to rethink everything when they reach age 11. They've taken that decision... Some of the best students have come from the Welsh medium...we've had some really high achievers from the Welsh stream. If we could maintain our stream I do believe we could build it up again. What we need is certainty, which we haven't had over the past few years (Brecon Governors)*

*Through default because they haven't been offered sufficient facilities for Welsh education closer to home [parents] have no alternative but to go to Ystalyfera. And now the current parents, whose children have done extremely well in primary education in Sennybridge School, are concerned that their children have to go to Ystalyfera. It's an urban school so the after-school activities have very little in common with the children from the rural areas that I represent and they are concerned about that as well. (Brecon Governors)*

## Consultation Process

- 4.22 The Brecon Governors voiced concern about PCC's apparently insufficiently transparent decision-making processes and lack of external scrutiny - and said that the Council's Cabinet would be going against the will of the local population if it endorses the proposals in their current form:

*Who judges whether the things that are put in place are sufficient to mitigate the impact...I have a concern about the lack of external scrutiny... (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*I think the whole premise of this consultation top trumps choice over locality...that's what you're trying to convince everybody of. I've watched all the consultation meetings and I'm yet to have any proof that it's actually what the people of Powys want. It's what YOU want... It's a convincing argument on paper perhaps but I'm not convinced that there's any proof that it's actually what the people want (Brecon Governors)*

*You had a primary school in Beguildy and all the farmers came out on their tractors to protest about the closure of the school and it didn't seem to make any difference what the local people did. There were 350 people affected by the closure and after closure people were left with a village at the end of a road and pupils were spread in all different directions. And the saving to the Council was only*

*£65,000. And then like the John Beddoes school which has been in special measures for a while; they went up to the town hall to protest and the decision was taken to get rid of the school. Will all the consultation have a bearing on the decision? What worries me is the option of doing nothing - we leave the kids in a school that's falling to pieces? (Brecon Governors)*

- 4.23 There was also concern that the Council has failed to take previous feedback and inputs into account when formulating its proposals:

*We had a consultation on Welsh medium education last year, we submitted our views and nothing has really changed on that but you still brought a consultation document ignoring all our views. We asked us for our vision last November; we submitted our vision and you didn't take anything of that on board either. And we did put some serious input into it at the same time as improving standards. What [name] said was that 'at the end of the day we've got to save money and there's not enough money' and so I'm just concerned that whatever we do, say or submit the Authority has already made a decision based on cost. I am really disappointed that all the submissions we've put in to date - about Welsh Medium education and our vision for the future - have been totally ignored. And from that it smells that you've got pre-conceived ideas because you didn't take anything on board when you wrote that document. (Brecon Governors)*

- 4.24 Some wanted to know how PCC has evaluated and weighted the potential impacts of the proposals on communities, what mitigations have been considered and why some alternative options (such as a through school model for Brecon) have been discarded when, in the view of Governors', they are perfectly workable:

*In considering the impact of this, presumably the Council will look at whether you can't mitigate against that impact. Therefore, would you be making an alternative proposal? Are you ruling out the possibility that should the impact be such that you can't mitigate against it would you consider an alternative option? (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*What about weighting? If an impact is going to be significant - and this document mentions the significant impact on the communities of this area - now that seems to me to be pretty significant particularly as you're interested in strong communities. Does that have greater weight than the benefit of saving £300k per year? Perhaps think about and let us have some answers on some weighting issues because not everything is equal... (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*You said it yourself in the documentation; that option AB which is a through school model has its benefits in transition between primary and secondary...but it was discounted. Well in my previous school, I was working with 13 primary schools alone and the one before that which was 750 11-16 pupils we were dealing with 20 primary schools. It's a totally do-able option as far as I'm concerned (Gwernyfed Governors)*

*What about the through school model? The Governing Body here has put a proposal together. Why can't that be considered both for the Gwernyfed area and the Brecon area? You could easily have a joint sixth form provision with Gwernyfed and Brecon and continue to work with NPTC to continue to give that choice... (Brecon Governors)*

## Projections, Facts and Figures

- 4.25 The Brecon Governors raised a number of objections to specific evidence and assumptions in the consultation document underpinning the case for change, particularly in relation to: the difference between offer and take-up of Welsh medium subjects; the omission of an 'up-to-date assessment of the

progress the high school has been making'; outdated figures on BHS's financial situation; and the apparently misleading insinuation that the school fails to offer post-16 Welsh medium education (when it was agreed this provision, post 16, would be provided at Builth Wells as part of the South Powys Consortium):

*Can I just point out that some of the statistics like when they say the number of Welsh medium subjects in year 10 and 11 in Brecon High School - that is not what's offered, that's the take-up because pupils may be choosing other things. It doesn't mean to say we are only offering two, that doesn't come through (Brecon Governors)*

*I want to talk about an omission...about an up-to-date assessment of the progress the high school has been making. The latest formal assessment for Gwernyfed is very up to date but the latest for ours is for 2012 (Brecon Governors)*

*You've been happy in this document to include the figures to show where we're currently at which... just continue to show that it is not sustainable. It would have been handy to show the figures that we're actually at (Brecon Governors)*

*I need to state that in this consultation document the intonation is that Brecon High School has failed in some way to offer any Welsh medium post-16. We haven't failed to do that. We are part of a South Powys consortium and it was agreed that this provision...would be provided at Builth Wells. (Brecon Governors)*

Figure 18: Other Issues and Sub-Themes from the Governors Meetings

Sub-Theme	Comments
Reduced funding per pupil in new proposed school	<i>I question why the funding per pupil is going down by so much in the new school? (Brecon Governors)</i>
Finding additional funding to expand A-level provision	<i>There's been a commitment by the local authority to put EIG to provide additional A-level provision in South Powys and in North Powys so why can't there be a commitment to do that into the future? Yes, the money could shrink but there is an opportunity there to be funding additional A-level courses. (Brecon Governors)</i>
Clarity around arrangements for developing the learning campus	<i>Whose grounds will the college be built on? Is the Authority giving away ground to NPTC? (Brecon Governors)</i>
Proposals will not deliver the 'super school' that was promised	<i>I don't think we're getting a 'super' school in any sense. It feels like this proposal is a pared down version of the original proposal of about four years ago. It will obviously be a smaller site than the original proposal which has implications for facilities and for how the school is going to be run will grow and what you can put in it.... (Brecon Governors)</i>
Lack of faith in the democratic process	<i>Cabinet isn't all the Council. It would appear not to be democratic; only nine people in it? (Brecon Governors)</i>
Possible need for staff to travel between school sites	<i>It's the rurality of the situation you don't seem to understand...we are a fair distance from anywhere. You can have members of staff who will be spending three quarters of their time in vehicles... (Gwernyfed Governors)</i>

Sub-Theme	Comments
Evidence of success at A-level on the Brecon campus	<i>The statistics we've had pertain to the whole of Neath Port Talbot and not to across the road...local parents are only interested in the results that come from across the road. (Brecon Governors)</i>
Tertiary system is an urban not rural solution	<i>It (tertiary college sixth form provision) probably works very well in an urban area but we're not living in an urban area, we're living in a rural area. (Brecon Governors)</i>
Investment in welsh language skills for primary staff contrary to centralising plans that limit local transitions into Welsh medium education	<i>I was talking to a teacher in one of the local primary schools who had been on a Welsh course... She was there with other teachers from the Brecon cluster group so they could go back into their primary schools to promote the Welsh language... So there's a lot of time and effort being put into these teachers being brought up to speed...But for that to actually work and carry on that's an opportunity for those schools to have small Welsh streams. You have those teachers with the expertise and the follow on is they would want those children to go onto secondary level and that's not happening. It's a golden opportunity for something to be done to encourage the growth of Welsh medium education in this area. It's all going to die a death at the end of primary school. (Brecon Governors)</i>

# 5. Staff Meetings

## Main issues and themes from the Staff meetings

### Overview of the Meeting Process

- 5.1 The staff meetings were held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Brecon) and Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Gwernyfed) at the respective high schools. Each meeting received a standard presentation from PCC on the proposed changes, which was followed by a question and answer session between participants and a panel of PCC officers. Most, if not all, staff members from each school attended the two sessions.
- 5.2 This chapter is in two parts: the first provides an overview of the staff meeting process and the second is a concise review of the main issues raised by participants.

### Main Themes Raised at Staff Meetings

#### Quality of Education

- 5.3 Participants at both meetings were unconvinced that reorganisation alone improves educational standards:

*I'm yet to understand how school reorganisation will impact on standards. I've been involved with schools for a long time and it ain't buildings that change schools, it's the people that work within them. It's the work you do to develop teaching and learning and nothing in this document explains to me how new buildings and organisation of the two schools is going to have an impact on standards. (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.4 Moreover, neither set of staff felt that their schools' current improvement trajectories are sufficiently recognised in the consultation document:

*You rightly acknowledge in the consultation document about Gwernyfed having come out of Estyn monitoring, You make no mention of the progress this school has made and that has been acknowledged by Estyn in regard to its movement towards coming out of special measures... (Brecon Staff)*

*We know how to improve; we have the right support in place. 53% of schools in Wales are in Estyn monitoring, and we're not any longer. National literacy tests are good, first or second quarter, Key Stages 3 and 4 have been in first quarter. My question is, what is your problem with the standards at this school? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

- 5.5 Furthermore, in their view, the consultation documentation unfairly suggests a connection between poor educational outcomes and the quality of the present teaching staff - and does not recognise the role PCC has allegedly played in falling educational standards across Powys as a whole, especially with respect to lack of support for schools:

*In your consultation questionnaire it says the reasons for the proposals. Point 2 it says 'Shadow Governing Body would employ high quality staff' etc.... It suggests that doesn't currently exist (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*You started your presentation by stating that three out of four schools in Powys are in special measures and yet you've just told me that you want to appoint high quality teaching staff and that jobs will be ring-fenced. I don't understand the connection (Brecon Staff)*

*Since 2011, Powys has had the highest number of schools, including primary, in special measures and don't you think you have to take some culpability instead of passing the blame to schools... What are YOU going to do? (Brecon Staff)*

*The top table keeps on about support, support, support. I haven't seen it. PCC has not given any support to this school or the teachers... (Brecon Staff)*

## Transport and Travel

- 5.6 Participants were keen to see the possible financial, logistical and time-related impact of teacher travel between sites factored into the current proposals - as well as a recognition that such an increase in travel will have on staff stress levels (and thus sickness levels):

*You're talking about an impact on staff, and then subsequently on standards. My husband teaches in Rhondda, where three schools were closed and turned into one...standards dropped, staff sickness and stress increased and that was just in one town. Staff were having to travel in their break; there was no detention... What you're proposing - one school split site - that's going to happen in just over one academic year. So I would imagine the split site will be for two, three, four, five years of working conditions where you're going to have to bus students or staff up and down. Who is going to cover break and lunch? Who is going to cover the cost of the bussing students or staff? If staff are giving up break and lunch, they're going to have to get back time. Where are meetings going to be held? Where are we going to meet parents? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Finance and Funding

- 5.7 Participants at Brecon argued that the school's current financial situation has been caused by systematic failures and historical mismanagement by PCC - and in some part by the uncertainty raised by the ongoing consultation process around BHS's future - and should not reflect badly on its current staff and leadership:

*We all know that historically PCC went against its own guidelines for school budgets and allowed the school to become heavily in debt when they shouldn't have done and the school still carries and has to pay back the loan for things which certainly the pupils and certainly the staff are not responsible for...if you could acknowledge the fact that some of the problems in the information that is being presented as reasons for closing this school is a presentation of facts for which the County Council are themselves responsible? (Brecon Staff)*

*How confident are you that these budgets are right and do you acknowledge that the actions over the last few years have contributed to those problems? Do you acknowledge the fact that losing children as a result of the consultation process that started last year and then was stopped resulted caused students to leave this school and has caused significant financial hardship to this school? I'd like to know what Powys County Council have put in place to support Brecon High School in the loss*



*of the students in the Welsh Medium...I would like someone to make comment on the fact that we lost 30 students as a result of the consultation process. (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.8 Furthermore, they questioned whether the Council is reflecting the current picture at Brecon by using outdated financial figures in its consultation document – and complained about a lack of support for a head teacher who is attempting to move the school in the right direction in a financial sense:

*Budgets are fluid and things have changed since publishing (the consultation document). They seem to change very quickly and therefore presenting this information as a snapshot without that information also being published alongside doesn't seem very fair... (Brecon Staff)*

*I feel we've got a head teacher who is taking the reins of the school and moving the school forward... We've had challenging financial problems that have led to a lot of difficulties... It hasn't been easy...the funding isn't there so it's a spiral really. We have a very good head teacher who is trying to move us out of special measures but isn't getting the support from Powys. From a financial position his hands are tied. (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.9 It was also said that the projected financial savings are not sufficient to compensate for the 'chaos' the proposals will cause if implemented:

*This split site thing that will last in your model for a very short period of time, the financial savings are not worth the chaos you will get, even if we all stay and don't run to the hills. For a minimal saving in the grand scheme of things, is it worth it? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Buildings and Estates

- 5.10 Staff at both meetings suggested that Powys should look again at the feasibility of keeping both current school sites by considering alternative options (such as an all-through school for Brecon):

*Instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, why don't we invest in what we've got? It's obvious that we need a new school but I was handing out the consultation documents to my pupils the other day and no way do they want to lose Brecon High School. There are opportunities to look at different options but it seems to me as if the decision has been made and that worries me... (Brecon Staff)*

*In terms of alternatives, has the option of 3-18 year schools been seriously considered on both sites? I worked in the English system ... and this has proven to be very successful and a sound financial option. (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.11 There was also a great deal of scepticism around the reasons for the proposals: Gwernyfed staff in particular suggested that they are driven by the need to secure Welsh Government capital funding streams for a new building in Brecon and not by a need to develop better educational standards and outcomes for pupils:

*Can you confirm that the reason you wish to close the high school is not because of the standard of education, but to secure funding from the Welsh Assembly Government for a new high school in Brecon? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Governance and Staffing of a New School

- 5.12 Gwernyfed staff principally underlined the challenge they believe a new Shadow Governing Body (when formed) will face in implementing a new school entity in an 'unachievable' timeframe, particularly with respect to developing timetables and negotiating contracts:

*The whole timeline is just absolutely, completely unrealistic and what that gets people to believe is that it's totally driven by financial need. It's just completely unachievable...four months to sort out 100 contracts over the two schools? Really? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*Here we have five maths teachers. The complexities of putting a second timetable together in the interim...we have seven or eight Welsh staff that aren't full-time equivalents. There are specialist staff on .6 .8 or .4. It's not ambitious; it's totally unachievable. (Gwernyfed Staff)*

- 5.13 Furthermore, Gwernyfed were keen to understand the relationship between PCC, the Shadow Governing Body and Senior Management Team in implementing any possible changes - and stressed that the former should not seek to involve itself in the day-to-day running of the school:

*What are the roles of the County Council and the Shadow Governing Body who then appoint the head teacher? It's not the position of the Council to say you will teach Key Stage 3 and 4 on both sites etc. It is up to the Shadow Governing Body and the head teacher to decide all that. (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Pupil Impacts

- 5.14 Gwernyfed staff highlighted the psychological and social impacts of the recent history of proposed local school closures on young people and the wider community. Families have apparently moved from the area due to the uncertainty, which has also apparently been very 'damaging' to children's mental wellbeing:

*Estyn said our transition was 'seamless'. We've worked with our primary schools to make sure pupils have come here and settle. This year, it's been much worse, they're scared. They've expressed concern, they're really worried. Some kind of psych problem. This goes back five years when you first proposed this... Families made decisions; they moved. They're going to Crickhowell. That's a reason why their numbers have gone up and we've gone down. The same is happening in Hay. The number of parents putting kids into English schools is up as well. This is not because of us. It's because of decisions made by yourselves! What about the psychological impacts on children in Years 5 and 6? The uncertainty of this entire process. It really is damaging to them, and you need to understand that if you make this decision, they have no idea what they're going to do. I speak to these children, they WANT to come here. You're damaging that. (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Staff Impacts

- 5.15 Of most concern to staff was the impact of continuing job insecurity on their own and colleagues' mental, emotional and financial wellbeing - and the lack of support offered by PCC in relation to this:

*Your announcement of a proposal for school closures has had a negative financial impact on me. What support have you put in place for what you will be offering me and other staff in the school? I applied for a loan...one of the questions asked was, 'are you aware of any changes in your financial situation, your earnings or your employment that may occur for the duration of this loan?' I answered honestly up to September 2016. Up to that date I have not been able to obtain financial loans...so what will you be offering me to put that right? This is affecting staff in this room; we can't get mortgages, we can't get loans. That has happened since the announcement back in 2015. What timeframe will you come back and tell me that I can now provide for my children... I need to be able to tell my family in six months' time I will know the answer... (Brecon Staff)*



*You're not considering us as people. We need to keep our mortgage/family going. If you give us a temporary contract for 12 months how can we do this? The banks won't understand... (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*This consultation is having mental, emotional and physical impacts on this staff and on our families. What have you put in place since making your statement to support us as your employees? We have never been made aware of (a counselling service)... Should it not have been your first consideration the effect this would have on staff and did you come and talk to us as staff or did you give it to the head teacher to inform us? Would it not have been better to have come and support and be honest and forthright with us? I don't think anyone was aware that there was support available to us. As your employees, you have let us down (Brecon Staff)*

*Looking through this document there is absolutely no impact assessment for Brecon High School staff beyond hoping for 'mitigation' of acknowledged 'demotivation'. Not very helpful. (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.16 They also suggested that the retention of current staff will be a real challenge in the short-term unless there is some recognition of their positive contribution to the schools and some clarification around job security, redundancy and redeployment can be given:

*People in this room work very, very hard and are professionals... We run a balanced budget. There's that feeling of 'what have we done wrong'? This sums up how we feel as an establishment, we don't want to lose this (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*You don't get it. You have nice comfy jobs, and we don't know what we're doing. Our jobs? Are we going back and forth to Brecon? What are we doing?! (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*If the proposal is accepted and the Shadow Governing Body etc. decides - what happens to us? Made redundant or...? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*As I understand it the Shadow Governing Body can ring fence jobs, or it can decide not to. In which case it seems to me the implication would that if the Governing Body wanted to it could advertise all jobs nationally which would mean that all staff here would lose their jobs. In which case, what's the redundancy situation in terms of payments to staff? (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.17 Furthermore, another important concern was that the loss of sixth form provision will result in a teacher 'exodus' because of their general enjoyment of teaching at this level and the loss of career development opportunities.

*Sixth form disappears from here. You obviously want to keep the best teachers here. But if the sixth form goes, they'll be looking for jobs elsewhere... How can you keep the standards of teaching up if there's an exodus of highly skilled staff? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*Teachers have subject skills and knowledge up to A-level, and they enjoy teaching up to A-level; it's part of their development and its why they teach...you're going to be preventing staff from being able to follow the careers that they want... A lot of teachers that do teach sixth form would feel that they would have to go elsewhere. It would have an impact on standards lower down, because obviously some A-level teachers can make great Key Stage 4 teachers... The most experienced, with the best subject knowledge will then be leaving to do a more fulfilling/challenging job. They wouldn't go to NPTC because the terms and conditions and the pay isn't the same (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*If the sixth form is transferred to [NPTC] I assume you'll get your lecturers; what's going to happen to all the expertise and experience from the schools in Brecon and Gwernyfed? They're just going to be swept away and that's a massive waste of resources (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*There's a statement here that there may be a positive impact on the further dismantling of Brecon's educational asset. It says, 'a new school would be able to focus solely on Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. I can't believe that anyone would have any conviction with that statement. To say that if you take away our sixth form, we can suddenly concentrate on everything else... (Brecon Staff)*

## Post-16 Education

- 5.18 Participants made a number of points around the continuity and quality of post-16 education in the area. They suggested that NPTC lacks the capacity and resources to provide at least comparable education provision to what is currently provided by the schools - and sought reassurances that pupils will never be expected to travel to Neath to complete their education (which has apparently happened in the past):

*You've worked very hard in this document to convince us of that argument about NPTC. All of the statistics are here. It doesn't hold any sway. It's the easiest thing in the world to talk about general results in NPTC. If you work in this environment and live in the community you will know that there is absolutely no quality assurance for students studying across the road. So on a lot of levels there are a lot of objections here (Brecon Staff)*

*In the consultation it shows that [NPTC's] standards aren't as good as ours, so if it's about raising standards, that's not happening at all (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*It was our understanding that you were happy with the sixth form provision here and how well it works. The standards here are good. A-level results are very, very good...every child went to their first or second place uni. About 70% of the cohort have applied to Russell Group unis this year. The standards are excellent. What you're proposing is that there is no sixth form at Brecon or Gwernyfed and that it all goes to NPTC. In the consultation it shows that their standards aren't as good as ours, so if it's about raising standards, that's not happening at all. Students I know have had lessons there, particularly psychology, which I think is the only A-level they currently provide that we don't. We had a student that was the only student to pass with A\* to C grade. She wanted to go to university to study psych and we had to give her additional support; without us she would have failed. Another four students from Powys had to travel to Neath. We want assurance that the standards will be as good [and] we need to ensure that they won't be shipped down to Neath (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*In the last four years, when the Council issues results and says results are comparable, even though [NPTC has] 22% free school meals and results are going up, it's still a bad deal for us because our results are trending upwards faster. Offering 25 subjects does not mean you will deliver 25 subjects. We could say we offer 25 and then decide not to provide the 13 lowest signed-up courses. That seems to be what you did. A student I know started a course with NPTC and it got dropped, and she had to go to night school! (Gwernyfed Staff)*

- 5.19 Lack of accountability and quality assurance in relation to NPTC's performance was also a concern, and overall staff felt that removing the option of school-based sixth form in favour of the proposed tertiary model would lead to an unnecessarily uncertain future for pupils:

*Because it won't be Powys County Council's responsibility for the standards of NPTC, what happens if we have issues? If they cancel a course, if results are poor? Who do they go to say 'the College is not providing for my child'? What happens when there isn't good A-level provision? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*If my children go to NPCT, what responsibility does the County Council have for that child? Where do I go to if something goes wrong? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*I pay my taxes here! If they pull out and say my son has to go to Neath, what then? I have an email saying there's no science labs over there. We're teaching one of them. You're saying that's okay, because I can complain to them? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

- 5.20 There was also significant worry about continuity for pupils; that is, being taught at the critical A-level stage by teachers with whom they are familiar and who know 'what makes them tick':

*In this school there would only be Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and therefore the continuation of education would stop and be transferred to another institution. We're looking at the impact on the pupils and the continuation of people who have spent almost five years within the school... (Brecon Staff)*

*My concern is that if we lose that continuity in this school. We know the students. We know what makes them tick. We know how to cajole them; get them to do the best they can in the school and they go on to another area within the school with teachers who perhaps they don't know, they're not going to achieve that continuity. (Brecon Staff)*

Moreover, there was a sense that younger pupils would suffer as a result of a lack of sixth form, whose pupils act as role models and have a significant positive influence on others.

*They will not be able to project positive role models to younger students, to celebrate their achievements. They will go from being the big fish to being little fish if they go to tertiary education and that will be a major loss to them. There has been no consideration of that at all in the document. (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.21 Staff also noted the unfairness of removing post-16 parental and learner choice within the area, an unique situation in the context of Powys as a whole and one that may result in the loss of Powys pupils to educational establishments in, for example, Hereford and Merthyr Tydfil where more courses are offered and the quality of education is assured. This, in turn, would seriously jeopardise the sustainability of NPTC's Brecon-based provision:

*I can't see the logic in the fact that this would be the only school in Powys where the sixth form is lost. You don't have a high school within Powys where these sixth formers [could go]. I don't think the impact on the pupils has been taken into account (Brecon Staff)*

*My son is in year 10. When the school closes he will have just finished his GCSEs. When the school reopens...where does he go for sixth form? As a parent I would be quite foolish to send him to an organisation that doesn't have a track record of delivering academic A-Levels on its site at present. So will there be other provision? Will Crickhowell suddenly double in size in their sixth form so he can go there? Or do I have to send him to Merthyr or Hereford? (Brecon Staff)*

*We did survey both our current Year 11 and year 10, and we have one student that would go to NPTC if Brecon and Gwernyfed shut. All the others would go to Hereford. In our current Year 10, all wanted to go to Brecon or Hereford. It's not that the students don't know what's on offer at NPTC. They will go to Merthyr, they will go to Hereford...and if they go there, they follow a completely*

*different system. They won't have access to the Welsh Baccaulaureate, which we do fantastically here and is great for university and gives you the best life chances (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*We know that these students aren't going to go there; we've done a questionnaire. The students that would go to NPTC, it wouldn't be enough for them... What you're suggesting is not sustainable because they have to have sufficient numbers which they won't get from two sixth forms. If you want tertiary education, you need all the sixth forms in this area. Crickhowell's numbers are growing, good luck to them... In Brecon and Gwernyfed, our kids are going to Hereford and Merthyr where more courses are offered. (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Welsh Medium Education

- 5.22 Participants desired a more honest appraisal of the likely pupil numbers and breadth of courses that will be offered at Builth Wells - as well as more information about primary school provision in the area - so that parents can make better informed choices around their children's future:

*Many parents made the decision to move their children to Builth last year and I note in your consultation document that there is an assumption that all pupils in Welsh streams would transfer to Builth. I am concerned that I can't find any information about the primary providers in the Builth area. I am concerned because I don't see that parents can make informed decisions if you are not giving them all of the information. How can you make comparisons as parents if the information isn't published in the consultation document? (Brecon Staff)*

Indeed, some argued that there is a lack of evidence that the proposal will create a critical mass at Builth Wells and encourage sufficient numbers to make it feasible, especially in the short-term:

*You talk about the increase of numbers in Builth Wells High School as the result of this change and the impact this will have on Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 and the ability to increase the breadth of subjects offered. It's going to take you four years before you can have any kind of significant increase in numbers. Let's say Year 7, going into Year 8 next year, there are currently three pupils; I can't guarantee that they'll all want to go to Builth. So it could be only one or two that are going to increase the numbers at Builth Wells High School. That won't have an impact on being able to deliver a broader range of subjects. And I would question the same at KS5. It's going to take an awful long time before any kind of numbers increase and bear in mind you have a huge drop-off in the number of Welsh Medium students who choose their A-levels through the medium of English. I fail to see how it's going to impact on the breadth of subjects at Builth Wells... (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.23 There was considerable anger among Brecon staff members that the school's Welsh stream has lost many pupils to Builth Wells as a result of the consultation process: parents apparently proactively removed their children for 'fear that the Welsh medium unit would close'. Furthermore, the provision of out of school transport to enable pupils from Sennybridge to attend Ystalyfera was noted; participants were unclear as to how this was allowed to happen in preference to encouraging people to send their children to Brecon and growing Welsh medium provision locally - particularly in the primary school sector:

*I have yet to hear any acknowledgement from anybody...of the impact of your original consultation on the significant number of pupils who left this school, who believed that it was a fait accompli and we lost 30 pupils almost overnight. Nobody's acknowledged the impact of the Local Authority. The fact that those numbers are now lost and the fact is you quote in the document [that at] Brecon High School there are low numbers (Brecon Staff)*

*Many parents took their children from this school in fear that the Welsh medium unit would close. You make a big point about 30 pupils; at that point of time it wasn't 30 pupils. They moved before they thought they would be pushed. So I would like to know, have you got any more historical data to show the downward trend and how it's dramatically changed after your first idea for doing this? (Brecon Staff)*

*We talk about a critical mass of pupils for Welsh medium. The fact we have a Welsh medium primary school across the road and you've also got Sennybridge which is within commuting distance; how is it that we cannot foresee them transferring to Brecon High School and also how has it happened that the Council provides transport out of catchment? There are healthy numbers in both those schools that could have come here (Brecon Staff)*

*A year ago it was acknowledged that the County Council had not provided support to the school...Brecon High School is now stuffed in terms of trying to grow its Welsh Medium provision. Ysgol y Bannau and Sennybridge are providing apparently at best between 15 and 20 young people, not all who will come to Brecon High School to do Welsh medium. Now that kind of number is not significantly big enough in order to have a sustainable Welsh medium provision...if you are serious about Welsh provision, why are you not growing it in the primary provision within South Powys to enable there to be sustainable provision? (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.24 In addition to the above, the lack of support offered by PCC to BHS's bid to obtain Welsh language status 2b was noted as another contributory factor to the decline of Welsh medium education at the school:

*Where was the Council when the school wanted to go from status 2c to 2b? Why didn't Powys help us as a school to get 2b status? (Brecon Staff)*

- 5.25 It was also said that PCC is not being as creative, proactive and supportive in terms of developing Welsh medium education as other counties across Wales:

*Why aren't Powys County Council being creative about getting schools to keep the local areas alive? You want to move the school 16 miles away; you'll lose the kids and you'll lose the Welsh (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*I am from Ystradgynlais and am aware of the changes that were made there...and in regard to expanding Welsh provision in primary, you as a county made a decision to close two Welsh medium primaries in Ystradgynlais. You made one Welsh medium primary; it was a very successful and popular school. It's been put on the smallest site in Ystradgynlais with no room for expansion. That school is now over-capacity and there's nothing that can be done about it... In every other county in Wales, English comprehensive schools are closing and are creating Welsh medium... It seems that Powys County Council have no support for Welsh medium education in general. I cannot understand how every other county in Wales is successful in developing Welsh medium education and Powys is not. (Brecon Staff)*

## Consultation Process

- 5.26 Many staff members suggested a lack of detail in the consultation document, which was thought to contain too many vagaries and implicit assumptions:

*In the consultation document there seems to be a lot of presumption. We'll try to make sure this happens/that happens. The schools will make the decisions. Not the Council... (Gwernyfed Staff)*

## Projections, Facts and Figures

5.27 Participants at both meetings suggested that finance not quality is the driver for the proposals. Additionally, they challenged a number of specific statements around the reasons for falling pupil numbers put forward in the case for change:

*A lot of the questions have been around the human elements for staff, the pupils, parents and the wider community. Most of the answers are statistical or financial, which obviously is the major concern. It seems the whole thing is finance driven rather than the welfare; the overall human element (Brecon Staff)*

*We're not debating standards? So if there wasn't a financial query, we would be worried about placements? Would we be in this situation if it wasn't financial? (Gwernyfed Staff)*

*You've made an issue of it in terms of the presentation this evening; the falling numbers in Powys and Brecon High School and so on. So why is it that Powys County Council would allow another school to increase its numbers in each year group? Brecon High School has suffered from the fact that the pupil numbers have been allowed to increase at Crickhowell. Pupils have left this school to go to Crickhowell as soon as parents are aware there are additional places. You talk about us as a school wanting to retain numbers, and then you create an opportunity for pupils to move out of this area. How can that be right? (Brecon Staff)*

*It is not true what you put about primary schools; there are more children in primary schools than we can actually take in... (Gwernyfed Staff)*

Figure 19: Other Issues and Sub-Themes from the Staff meetings

Sub-Theme	Comments
Loss of unique school identity	<i>Gwernyfed is the worst scenario; we're going to disappear... And I know it won't be called Brecon High School but it's a high school in Brecon. (Gwernyfed Staff)</i>
Quality of BHS buildings	<i>Have you actually walked around Brecon High? The roof's caving in. Are you expecting our students to go from here to there!? It's perfectly good here. (Gwernyfed Staff)</i>
Insufficient pre-engagement with staff	<i>Shouldn't we have been consulted when you came up with the various options in the first place? A consultation on all the different options...what would work best, what do you think about this? The range of options, not just this one? (Gwernyfed Staff)</i>
Impact of loss of BHS's Welsh medium stream	<i>There's no impact assessment on the loss to the school of the Welsh medium stream who have contributed out of all proportion to their numbers over the years. (Brecon Staff)</i>
Loss of Welsh unit will not improve outcomes for English medium Pupils	<i>I feel it's equally insulting that by losing the Welsh unit that we'll then be able to concentrate more on the English unit. Not impressed. (Brecon Staff)</i>



Sub-Theme	Comments
Comparisons with North Powys merger	<i>We can compare John Beddoes/Newtown to here. It sounds the same, but up there you're talking about a merger. The chaos will be far greater; we're looking at the closure of two schools, The staffing changes won't be the same. You can't compare it. It's not going to be as smooth as that. (Brecon Staff)</i>
Use of emotive language in consultation document	<i>I would actually like to go to the pupil consultation document and some of the comments that are made in there...on page 2 you state 'we <u>fear</u> the standard of education delivered in our secondary schools may <u>worsen</u>'...don't you think you're scaremongering? You could have chosen your words far more carefully when dealing with young people. (Brecon Staff)</i>

## 6. Secondary School Workshops

### Main issues and themes from the secondary school pupil workshops

#### Overview of the Meeting Process

- 6.1 ORS facilitated and reported discussion sessions with BHS and GHS pupils aged between 11 and 18 (key stages 3 to 5; year groups 7 to 13). All year groups were invited to nominate a number of pupils to attend. The point or purpose of these workshops was to allow PCC to engage with, and listen to, existing pupils - and to elicit their opinions, queries and concerns on the proposed changes. They also offered the pupils an opportunity to become more informed about the consultation process, the case for change and the proposals themselves.
- 6.2 The workshops were held and attended as follows:

Location	Date	Approx. number of attendees
Gwernyfed High School	Tuesday 12th April 2016	60
Brecon High School	Wednesday 27th April 2016	117

- 6.3 ORS worked in collaboration with PCC to agree a suitable agenda and informative stimulus material for the meeting, which covered the following topics:

Participants' knowledge of the consultation and proposals;

PCC's case for change;

PCC's proposals; and

Alternative options

The pupils were also encouraged to ask any questions and make any comments they wished throughout the discussions.

#### Reporting

- 6.4 This section of the report presents the main themes and key points arising from the Brecon and Gwernyfed sessions (those affecting Builth and Llandrindod have been reported separately). The opinions expressed were not always unanimous, but we have endeavoured to reflect the range of views expressed. Some important common themes emerged from discussions across both workshops; but issues relating to a particular school or key stage have been highlighted. Many quotations are used (in



italics), not because we wish to endorse any views, but in order to illustrate some of the more common and important themes and issues.

## Main Themes Raised at the Secondary School Pupil Meetings

### Awareness of Consultation and Proposals

- 6.5 Most, if not all, pupils had heard of the consultation and had some knowledge of the proposals to: close the school sites at Gwernyfed and Brecon upon the opening of a new school in Brecon; and to deliver post-16 education there via the NPTC Group of Colleges.
- 6.6 However, a minority of pupils had misheard or made incorrect assumptions such as: ‘years 7, 8 and 9 would stay in this building and years 9, 10 and 11 would go to Gwernyfed’. (KS3, Brecon High School).
- 6.7 Some BHS pupils felt that communication around the consultation and the fact the changes are not certain could and should have been better:

*My friend and I are going to different schools for A-Levels; I’m going the Crickhowell to do mine because of the miscommunication. I thought the decision had already been made to get rid of the sixth form. If I’d have known there might still be a sixth form here I would have stayed (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*The uncertainty about what’s happening is affecting loads of people already. The messages need to be communicated more clearly. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

### Views on the Case for Change

- 6.8 BHS pupils recognised their school building’s age and poor condition, as well as the relatively poor educational practices in evidence there. Some important examples of the latter were that teachers are frequently teaching subjects outside their areas of expertise and an over-use of supply teachers. Therefore, most understood and supported PCC’s reasons for considering changes to the way in which it delivers secondary school education in the area:

*The school is falling apart because it’s a really old building. People do their exams in the gym and they can see outside and people can see in. It’s not very nice for people doing their GCSEs (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*There is a case for changing some things. In the hall some of the tiles are broken on the roof; there are other things like that which are quite bad (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Our core subjects are being taught by people who aren’t qualified in that subject; our science teacher is our music teacher (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*We’ve had supply teachers every week who don’t get through as much during the lesson. I feel like we’re slowing down when we were quite ahead before (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*Half the children in my class in Sennybridge Primary went straight to Ystalyfera; they didn’t even consider Brecon and why that’s happening should be looked at (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*There was a small fraction in our years that didn’t come to Brecon because of the state of the building anyway - some went to Builth and one other to Ystalyfera. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

- 6.9 Indeed, only a minority of participants could not understand the case for change at BHS, particularly in terms of educational standards:

*I've been here seven years and haven't had a problem with the school itself...in terms of education I can't fault it. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

- 6.10 Although GHS pupils agreed that change is needed at the Brecon site, they rejected PCC's case for their own school, suggesting that it's involvement in the proposals 'hinder the overall aims'. Specifically, they argued that low pupil numbers are not an issue because:

Smaller schools and class sizes are preferable to larger ones in terms of educational standards:

*Why do you need 600 pupils in a school? Isn't it better to have small classes and one-to-one teaching? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*The current sizes of classes are good – a class of 28 is too big (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*The 'negatives' in the (consultation) document aren't really negative. For example, the small class sizes which isn't a bad thing (KS5, Brecon High School)*

The school naturally has fewer pupils due to its rural location, not because it is in some way deficient:

*It is a small school due to being in the countryside (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

It is a situation that has partly arisen as a result of this consultation, which has discouraged pupils from attending GHS:

*We currently have so few numbers in the year groups because of what Powys have done with the threat of closing the school. Pupils in year 6 were hearing that Gwernyfed was going to close so they have chosen to go to other schools not under threat. (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

## PCC's Proposals: A New School in Brecon

### Support and Acceptance

- 6.11 Brecon pupils were supportive of a new secondary school and were hopeful that it would bring important educational improvements such as: subjects being set-based rather than mixed ability; a wider range of subject options; more permanent teachers; and better facilities:

*I think a new school would be great because we will have more subject choices (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*If we join we might have a better education. You could have more qualified teachers...better Maths or English teachers in a bigger school (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*A friend of mine was choosing their GCSE options a while ago and wanted to do Music which wasn't an option here. They also changed Triple Science as a compulsory option so people couldn't choose what they wanted. Would this be rectified under the new system? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*It would be good to have more modern options. With A-Levels you have to specialise so if you know what you do to do at A-Level when you're at GCSE age they should have something more specialised to offer you too so you have continuity. For example, for IT they could have a specialist programming aspect (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Having a good new facility would entice people to come and raise pupil numbers. A better building would be attractive to people. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

### Concerns and Opposition

- 6.12 Despite the general positivity at Brecon, the pupils were also mindful of resistance within the Gwernyfed catchment area, which led them to question whether the two schools should or could be merged:

*I have a friend in Gwernyfed and they don't want it to happen. In Brecon there's a mix as to whether we want it to or not but they are all against it in Gwernyfed. So if it does happen how will you persuade them that it's a good idea? (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*The majority of people from Gwernyfed don't want to move here... (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Brecon definitely needs a new building but I'm not really sure a merger with Gwernyfed is a good idea (KS4, Brecon High School)*

- 6.13 In particular, the increased travel for pupils from the Gwernyfed catchment area was recognised as an issue - as was the possibility that many pupils from that area would likely attend a school elsewhere rather than the proposed new one at Brecon:

*Gwernyfed pupils worry about how they will get here. For us it's a couple of metres longer to walk but for them it's a lot further (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*I think we can all agree that we need a new building but not a new school combined with Gwernyfed. It wouldn't be so bad for us but some people from Gwernyfed would have to travel miles and miles (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*From their point of view, for pupils from the other side of the area like Hay etc. it's probably far enough to Gwernyfed let alone Brecon. So you see where they're coming from. The majority will find another school to go to nearer where they live (KS4, Brecon High School)*

- 6.14 These issues and concerns were confirmed in the Gwernyfed workshops, where pupils were overwhelmingly opposed to PCC's proposals on the following grounds:

Brecon is too far to travel to and access, which has not been sufficiently considered due to 'the difference between what the government and pupils think are acceptable travel times'. Indeed, the remote location of and lack of public transport for many pupils was a key issue, which led several participants to question how money can be saved given the amount that would be required for transport provision:

*There has always been a bus to Gwernyfed from pupils' villages but there is rarely any transport to Brecon (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*If people are travelling more how is this saving money? (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Brecon is a long way to go (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*A large amount of pupils live up in the mountains - would the transport go there? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

The additional travel time to and from school would impact on pupils' ability to undertake extra-curricular activities (and on their parents who might have to travel further to collect them) – and would leave little time for homework and 'down time':

*Can the bus routes be changed to suit after-school classes? (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Would students have to pay for extra bus tickets to do this on public buses? (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Most pupils do after school clubs, and their parents have to come and pick them up... (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*It would take me an hour to get home from Brecon which means I wouldn't get to rugby club on time (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*After school clubs can be accessed easily now because it's not far to travel, but if we do have to travel parents will end up waiting around. It doesn't just affect pupils but parents as well (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

*The extra travel would impact on my life. I wouldn't have time for the young farmers club I'm involved with, my homework or helping my dad out on the farm. Extracurricular is really important, why should I have to give it up? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.15 In addition, pupils in both areas recognised that BHS is perceived as having a 'bad reputation' and there was concern that locating the new site there would either allow these issues to continue or fail to eradicate the stigma associated with the existing school:

*I used to go to Brecon High School and there were issues with security (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*There are lots of people in Brecon who smoke, take drugs and misbehave (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Some pupils went to Gwernyfed from Brecon because they were being bullied (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Stigma would still be attached to Brecon; people wouldn't see it as a new school. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

- 6.16 Many reservations were expressed and reassurances sought about attending a merged school. These included:

Brecon and Gwernyfed pupils not 'getting on well', possibly resulting in conflicts

*Brecon and Gwernyfed don't really get on (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*There is rivalry between Gwernyfed and Brecon (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*I don't mind them moving here but some of the kids from there have insulted us before because they think we're having a really bad education and are irresponsible... (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Lots of people don't get on with Brecon pupils, there's lots of rivalry; can you guarantee that we will get on with each other? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

Pupil increases leading to misbehaviour and larger classes, which would place further strain on teachers and affect educational standards

*Brecon has a rule they aren't supposed to go by the leisure centre and teachers have to rein it in. I have concerns this is going to happen on a bigger scale wasting teacher's time (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*If you have bigger classes teachers may not be able to give pupils enough attention (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

Whether the wellbeing centre at BHS would remain successful within a larger school

*What support will you offer to pupils in a larger school? We have a wellbeing centre here which is very well used and is massively important. It has links with outside organisations and they do tremendous amounts for all pupils. They do group activities for people who aren't confident socialising and it's a space for people to go to, to get away from things every day. It's phenomenal to be able to see a familiar face that is trained. How will that be provided in a merged school? Some of the children who rely on that service would not want to come to school if it wasn't there (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*We are an inclusive school and the wellbeing centre is a big part of that as they will not give up on any pupils. Will you be able to provide this in a bigger school? (KS5, Brecon High School)*

Whether the school uniform would change of and ,if so, whether parents would they be expected to pay for it

*Will we have to pay for any changes to the school uniform even if the Council are the ones who want to change it? (KS3, Brecon High School)*

Whether the termly inter-school sports tournament would be affected.

6.17 Additional worries around the proposal included:

Whether it would put teachers' job security into doubt - and specifically whether they there would redundancies or the requirement to re-apply for posts

*Would the teachers have to reapply for their jobs? Would any of them be made redundant? We would want the best teachers across the two schools (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*We were speaking to our RE teachers and she said all the teachers are really worried about losing their jobs (KS3, Brecon High School)*

Uncertainty may result in some teachers choosing to leave, further impacting on the current quality of education

*If staff want jobs elsewhere will we be able to get new staff in to finish off the year? (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

How going to a new school may affect and unsettle those in the middle of their GCSEs

*If the new school is built and the schools merge, people doing their GCSEs may have new teachers. When this happens it does affect your grades (KS4, Brecon High School)*

Whether PCC can afford to build a new school

*Are you sure you will be able to build a new school financially? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

How PCC can safeguard BHS pupils in the short-term given the poor condition of the school building

*How will you make the building safe for us in the interim? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

What alternative options are available to pupils who do not wish to attend the new school

*If people don't want to come to the new school the nearest one for both areas is Crickhowell, which is already turning people away because they're overcrowded. (KS4, Brecon High School)*

- 6.18 There was also some scepticism around the proposed timescales for the opening of the proposed new school based on previous experiences of implementation delays in improving the area's primary school:

*Five years ago there was a proposal to close primary schools and build a new super school – they've closed some schools but not built the new one. I'm worried this will also happen to Gwernyfed (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*The new primary school should have opened in 2015, how do we know this isn't going to happen here? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.19 A final discussion point was around the short- and long-term future of the school buildings themselves: in the Brecon workshops reassurance was sought that the land would be put to good use, while there were concerns about how development on the Gwernyfed site may impact the local leisure centre at the sessions there:

*There's no point having a big building like this wasting away here. It's important the Council does something with it (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*Say if the school gets built, what will happen to our school during the process? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Can you build on the proposed land? What will happen to the leisure centre? (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

### General Queries

- 6.20 Some pupils wanted to know more about the details of the proposal, and asked questions around: whether the schools' uniform and logo would change; how the head teacher and senior leadership team would be chosen; and how long it would take to build the new school.

### PCC's Proposals: Proposed Closure of GHS

- 6.21 As might be anticipated from the views reported above, Gwernyfed pupils were strongly opposed to the proposed closure of their school: they described it as a 'happy' and 'safe' community-focused school in attractive surroundings with a good reputation. Some typical comments were:

*I don't see anything wrong with Gwernyfed and I don't see the need for closure. It also has beautiful surroundings (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Gwernyfed is small and safe; you are happy to bring younger siblings here and there's no bullying (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*There is better pupil and staff engagement at Gwernyfed (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Gwernyfed fits all the categories of the Wellbeing Act so by moving to Brecon this will be lost; it should be something to protect (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*Gwernyfed is in a good spot for a school; you stay in school all day whereas in Brecon pupils can walk to town (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*I went to Brecon High School and came to Gwernyfed to do A-Levels, and the sense of community is so much better here. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

- 6.22 Furthermore, participants reasoned that only BHS needs improving and that it is unfair to 'tar Gwernyfed with the same brush'. Indeed, pupils felt that merging their school with 'a bad one' would have a detrimental effect on its current high standards, contradicting PCC's case for change:



*It's Brecon that needs to be changed; Gwernyfed should not be sacrificed for it (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*I feel like Gwernyfed is getting penalised (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*Bringing Gwernyfed down to Brecon isn't fair. Brecon is known for truancy because it is by the town, but in Gwernyfed there is no chance of this (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*To put a good school with a bad one could make our standards drop. The problems are linked with Brecon, not Gwernyfed (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*How much of a negative effect will this have on younger pupils? Gwernyfed is already of a good standard and if this goes ahead there will be a slip in standards. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

- 6.23 An important issue for many pupils was the impact the proposed closure of GHS would have on its affiliated local clubs. Indeed, there was concern that many of the area's young people would no longer be able to attend these clubs due to getting home later from school and that numbers would further dwindle with no local high school:

*If the school closes and they have to go to Brecon it would impact on after school clubs due to transport issues with being picked up (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*I am part of the rugby club which has 115 members, most of who are from Gwernyfed. It has lots of funding and girls teams etc. but without a flow of 11 to 16 year olds I can't see there being a youth team in seven years. No one will move here if there is no school. (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.24 In addition, it was thought that local businesses and the area's sense of community would suffer hugely in the absence of GHS:

*The plans could disrupt the sports centre, charity work and businesses. The sense of community would be lost; the setting of the school is nice and it's the hub of the community (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

*The economy and business in the local community will be impacted; less pupils will stop off at places on their way home from school etc. (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*A £100,000 a year saving doesn't outweigh the loss economy on the community. (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.25 The pupils also argued that it would be 'very unlikely' that those in the Gwernyfed catchment area would attend the new school in Brecon, instead preferring to 'go over the border' to England - and they felt that the closure of GHS would discourage parents of young children from settling in the area, again exacerbating the issue of low pupil numbers:

*By proposing this closure you're not doing anything to improve pupil numbers because the primary school pupils won't come here. (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

### Alternative Suggestions

- 6.26 Pupils urged PCC to provide a new building for BHS only, and to spend any additional funding on improving Gwernyfed instead of closing it. Indeed, they asked 'why this was not the main option' under the proposals:

*Why don't you just rebuild Brecon? (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*Fixing the school would mean less travel and sixth form. Plus we already have good grounds and facilities (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*If you are spending this money why don't you spend it on just changing Brecon where it is actually needed? (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*It's an option just to renovate Brecon; it seems the only reason Gwernyfed is proposed to close is to wipe the debt (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*You really don't need to join the two schools, as the new building will attract people here and raise pupil numbers. (KS4, Brecon High School)*

- 6.27 A less popular alternative was to merge the two schools into one site, but to locate it at Gwernyfed instead:

*Why can't Brecon come to Gwernyfed instead? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

*You could build a primary school on the existing Gwernyfed site and combine it with the secondary school. (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.28 There was at least some opposition and concern across both catchment areas to the closure of the two schools, and one Gwernyfed pupil asked: 'why are the schools in South Powys proposed to close and none in North Powys?' Those who were opposed to the closures explained that they would prefer PCC to save money in other service areas and repair the two schools instead:

*I've heard that joining the two schools together will save money, but money is wasted on things like digging up roads all the time. Refurbish this school and don't combine them and make Gwernyfed pupils travel so far (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Why don't you repeat the structure used by John Beddoes Secondary School if this has worked well – there has been an increase in standards and guaranteed post-16 provision (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Why can't the money be split between Gwernyfed and Brecon and used to upgrade the current buildings? (KS3, Gwernyfed High School)*

## Post-16 Education

- 6.29 BHS pupils were particularly opposed to the proposal for the area's post-16 education to be delivered by NPTC. They urged PCC to retain a sixth form at the proposed new school site for the following reasons:

The current sixth form is an integral part of the school; its pupils provide inspiration, encouragement and set a good example for younger year groups

*With a sixth form there is someone to look up to. I would say keep the sixth form because it's encouraging for younger pupils (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*The sixth form for us are quite an inspiration to look up to and to say 'we want to be like that' (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*The sixth form means a lot to us. They do so much for the school and push people to do things, especially people who don't have the confidence. They say 'you can do it'. They have got to sixth form and they show that even if you do go to Brecon High School you can go to university (KS3, Brecon High School)*



*When we were in the younger years the sixth formers were people we looked up to; I always wanted to be a sixth former here and couldn't wait to be a prefect. Taking it away would be a negative thing I think (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*I like the fact we are role models for younger kids (KS5, Brecon High School)*

Sixth forms offer more continuity in terms of pupil/teacher relationships and educational support

*We want to be able to have teachers that we can trust at A-Level and have developed a relationship with since Year 7 (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*In the sixth form you are taught by teachers you are used to and know well; if you move to college you don't have that and it's unfair (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*If the new school will be built and it will be better than this one why can't you supply a sixth form? Both my sisters are in sixth form and they say it's really good because they can ask the teachers for help (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*I go to college as part of sixth form and there is nowhere near as much support as you get in the sixth form at school and you need at A-Level. In school you grow up with the teachers and you don't get that at college (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*The support we had from our GCSE German teacher shows it helps having a sixth form; we said we wanted to do it at A-Level and she taught us off-timetable to allow us to do that (KS5, Brecon High School)*

It is advantageous to provide post-16 education locally because after-school support can be easily accessed as teachers more often than not live nearby

*I do RE and the after-school support and revision provided has been so beneficial. The college teachers don't live around here and wouldn't be able to provide that (KS5, Brecon High School)*

College teachers not being local may affect the quality of education and pastoral support

*We can usually get a quick and helpful response from current A-Level teachers, but if teachers had to travel standards could drop. This would have an impact on the pastoral side during the day and the continuation of support will suffer (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

A range of important (and CV-friendly) responsibilities and opportunities are offered in a sixth form that colleges do not provide

*Mentoring etc. is good on CVs, but if you go to college these unique aspects are taken away. Senior prefecting and school charity work has had a massive effect on university applications and jobs etc. (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

Friendship groups can be educated together

*Instead of going to another school for A-Levels you can do it in the same school as your friends (KS3, Brecon High School)*

The current South Powys Consortium is working well

*Travel to other campuses works very well. I really enjoy travelling to other schools; it's a nice break and a chance to meet new people. It is seen as positive because teachers will work around you. I can also do work during the journey. (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.30 One of the most significant concerns among pupils in both catchment areas was the perceived poor standard of NPTC's provision. The Neath and Brecon campuses were both said to be lacking in: teaching quality; proper management (especially in relation to teachers leaving before the end of term and not being replaced); facilities; and capacity to accommodate more pupils. Participants thus expressed strong reservations as to whether NPTC can deliver what is promised; indeed, some felt they would prefer to attend colleges and schools elsewhere - such as in Merthyr or Hereford – with proven track-records and good quality assurance:

*The college is a very poor standard at the moment, so would there be money put into it to raise standards? (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*It's the management of the college too. The Performing Arts class didn't have a teacher for months because they sacked one and didn't replace them, so before they went to Neath they didn't have a teacher which was a big source of worry (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*Nobody is going to go to NPTC from around Gwernyfed because of its reputation (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*The college is only just big enough for the current number of pupils, how would it be able to accommodate everyone? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Almost all of the sixth form will be going to Merthyr College which is a waste of time and money (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*There's no faith in Brecon or NPTC; pupils would go to Hereford instead. (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.31 Indeed, some pupils explained that uncertainty around the future of their school has led many to apply for or consider Hereford or Merthyr Colleges regardless of the consultation outcome. As such, they said that the number of post-16 education pupils at the NPTC campus in Brecon may not increase by as much as PCC suggests:

*Hereford is a good college and has lots of choices and they all get the standard A-Levels. Lots of people from Gwernyfed are going to Hereford due to the quality and concerns about the closures (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*I will be leaving to do a vocational course in Merthyr. I was going to stay in Gwernyfed until the threat of school closure (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*99% of pupils are going to Hereford because of the proposal so there is no guarantee that centralising it will increase the numbers; it's a gamble (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*I'm concerned about going into sixth form and teachers leaving half way through the course because their jobs will be under threat. I'm considering going to Hereford College because of this. (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

- 6.32 Additional important concerns that arose throughout the discussions were that:

It is unfair to take away pupils' right to choose where they study, especially in the case of those who prefer to learn in a school environment

*If sixth formers don't want to go to college and want to go to a school, the nearest is Crickhowell and a lot of people have been turned down there because it's full. So where would they go? (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*It's a culture thing; I would rather go to a sixth form in school than a college... (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*You could argue that you are taking away the right of the pupils in this area to go to a sixth form in a school. Everyone else in places like Crick and Builth have the choice (Brecon High School)*

*I'm in Year 10 and what I don't find fair is that we may not have the option to go through sixth form when other pupils in Powys have. (Brecon High School)*

A lack of a sixth form will have a negative effect on the running of BHS due to the work older students do in terms of, say, organising activities and fundraising

*If the sixth forms went what would happen to the houses and the house competitions? They help organise this (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*The sixth formers contribute to the high school quite a lot and they raise a lot of money... (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Sixth form is a vital part of the school; they get involved in doing and running so many things. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

### Alternative Suggestions

<sup>6.33</sup> All of the alternative suggestions were offered by Brecon pupils, and all involved the retention of post-16 education within the proposed new secondary school. Indeed, it was argued that merging the two schools would provide sufficient pupils numbers to maintain a sixth form there:

*Why don't you have a sixth form in the new school and include the things the sixth formers might need? Have a sixth form academy within the school. They would then be able to go and see familiar people if they were stuck with anything and they wouldn't have to travel anywhere (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*If you are already building a new school, why not incorporate sixth form provision with all the facilities we need to do the subjects we want? (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*Surely if you bring the two schools together there will be enough numbers to sustain a sixth form there? (KS5, Brecon High School)*

<sup>6.34</sup> Another pupil suggested still using the college to provide education, but making arrangements for this to be delivered from the school building:

*Since you're merging the two schools together the college is something that could be used too, but providing subjects within the school environment (KS4, Brecon High School)*

### Questions and Queries

<sup>6.35</sup> Some pupils were not explicitly opposed to the post-16 proposal, but sought reassurance that: NPTC would offer a better range of subjects and facilities; the teaching would be of high quality; new facilities would definitely be developed at Brecon to prevent pupils having to travel to Neath; the college could cope with larger pupil numbers; and that subjects would be protected from discontinuation if pupil numbers were low:

*If the college is going to be providing A-Levels will they be giving the facilities to enable us to do what we want? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*Can you guarantee that we won't have to travel to Neath eventually? Performing Arts has been cancelled this year and the pupils doing that have to travel to Neath for their course (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*Can it realistically be done? We don't want pupils missing out on facilities that are already in Gwernyfed (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*It would obviously be better to have all subjects on one site rather than people having to travel, but it's about quality. Is the college provision going to be of the same quality as in a school where the teacher has been teaching the subject for years? (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*If all the people go this college can it withstand the numbers? (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*How much are you expanding the college? (KS4, Gwernyfed High School)*

*If a subject drops in pupil numbers can we stop them from getting rid of the course? (KS5, Gwernyfed High School)*

## Welsh Medium Education

### Concern and Opposition

<sup>6.36</sup> The proposal to provide Welsh medium education at Builth Wells High School and close the Welsh stream at Brecon was met with significant opposition from BHS pupils, who queried why said stream could not be included within the proposed new school. They said that the consultation and resulting uncertainty around the future of Welsh medium education in Brecon has already caused parents to start moving their children to Builth, further exacerbating the problematic issues of low pupil numbers within the Welsh stream at Brecon:

*We used to have a huge class but a lot of parents scooted their pupils over to Builth since the announcement was made last year, so now we're really depleted. That's also what's happened with the Year 7 pupils we could have had here; the parents have wanted a fresh start for their children so they have sent them to Builth (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*The proposal came out last year and it looked like the decision had already been made; people thought 'we might as well send our kids to Builth because of that.' So Welsh has disintegrated here from that time. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

<sup>6.37</sup> The potentially negative impact of the proposal on Ysgol y Bannau's pupil numbers was a worry; it was suggested that parents (especially English-speaking parents) may be discouraged from sending their children to a Welsh medium primary school without any secondary provision locally:

*If you close the Welsh-stream wouldn't it put people off going to Ysgol y Bannau, as they will have to travel up to Builth to go to a Welsh secondary school? (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*If you are sending people to Builth it's a waste of Ysgol y Bannau which is one of the best primary schools around (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*If the Welsh school was in Builth wouldn't it reduce numbers at Ysgol y Bannau across the road? (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*A lot of English speaking parents who have sent their kids to Ysgol y Bannau took a leap of faith. My parents don't speak Welsh but since it was local and it was there they thought it was a good idea for me to go to a Welsh school. In the future people like my parents wouldn't take that leap of faith*

*if there's no local Welsh stream in Brecon. There would be fewer numbers in Ysgol y Bannau and only Welsh speakers would send their children there. (KS3, Brecon High School)*

- 6.38 Furthermore, Brecon pupils argued that the knock-on effect of fewer people learning Welsh would result in a decline in the Welsh language locally:

*Moving the Welsh stream to Builth would have a massive effect on pupil numbers in Ysgol y Bannau, as parents are already starting to panic. This could have a massive impact on the 'Welshness' of Brecon (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*I know people who say 'if they shut the Welsh stream in Brecon I'm going into the English stream.' It's so important for our heritage. (KS5, Brecon High School)*

- 6.39 Travel was another main concern insofar as Builth was considered too distant from Brecon. Using public transport to and from difficult to access areas was predicted to be particularly problematic, as was the lack of flexibility for pupils wishing to continue participating in after-school clubs or needing time off for, say, GP appointments:

*One of my friends used to be in the Welsh stream here but now goes to Builth. It's much harder for her to get there in the morning because of the transport; wouldn't it be easier to have a Welsh stream here so she could walk to school? (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*Some people will just not go to Builth because they won't or can't travel that far (KS4, Brecon High School)*

*We wouldn't be able to get to Builth during the bad weather which would affect our education (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*I've been going to the doctors quite a lot this term and if I went to Builth I'd probably be off for the whole day rather than a few hours (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*If I went to Builth I wouldn't be able to go to the after-school clubs anymore because it would be too difficult for my parents to pick me up. (KS3, Brecon High School)*

- 6.40 The fragmentation of friendship groups and the depletion of local extra-curricular clubs were also thought to be potential consequences of removing the Welsh stream from Brecon:

*I'd rather keep it here as I've made lots of new friends and I might lose them if I went to Builth (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*Some of my friends have gone to Ystalyfera, and when they move you do lose that friendship. I do see it being harder (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*Some of the Welsh boys play football with the English stream boys, so it's breaking up friendship groups and communities as well (KS5, Brecon High School)*

*Because some of my good friends have gone to Builth I might want to follow them there, but then I'd lose the ability to go to after school clubs and choir (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*If the Welsh stream went to Builth things like the choir would lose numbers. (KS3, Brecon High School)*

- 6.41 Despite the overwhelming negativity, a few pupils from Brecon acknowledged that removing the Welsh-stream from their high school would make good financial sense and allow more money to be spent on educational improvements:

*It does cost a lot to keep the Welsh-stream in Brecon so they may need to think about moving to Builth (KS3, Brecon High School)*

*Remove the Welsh stream and build a new school that would be more advanced and save money. (KS4, Brecon High School)*

Moreover, the views of one Welsh medium pupil who has moved from Brecon to Builth are worth nothing here. They say that: *I came here from Brecon because there weren't many lessons available in Welsh, there weren't many of us and it was the same teacher teaching lots of things. I've seen an improvement since I came here. (KS3, Builth Wells High School)*

## 7. Primary School Workshops

### Main issues and themes from the primary school pupil workshops

#### Overview of the Meeting Process

- 7.1 ORS facilitated and reported on the findings of deliberative workshops with primary school children aged between six and 11 from each of the affected catchment areas (some of whom were members of their school councils). All feeder primary schools were invited to nominate a number of children to attend. The point or purpose of these workshops was to allow PCC to engage with, and listen to, children who will be beginning their secondary school education in the next one to five years – and to elicit their opinions, queries and concerns on the proposed changes. They also offered the children an opportunity to become more informed about the consultation process, the case for change and the proposals themselves.
- 7.2 The workshops were held and attended as follows:

Catchment Area	Location and Date	Schools Attended	Approx. number of attendees
Brecon	Ysgol y Bannau Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> May 2016	Ysgol y Bannau Ysgol Cradoc Llangorse Church In Wales School Llanfaes Primary School Mount Street Infant and Junior Schools Priory Church in Wales School Sennybridge Primary School	70+
Gwernyfed	Talgarth Primary School Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2016	Bronllys Community Primary School Clyro Church in Wales Primary School Hay-On-Wye County Primary School Ysgol Llyswen Talgarth Community Primary School	63

- 7.3 ORS worked in collaboration with PCC to agree a suitable agenda and informative stimulus material for the meetings, which covered the following topics and activities:
- Participants' knowledge of the consultation and proposals;
  - PCC's case for change; and
  - PCC's proposals.
- 7.4 An initial presentation of the case for change and the proposals was then followed by: comments and questions; a poster-making activity (whereby participants (in groups) created a poster to display and



express their thoughts and feelings about the proposed changes<sup>1</sup>) and presentation of views; and a final question and answer session.

## Reporting

<sup>7.5</sup> This section of the report presents the main themes and key points arising from the Brecon and Gwernyfed catchment workshops (those affecting Builth and Llandrindod have been reported separately). The opinions expressed were not always unanimous, but we have endeavoured to reflect the range of views expressed. Some important common themes emerged from discussions across both workshops; but issues relating to a particular catchment area or school have been highlighted. Many quotations are used (in italics), not because we wish to endorse any views, but in order to illustrate some of the more common and important themes and issues.

## Main Themes Raised at the Primary School Pupil Meetings

### Awareness of the Consultation and Proposals

- <sup>7.6</sup> Most, if not all, pupils had heard of the consultation and had received a questionnaire to complete. They also had some knowledge of the proposals to: close the school sites at Gwernyfed and Brecon upon the opening of a new school in Brecon; and to deliver post-16 education there via the NPTC Group of Colleges. In addition, some pupils were aware that Brecon High School's financial situation is a cause for concern.
- <sup>7.7</sup> However, a few pupils in the Gwernyfed workshop were uncertain about the proposals for sixth form education in the area.

### Views on the Case for Change

<sup>7.8</sup> Initially, participating pupils were asked why they thought PCC is considering changing the way it delivers secondary school education in the Brecon and Gwernyfed catchment areas. In response, pupils at both workshops identified the age and poor condition of the two schools – and particularly Brecon – as a motive behind establishing a new school:

*Brecon High School is not in a good condition so they want to make a better school (Brecon catchment area)*

*Brecon's school is damaged (Gwernyfed catchment area)*

*Gwernyfed is an old school (Gwernyfed catchment area)*

*Some say that Brecon and Gwernyfed are in a state. (Brecon catchment area)*

<sup>7.9</sup> Pupils in the Brecon catchment workshop also acknowledged the high running costs of both schools and the need to save money. In addition, specific issues in relation to Gwernyfed High School (henceforth GHS) were mentioned, notably its falling pupil numbers and lack of subject availability at A-level:

*At the moment the costs are too high (Brecon catchment area)*

*Gwernyfed does not have as many pupils (Brecon catchment area)*

*There are not enough sixth form subjects in Welsh in Gwernyfed. (Brecon catchment area)*

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix 1 for photographs of the posters



- 7.10 Pupils at the Gwernyfed catchment session recognised PCC's aim to improve educational standards, facilities and mutual support:

*To provide somewhere that offers a lot of different subjects to study are needed (Gwernyfed catchment area)*

*They want new facilities to help children learn (Gwernyfed catchment area)*

*To bring the schools together to better support one another. (Gwernyfed catchment area)*

However, many of these pupils felt that there is currently little wrong with their local high school, and that any proposed changes are unjustified. Indeed, despite most having a generally good understanding of some of the reasoning behind PCC's proposals, there was much concern about and aversion to the specific changes being proposed in response. These concerns and views are explored in further detail overleaf.

### PCC's Proposals: A New School in Brecon?

- 7.11 Pupils in the Gwernyfed catchment workshop were particularly concerned about the impact of attending a new secondary school in Brecon, concerns that were also shared by Brecon catchment pupils, though to a lesser extent. Specifically, the location of the new school raised the following issues around travel, transport and after/out-of-school activities.

The distance between Brecon and the Gwernyfed catchment area was deemed too great. Pupils were concerned about increases to journey times, particularly in terms of time spent on buses and the inconvenience involved in getting to and from school should the bus be missed

*People who have to travel from Gwernyfed to Brecon will have to add on an extra 20 minutes to their journey (Llangorse Church in Wales School, Brecon)*

*Pupils who live further north and would have gone to Gwernyfed will have to travel all the way down to Brecon (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*It's a long way for me to travel (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*81 and a quarter days will be spent on the bus travelling from Clyro to Brecon High School over five years (Clyro Church in Wales Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*What if we miss the bus at home time? We will be an hour away from home! (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*We will have to get up really early (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*We are worried about being told off by teachers for being late for school because of travelling (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*The thought of going on a bus with lots of people is scary. (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

The impact on pupils' social lives and their ability to undertake after-school activities was noted; those living further away from the proposed new school were especially concerned that time and transport limitations would prohibit their attendance at extra-curricular activities

*I might lose my friends if we have to go further away (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*There won't be enough time to do after school clubs (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*Clubs in Brecon are too far to travel to* (Clyro Church in Wales Primary School, Gwernyfed)

As well as general access issues, pupils from Llangorse Primary School were concerned about how travelling by bus will affect pupils with disabilities

*Will there be wheelchair access?* (Llangorse Church in Wales School, Brecon)

- 7.12 Given these concerns, it was suggested by some that PCC should consider establishing a new school in a location between the two current facilities:

*Why don't you build a new school in between the two?* (Priory Church in Wales School, Brecon)

*Why not build a brand new school in between the two sites?* (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)

- 7.13 Some pupils in both catchment areas were concerned about the following aspects of attending a larger school:

An increase in bullying and the ability of the new school to deal with it effectively

*More children will mean more bullying* (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*We are concerned about bullying* (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)

*How is it possible to manage bullying well in a larger school? We worry that it will be harder to detect* (Priory Church in Wales School, Brecon)

Larger class sizes leading to distractions and insufficient teacher time (and thus not necessarily meaning a better education)

*There will be too much noise in the classrooms because of the bigger classes* (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*If they build a new school how big will the classes be?* (Llanfaes Primary School, Brecon)

Developing relationships with new teachers

*The new teachers might be scary* (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

Being split-up from existing friends and making new friendships

*How will you get the children from different schools to become friends?* (Priory Church in Wales School, Brecon)

*The new school would be too big; we won't know where the classrooms are or our friends.* (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

- 7.14 Furthermore, Ysgol Cradoc pupils explained that they '*come from a small primary school and we want to go to small secondary school.*'

- 7.15 Additionally, the pupils had a range of questions about the proposed new school, many of which concerned staff. For example, they asked: whether current teachers from Brecon and Gwernyfed would be employed there; whether they would need to reapply for their jobs; and how PCC plans to recruit to a new school bearing in mind travel times. They also enquired how long the facility would take to build.

- 7.16 There were also general worries in the GHS catchment workshop about the timing of having to move to a new school (if approved). Many workshop pupils would be studying for their GCSEs around this time, which they felt would be unsettling and disruptive:

*All of the changes will happen at the most important time – our GCSEs* (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)

*When things change we may be at GCSE level which may impact on our exams. (Llangorse Church in Wales School, Gwernyfed)*

- 7.17 Despite the general concerns about and opposition to the proposals, some pupils in both workshops acknowledged some potential benefits to having one larger school. In particular they felt that the two existing schools: would be ‘stronger’ together; would offer opportunities to make new friends; and could be combined into a modern building with better facilities:

*There will be better facilities in the new school (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*The good things from both schools can come together (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*We will have a newer school (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*It brings people from different schools together to better support one another (Gwernyfed)*

*There will be new computers and more lockers (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

*There will be more children to meet and more friends (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*There will be somewhere new to explore. (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

### PCC’s Proposals: Closure of GHS

- 7.18 There was a great deal of support for GHS and thus strong opposition to its proposed closure. Pupils explained that Brecon High School (henceforth BHS) is considered ‘*to be the problem*’ - in contrast to GHS, which was described as ‘*a good school*’. Furthermore there was concern that a merger of BHS and GHS would negatively impact on the latter’s performance:

*What is the purpose of closing Gwernyfed? It’s a good school (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*Why are we merging when the issue is with Brecon? (Llangorse Church in Wales School, Gwernyfed)*

*The two schools are very different, why merge them? (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*Why do we have to shut down a good school and join a bad one? (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*Will Gwernyfed’s school ranking go down by joining with Brecon? (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

- 7.19 Another important issue for some was the impact of the proposed closure on its associated clubs, especially the Rugby Club. Indeed, there is apparently a great deal of uncertainty around their future insofar as the area’s children would likely choose to attend clubs around their new school rather than in their local area:

*Gwernyfed Rugby Club might be impacted, I’m worried people will stop going there (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)*

*It will be bad for the Rugby Club if Gwernyfed closes (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)*

*If there’s no Gwernyfed school how will it impact on clubs? (Mount Street Infant and Junior Schools, Brecon)*

*There are over 30 clubs run by Gwernyfed High School – what will happen to people’s jobs?*  
(Llangorse Church in Wales School, Brecon)

- 7.20 There was also worry about how communities and friendships would be affected by the proposal: that is, existing friendship groups may break up, especially as some pupils would be likely to attend schools other than Brecon depending on their location. Some participants also explained that their siblings currently attend Gwernyfed and that they wish ‘*to follow family footsteps.*’

*If Gwernyfed is closed all the children will have to go to different schools and be split up* (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)

*Not everyone will go to Brecon; they will go elsewhere such as Herefordshire if they live on the border* (Clyro Church in Wales Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*If Gwernyfed closed the community around the school would die too. If that happened then our school numbers would drop and Clyro would be forced to close too* (Clyro Church in Wales Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*My dad works in Gwernyfed sometimes and he says it’s a good school, and he wants me to go there. My mum, dad, stepmum and grandad all went there.* (Gwernyfed catchment area)

- 7.21 Furthermore, Llangorse and Clyro pupils said that more houses are being built in the area (specifically ‘*over 400 in Talgarth*’) and that ‘*the number of pupils in Gwernyfed may go up.*’

- 7.22 Finally, pupils were keen to understand what would become of the GHS building if it were to close:

*I’m worried about what will happen to the old building if it’s knocked down* (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)

### Alternative Suggestions

- 7.23 Pupils proposed some alternative suggestions that they felt would result in less disruption for GHS and the pupils within its catchment area. These included: retaining GHS in its current form and focussing on improving BHS without a merger; merging BHS with another school; merging GHS with Crickhowell High School; and reversing the proposal so that the single site school would be located in Gwernyfed rather than Brecon:

*Gwernyfed is a good school – leave it as it is and build a new smaller school in Brecon* (Ysgol Cradoc, Brecon)

*Why not deal with the issues in Brecon and leave Gwernyfed alone?* (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)

*Brecon doesn’t need a ‘super school’; it can just be a normal one without closing Gwernyfed* (Ysgol Llyswen, Gwernyfed)

*Why doesn’t Brecon join another school?* (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*Why don’t they knock Brecon High School down and make them join Gwernyfed?* (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*Why can’t it be the other way around?* (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*I think they should just close down Brecon because Gwernyfed is doing ok* (Llanfaes Primary School, Brecon)

*I’d rather join with Crickhowell because it’s a better school.* (Bronllys Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

- 7.24 Pupils in both workshops questioned why the money earmarked for the proposed new school could not be spent on repairing and maintaining the two schools instead of building a new one. This, to many, was a preferable option:

*Why does Brecon need a new high school? Why can't you just put new windows in and carry out the repairs?* (Ysgol Cradoc, Brecon)

*How is there no money for repairs but money to build a new school?* (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)

*Why are you wasting time having meetings and making changes and not improving what is already there?* (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)

*It will take £50 million to build the new school, which instead can be used to repair both schools* (Llangorse Church in Wales School, Brecon)

*If you have money to build a new school why can't you repair the current ones?* (Hay-On-Wye County Primary School, Gwernyfed)

- 7.25 Finally, building two new schools on the respective sites was suggested – to be funded by the savings made from not having to transport pupils from the Gwernyfed catchment to Brecon:

*Why don't you build two new schools at the two sites and use the money that would have been spent on transport to pay for them?* (Mount Street Infant and Junior Schools, Brecon)

## Post-16 education

- 7.26 The proposal for post-16 education to be delivered via the NPTC Group of Colleges in Brecon was not met with a great deal of opposition, though pupils in the Brecon catchment workshop were more sceptical and questioned: why the new school would not have its own sixth form; why PCC cannot run the college; whether the college would offer a sufficient range of subjects; and why the Council feels NPTC would provide better post-16 education than the proposed new school.

*If you are going to build a new school why is sixth form not going to be there?* (Sennybridge Primary School, Brecon)

*Will the sixth form be able to provide a good range of subjects such as agricultural and engineering choices? Can they deliver?* (Llangorse Church in Wales School, Brecon)

*Why do you think that going to sixth form in a college is better than going to a sixth form in a high school?* (Priory Church in Wales School, Brecon)

- 7.27 There was also some concern about being unfamiliar with the college teachers:

*I'm worried about going to a sixth form where I don't know the teachers.* (Mount Street Infant and Junior Schools, Brecon)

- 7.28 However, some pupils recognised the benefits of having a better range of subjects available at A-Level:

*There will be new subjects* (Talgarth Community Primary School, Gwernyfed)

*There will be plenty of subjects.* (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)

## Welsh Medium Education

- 7.29 The plans to continue Welsh-medium education in Builth Wells High School but not at Brecon was also met with criticism, mainly from Ysgol y Bannau pupils. They were chiefly concerned about:

The lack of Welsh medium secondary education locally discouraging parents from sending their children to Ysgol y Bannau – leading to a decline in the Welsh language in the Brecon area

*Children won't come to Ysgol y Bannau because there won't be a high school (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

*Have you thought about the impact on Ysgol y Bannau? (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

*We are worried about losing the Welsh language if pupils transfer to English-medium education. (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

The distance between Brecon and Builth and the logistics of being so far from home if, for example, they became ill while at school

*If you live in Brecon but have to go to school in Builth and you got ill, how would you get home? (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

The cost to PCC of having to transport pupils from Brecon to Builth

*It will cost more money to transport pupils to Builth Wells. (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

<sup>7.30</sup> Pupils in the Brecon catchment area thus urged PCC to continue Welsh-medium education at their local high school:

*Save our schools! If you are going to build a new school (in Brecon) why is Welsh education not going to be there? (Sennybridge Primary School, Brecon)*

*Why not build a big bilingual school in Brecon? (Sennybridge Primary School, Brecon)*

*Why can't you just make the Welsh-stream in Brecon better? (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

*Can't some of the teachers come from Builth to Brecon to help the teaching quality? (Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon)*

## 8. Additional Learning Needs Focus Groups

### Main issues and themes from the Additional Learning Needs Focus Groups

#### Overview of the Meeting Process

- 8.1 ORS to facilitated and reported on the findings of deliberative focus groups with children, staff and stakeholders to explore the ways in which the proposals could affect Additional Learning Needs (henceforth ALN) provision across the County. The point or purpose of these focus groups was to allow PCC to engage with, and listen to, pupils with ALN, as well as the staff and stakeholders involved in delivering support to these pupils. They were given the opportunity to ask questions about the proposals and to share their opinions and concerns about how the proposed changes may affect pupils with ALN across the County. The groups also provided the opportunity for the pupils, staff and stakeholders to become more informed about the consultation process, the case for change and the proposals.
- 8.2 A total of three focus groups were held in May 2016: one with pupils from Ysgol Penmaes (including three who also attend Brecon High School on a part-time basis) with ALN; and two with stakeholders. The latter included staff members, Governors and representatives of a range of organisations including: Powys CHC, Powys Carers and Powys County Council.
- 8.3 The workshops were held and attended as follows:

Location	Date	Participant Type	No. of attendees
Cartrefi Cymru	Friday 16th May 2016	Staff and Stakeholders	10
Ysgol Penmaes	Friday 20th May 2016		
Ysgol Penmaes	Friday 20th May 2016	ALN pupils	11

- 8.4 ORS worked in collaboration with PCC to agree a suitable agenda and informative stimulus material for the meeting, which covered the following topics and activities:

- Participants' knowledge of the consultation and proposals;
- PCC's case for change;
- PCC's proposals; and
- Alternative options

Pupils and stakeholders were encouraged to ask any questions they wished throughout the discussions.



## Reporting

- 8.5 This section of the report presents the main themes and key points arising from the ALN focus groups. The opinions expressed were not always unanimous, but we have endeavoured to reflect the range of views expressed. Some important common themes emerged from discussions across all three groups and these are reported below; but issues relating to a particular catchment area or school have been highlighted. Many quotations have been used (in italics), not because we wish to endorse any views, but in order to illustrate some of the more common and important themes and issues.

## Main Themes Raised at the ALN Focus Groups

### Views on the Case for Change

#### Stakeholders

- 8.6 Many stakeholders recognised that ALN funding is a key issue and discussed current staff shortages:

*Additional Learning Needs haven't got any staff. We have more children in exams who need a scribe than we have got staff for.* (Stakeholder)

Without increases to this funding, there was doubt that the proposals would result in any improvements for ALN pupils, which begged the question of 'what more mainstream schools can do' without more money and resources:

*We had ALF and there are a few classroom interventions...but a bigger school won't help; the same children will need the same support but the funding formula won't change. You can't have six children and one scribe, and the parents are fighting for as much as they can such as one-to-one to one support; but this change is not going to help them.* (Stakeholder)

#### Pupils

- 8.7 Pupils were aware of the proposals and were of the view that PCC is considering them due to Brecon High School (henceforth BHS)'s poor financial situation and building condition. Indeed, some had first-hand experience of the latter and were in agreement that change is necessary not only to improve the environment for pupils, but also to save money:

*Brecon hasn't got any money, they spent it all* (Pupil)

*They are shutting Brecon School because it is getting old* (Pupil)

*I remember when we went up there to a drama class and it was falling apart then* (Pupil)

*It needs to be refurbished; the walls are literally crumbling* (Pupil)

*They want to save money; they may actually have some money if they build a new school.* (Pupil)

- 8.8 However, there was little, if any, agreement that Gwernyfed High School (henceforth GHS) requires improvement and replacement with a new school.



## PCC's Proposals: A New School in Brecon

### Travel, access and location

#### Stakeholders

8.9 The impact of travelling longer distances was discussed at length and stakeholders were keen to know whether any of their concerns had been considered by PCC when developing its proposals. Overall it was felt that additional travel would have a detrimental effect on the well-being of pupils with ALN in the following ways:

Routine and continuity is imperative for some ALN pupils, and time spent travelling as well as changes to current travel arrangements could lead to increased anxiety and stress

*If there is provision in Brecon then there would be those who would have to travel and there has been some feedback on transport and anxiety. It is the whole change! (Stakeholder)*

*For a lot of children they find the journey anxious. For those with a sensory impairment it takes time to learn...that has to be a consideration (Stakeholder)*

*Change has a detrimental effect. Trying to cope with exams, trying to cope with the hour on the bus when public transport is rubbish... I am concerned that the tone of the business case has dismissed this and it will have to be addressed (Stakeholder)*

Pupils will be exhausted as a result of travelling further and longer days

*For younger ones it is a long day. They are absolutely knackered. It could be at that age they are not naturally equipped to deal with that... (Stakeholder)*

*There are those who already travel far; but you are going to add that travel time. They are going to be exhausted! (Stakeholder)*

Public transport cannot be relied upon, which may result in poor attendance

*Public transport is rubbish; what if they cannot get in, attendance could potentially come in (Stakeholder)*

Pupils without sufficient support at home (such as young carers) would be affected by the logistics of their starting day earlier and pick-ups/drop-offs

*If they have to get transport earlier I am worried about their nutrition; they are not getting the support at home. If children are turning up and they haven't had a good start... (Stakeholder)*

*There would be a group that would struggle with the transport and struggle to be picked up; like carers (Stakeholder)*

It would be unacceptable for pupils with specific issues such as incontinence to be expected to travel further

*There are children who have continence issues; if you increase their journey it will be untenable. This needs to be factored in. (Stakeholder)*

8.10 The ease with which wheelchair users would be able to access public transport was discussed, as was the loss of independence for those who can currently get to and from a local high school themselves, but would not be able to do so if they were required to travel further.

- 8.11 In addition, the logistics of accessing the Autism unit while the school was being run over two sites was questioned, specifically whether staff would be expected to travel between Brecon and Gwernyfed:

*A Year 8 pupil couldn't just access the Brecon unit...which site is going to have the ASD unit while there are two sites. Will staff be travelling between the two sites? There should be equality of access. If there is going to be pupil support there then it needs to be on both of the sites. (Stakeholder)*

- 8.12 Stakeholders emphasised the importance of keeping ALN services within communities because of providers' local knowledge and better understanding of the needs of pupils and families:

*It all comes back to knowledge about the local community; you need to know what is happening and Brecon and Gwernyfed are two different communities (Stakeholder)*

*We are talking about Powys, not an urban area; this is considered to be a strength in Powys and from the parents' perspective it is more about the school and the community setting. (Stakeholder)*

- 8.13 It was also argued that attending a school further away could weaken pupils' links to their local communities, which could lead to: mental health problems such as anxiety, especially for those with spectrum disorders who rely on the structure and routine of being within their local areas; young people not being home in time to attend local after school-clubs; and some pupils requiring help and support from their local communities later on in life, but encountering difficulties in doing so if they have become disconnected.

- 8.14 Furthermore, it was reasoned that pupils are 'entitled to be in their communities' and that integrating with pupils within their local areas is an important part of their socialisation.

- 8.15 Despite the above however, one stakeholder was undecided about what is more important for and beneficial to pupils: attending a school in their local community or potentially being offered better opportunities in a larger one, albeit out-of-area:

*Overall there is always going to be this dilemma with having a bigger campus, opportunities and economies of scale or keeping pupils in their own communities...you only think what you have got is best, because you don't know what anything else will be like. (Stakeholder)*

## Pupils

- 8.16 Interestingly, travel and access was not discussed as eagerly in the pupil focus group: it was certainly not considered to be a key issue. Indeed 10 of the 11 participants are currently travelling to Ysgol Penmaes/Brecon High School from other areas in Powys and most did not think this impacts on their quality of life or education:

*It is a positive; I go in my taxi and I can listen to my music to pass the time. (Pupil)*

- 8.17 However, there was some concern among a few that Brecon High School is too distant from some pupils in the Gwernyfed catchment area, which may affect the numbers attending any new school there:

*Keep Gwernyfed as it is; some children won't want to travel from Brecon (Pupil)*

*Even if you do build a bigger school, some might not come because it is too far away. (Pupil)*

- 8.18 In addition, another pupil who currently travels from outside Brecon to their school explained that 'it can sometimes be quite tiring when you are on your way home'.

## A Larger School?

### Stakeholders

- 8.19 Some stakeholders were sceptical as to whether a larger school would benefit pupils with ALN: their main concern was that being around so many more pupils would increase anxiety and stress levels:

*The numbers of pupils in Brecon High School are high now; if they double it that would affect their anxiety. There won't be the low arousal space. A new site could possibly have improvements but it is about the communication with parents about what will be there, and the number needs to be looked at (Stakeholder)*

*There are a number of youngsters who are not sitting in the main hall because of some sort of anxiety. (Stakeholder)*

- 8.20 There was also worry around staff, particularly around ALN teacher to pupil ratios and that new staff may not be sufficiently qualified in or knowledgeable about ALN, resulting in some pupils 'slipping through the net':

*What if the staff don't have the skills to help children with special needs? (Pupil)*

*Some people who have special needs just won't say and they will struggle through school, or maybe it won't be picked up by the teachers because they just think it's normal. (Pupil)*

- 8.21 Another stakeholder reasoned, though, that being exposed to and getting to know other pupils, especially those with ALN, could be beneficial:

*A larger environment could work for some pupils; seeing people who are similar to themselves could be good for them. They would like this, provided that they have the support. (Stakeholder)*

### Pupils

- 8.22 In contrast to most of the stakeholders, many pupils were positive about the thought of attending a larger school: they felt it would employ more teachers, offer a wider range of subjects and provide a larger support unit, thus enhancing the quality of their education:

*There would be more options if it was a bigger school. If the Gwernyfed and Brecon teachers came together there would be more teachers and we'd have more help if we needed it. They would have more subjects and more exams...there would be more options (Pupil)*

*If they build a new school they could get a bigger unit (Pupil)*

*It would be good if they had a bigger unit; they could help people who are behind and need help with work. Eventually they could go back to the normal bit of school but have the option of using the unit if they want. (Pupil)*

- 8.23 Pupils were also positive that combining Brecon and Gwernyfed would offer more socialisation opportunities through not only meeting new people, but also being able to see friends who currently attend different high schools more often:

*It would make a nice change for the staff and pupils to meet new friends. Instead of coming all the way from Gwernyfed all the way up to Brecon to meet friends, they could see them in school; they would have a better social life and gives you the chance to see friends face-to-face. It widens your area (Pupil)*

*For those who go there it could be better because they would make more friends because there would be more people there. (Pupil)*

This view was supported by someone who currently travels from an area outside Brecon to study there, and feels they have a wider group of friends as a result.

- 8.24 Conversely, there was some apprehension around having new teachers - and a few participants felt that they would receive better support from a smaller school where pupils and teachers can get to know each other well:

*I think if the schools stay as they are and pupils know their teachers then they would have a better chance of support. If they go to a bigger school, students will lose out of having staff that they know (Pupil)*

*If they had a bigger school they could have different teachers, who might be like "who is this? I don't know him or her". I want the school to stay the same. (Pupil)*

- 8.25 There was also some scepticism about how well pupils from Brecon and Gwernyfed would integrate because they 'don't really like each other'. This, along with a general increase in pupils, led to fears of more bullying within the proposed new school.

- 8.26 A few participants recognised that opinions on being part of a larger school will differ and thus recommended that the decision should be to some degree based on a pupil 'vote':

*Some kids are looking forward to a bigger school, but others are not. Just ask the kids what they want; if most want to keep it the same, keep it the same, but if they want a new school then change it to that. There should be a vote so that pupils can have their say. (Pupil)*

### Alternative Suggestions

- 8.27 Although pupils accepted that BHS is in need of replacement, GHS was considered to be in good repair. As such, most felt it should remain 'as it is':

*Now they have got a good budget in Gwernyfed, couldn't Brecon just sort themselves out? (Pupil)*

*They could just build a new school in Brecon? Why does Gwernyfed have to go? (Pupil)*

- 8.28 Another suggestion was to repair rather than replace BHS:

*They could keep Gwernyfed and repair Brecon; fix the important parts first. (Pupil)*

## Transition Management and Considerations Specific to ALN Pupils

### Stakeholders

- 8.29 Stakeholders identified the importance of effective transitional management if the proposal is to go ahead; they emphasised that ALN pupils may find the changes particularly stressful, and asked how PCC plans to support them:

*It is important that pupils from Gwernyfed are being managed well...how will they be supported in that move? (Stakeholder)*

*There are a lot of detachment issues, and that is just with 'normal' transition (Stakeholder)*

*Massive investment into time and resources is needed; it's not just about taking them for a trip around the school, it takes more than that. (Stakeholder)*

- 8.30 There was particular concern around the current lack of funding and resources for vulnerable children, particularly in the area of mental health. This led some to question how pupils who may struggle with the changes would be sufficiently supported:

*What services are available for pupils when things go wrong? Are there mental health services? There are no contingencies in place (Stakeholder)*

*There is a lack of support for those who have SEN from CAMHS. You either have to have an eating disorder or have tried to commit suicide; there is a lack of those who are just having a hard time. (Stakeholder)*

- 8.31 Despite this perceived lack of support, suggestions as to how PCC could (and should) help pupils and their families with the transition were discussed, including:

Sufficient, ongoing communication;

Engagement with parents throughout the whole process;

Thorough assessments of pupils to ensure they receive the correct support;

Multi-agency working (for example between the school, social services and mental health services);

Providing as much continuity as possible; and

Beginning transitional support as early as possible.

### Pupils

- 8.32 Pupils discussed the types of things they would find useful in navigating around and accessing facilities within a new school - such as maps, signposting, lifts and ramps:

*Couldn't pupils have a map included with their planner to find their way around? (Pupil)*

*There needs to be access to lifts and stairs; Brecon High School has got a lift but it's broken (Pupil)*

*Having signs for people with wheelchairs so they know they're way around. They also need to have access so ramps and maybe a lift are needed. (Pupil)*

- 8.33 While stakeholders discussed the importance of better joined-up working between schools and outside agencies, pupils explained that improving the links between Ysgol Penmaes and other high schools would be helpful in future:

*If some of the pupils from Brecon High School want to do childcare courses they would have a better chance of working with the younger ones here (Pupil)*

*Quite a lot of high schools send their pupils here for work experience although we have to limit it. We have had some pupils who come to use our hydrotherapy pool if they have physical issues, and we've always had a good relationship with the high schools who send their pupils here. (Pupil)*

## Post-16 Education

### Stakeholders

- 8.34 Most stakeholders recognised shortcomings with the current provision of post-16 education for ALN pupils, particularly in terms of access to a range of subjects:

*Years ago there used to be catering in Brecon which has now gone, and courses such as painting which would be suitable for our pupils would only be available in Newton. (Stakeholder)*

8.35 Therefore, participants predicted that college-based study would help improve ALN pupils' quality of education. Indeed, it was hoped that as well as providing better opportunities for pupils, encouraging and enabling more of them to attend college would free up space in schools such as Penmaes.

8.36 Despite this though, NPTC's apparently poor reputation and lack of suitable courses in the Brecon area led some to question whether it would be able to 'deliver' for ALN students:

*Historically the provision of SEN in Neath College was good, but it hasn't yet spread to Brecon. However, if the provision would improve via the new college system, we could let more pupils go at the age of 16 rather than 19. Our special schools in the North and the South are full (Stakeholder)*

*It is about the NPT group being able to deliver what they are promising; potentially it could have a positive impact for our learners, and there would be some pupils who wouldn't be hanging on until they are 19 because there may be better opportunities (Stakeholder)*

*I think the college has a long way to go to build up confidence in schools to be able to say that 'we can offer this and we can offer that'. The secondary schools have also been saying that the college has been offering things that have then fizzled or withdrawn because there has not been enough take-up. Any changes will take time (Stakeholder)*

*It isn't just about the range of courses at the college, it is also about the levels that the qualifications offer. There is little availability for level one courses, and pupils might have to go straight to a level two, which will be too much of a jump for them. The provision all has to be integrated. (Stakeholder)*

8.37 Other reservations included: whether college-based education only is the most appropriate option for such a large area; potentially less focus on the pupil wellbeing within the college compared to schools; and the implications of increasing numbers of pupils requiring transport for college, which is already too high:

*Personally I am not convinced how suitable the college is to run across the wide area (Stakeholder)*

*The difference is that colleges are commercial whereas schools have an obligation and have focus on the pupils (Stakeholder)*

*Currently there are too many children who require a lot of transport for college. (Stakeholder)*

8.38 The importance of transitional support for post-16 pupils, as well as partnership working between the college and adult services, was also discussed by stakeholders:

*What will happen at sixth form? That will be the biggest gap in the provision (from transition support); will they be able to manage the transition? Any measures undertaken would have to include structure and communication (Stakeholder)*

*I would like to see the possibility of a transition class for post 16 education which would bridge the gap (Stakeholder)*

*Post-16 and 19 education should be linked to adult services provision; it is no good having them separately (Stakeholder)*

*There needs to be links between education and adult/social care services. (Stakeholder)*

## Pupils

8.39 Some pupils recognised the advantages of college-based education and were aware that Hereford College is a preferred option to BHS's sixth form for some students. Furthermore, participating pupils

who were planning to attend college explained that they were doing so because of the range of options and flexibility available to them:

*You have options, so you can pick what options you want to do. I am doing ICT and Team Enterprise (Pupil)*

*On transition day in the afternoon we all sit in the hall and people tell us what options we can do for the following term. They ask us what our interests are and what we want to do. (Pupil)*

<sup>8.40</sup> However, most who were almost 16 years of age said they would prefer to continue their studies at Ysgol Penmaes because of the help offered to SEN students there, Makaton signs (a system of sign language for those who struggle to verbalise) for example.



# 9. Public Meetings

## Main issues and themes from the public meetings

### Overview of the Meeting Process

- 9.1 The public meetings were held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Brecon) and Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Gwernyfed) at the respective high schools. Each meeting received a standard presentation from PCC on the proposed changes, which was followed by a question and answer session between participants and a panel of PCC officers. According to figures provided by PCC, 1,013 members of the public attended the two sessions; 219 at Brecon and 794 at Gwernyfed.
- 9.2 This chapter is in two parts: the first provides an overview of the public meeting process and the second is a concise review of the main issues raised by participants.

### Main Themes Raised at the Public Meetings

#### Quality of Education

- 9.3 Participants at the meetings were unconvinced that reorganisation into a larger school alone will improve educational outcomes for pupils, and there was disquiet in both areas that PCC has not recognised the positive upward trajectory of both schools in its consultation materials:

*The Council has an opportunity to find new ways of delivering education in a rural community which is challenging. The primary aim has to be to improve quality and there has been no evidence to suggest that these plans will do this... (Brecon Public)*

*This school is in special measures and you are saying those schools are failing. If you look at four Estyn monitoring forms for this school they say that this school has made a lot of progress and that isn't mentioned... (Brecon Public)*

*First of all I'm really pleased that someone finally congratulated Gwernyfed on their achievements; it's now as good as Crickhowell and Newtown...this school needs to continue. We can never, ever let this school go. (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.4 The perception that pastoral care is better within smaller 11-18 high schools was noted by a former pupil of GHS, who described how the dedication, understanding and support they received from familiar teachers was invaluable in helping them achieve their educational aims. They also discussed the importance of a sixth form in terms of personal development and fostering a sense of responsibility (PCC's post-16 proposals are discussed further later in this chapter):

*...my desire is for the young people of Brecon to have the best educational provision and that to me is about the quality of that provision. My belief is that this is best done through an 11-18 school with cultural diversity (Gwernyfed Public)*

*I'm a former student in Gwernyfed: I just want to thank them for everything they've done, allowed me to achieve a first class degree. What I want to know is how you can implement the dedication they've shown me in such a large school? They take the time to understand and support you in every way, to be part of a sixth form where you can have responsibilities and show universities how*



*you've developed... I've grown through the school with (the teachers) knowing me. Their results are outstanding and there are far and few between where all students get their first choice uni. It shows their dedication and relationships with students... If you went to a new school, you only have two years' relationship, it is nothing compared to the seven years they had with me. How are you going to mirror that in such a big school and sixth form? (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.5 Once again, it was said that concerns around stability, options choices and educational quality within Powys may result in parents and learners choosing an education elsewhere:

*I have serious concerns about the future of educational provision in Powys in terms of stability, options choice and quality... I very much want my children to have the best education in Powys but if I don't feel like they can get this I will look elsewhere. There is already evidence this is happening. (Brecon Public)*

## Finance and Funding

- 9.6 Participants were of the view that the proposals are simply about saving the most amount of money possible and not about improving pupil outcomes - and PCC was accused of wishing to close GHS to wipe out BHS's debts and moving too quickly to make changes in an attempt to secure Welsh Government capital funding for rebuilding the latter:

*I believe these proposals are financially motivated rather than about the long-term future of the young people of Powys (Brecon Public)*

*It shouldn't be about cost. How much is it going to cost our children? (Brecon Public)*

*It's really upsetting to see a money-saving scheme rather than a teaching quality scheme. I don't see a problem with the quality of the teaching here (Brecon Public)*

*The purpose of the closure is of course to write-off the debt of Brecon... (Gwernyfed Public)*

*Welsh Government policies say you cannot merge a failing school with a successful school. Is this not just doing that through the back door to wipe Brecon's debts? (Gwernyfed Public)*

*In March last year you started this process and you were forced to stop it here by the court because you tried to steamroll it through without following your own code. You then tried to tell us you were pausing and reflecting, when really you're catching up before you miss the deadline for funding for Brecon High School from the Welsh Government... (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.7 The need to address Brecon's buildings issues were not disputed, but the vision of building a brand new learning campus without any certainty around long-term Welsh Government capital funding was - as was how the new debt burden will be managed in future:

*We are proposing to close two schools without a guarantee at the moment that there is going to be money for a new one (Brecon Public)*

*One of [the] risks is the non-availability of Welsh Government capital funding to build the new school and one of the ways you are looking to address that potentially is 'the Council will look at the capacity to fund this from its capital budget programme'. I want to know, given pressures on Powys budgets and promises made in the past in the Gwernyfed cluster, that my children will not have to come to Brecon High School in its current state because 'at present it is classified as a condition 5D building'. Can you guarantee that the new build you are proposing that we deserve will be able to happen? (Brecon Public)*

*The £20m you're looking at spending, the interest on that alone will be in excess of 300,000. How the hell do you justify that?* (Gwernyfed Public)

*We're talking about a loan of £20 million pounds, that's going to have a colossal interest rate on it. And there's no mention of how much it would cost to make Gwernyfed successful in the future* (Gwernyfed Public)

*In favour of the proposals...saving of £300,000 a year, extended choice of A-levels and managing to get rid of unutilised places. What it doesn't seem to balance up is the capital cost of over £20million which gives us a repayment over 100 years.* (Brecon Public)

- 9.8 One participant suggested the following phased approach to the use of capital funding:

*The [BHS] building was classed as a D Fail in 2009 and at the rate you're going it will be a decade before the new building shows up. This is unacceptable. I propose a phased approach to this. Phase 1. You take £20 million of the £25 million allocated in the capital programme for a new school for between 600 and 800 to open in 2018...with a stage two that allows you to expand the Brecon campus.* (Brecon Public)

This, they felt, would have the significant benefit of certainty, meaning the area's parents would be happy to send their children to the new school safe in the knowledge of a secure educational future for their children - and even more so were it to include a sixth form for continuing education:

*You will then benefit from parents in Powys deciding to send their children here because there's a new building. If you keep delaying it people will lose their belief in you to care for their children and help them prosper.* (Brecon Public)

## Buildings and Estates

- 9.9 Discussions on buildings and estates focused primarily on the lack of surplus capacity at the proposed new school to grow and meet future pupil number projections.

*Based on your figures, within two years the school will be at full capacity. How is that a 21st century school if it has no capacity to grow? There will be only eight spaces in a 1,100 capacity school.* (Brecon Public)

- 9.10 Brecon participants also sought clarification on whether NPTC's facilities will have the capacity and resources to cater for an additional range of subjects and increased number of students at post 16 - and those at Gwernyfed asked for information about how existing community facilities provided by the school sites will be maintained for community use:

*I want an assurance from NPTC that there will be no watering down of vocational qualifications on the college site if A-Levels are to be provided there. The site is only so big and can only accommodate so much* (Brecon Public)

*There are current room problems and lack of space. How will you make sure you have enough space for the extra students coming to (the college)?* (Brecon Public)

*The school organisation code states your proposal has to show how community facilities provided by the school will be maintained... Where in your proposal do you deal with how Gwernyfed sports facilities and clubs (around 40) will be maintained when you close and then sell the Gwernyfed site?* (Gwernyfed Public)

## Pupil Impacts

9.11 Participants highlighted a number of concerns around the impact of the proposed changes on pupils' wellbeing, particularly in relation to:

Additional travel distance and time and their consequences for: reduced sleep, homework and recreational time; academic attentiveness; and extra-curricular participation both within and outside young people's home communities

*First of all the commute, studies have shown that students who travel long periods of time to a school have reduced sleep time, recreational time, academic attentiveness and extra-curricular participation (Brecon Public)*

*Children wake up and have breakfast earlier and so by the time they get to school they are so hungry that they can't concentrate. They arrive home later as well and have less time to complete homework and relaxation which in turn can affect their mental health (Brecon Public)*

*How many hours is it going to take for pupils here to get to Brecon, and how many study hours will that equate to...quite a lot, don't you think? (Gwernyfed Public)*

*How are Powys going to support my child to access extra-curricular activities after school if they have to travel to Builth for Welsh education? Will you provide extra transport for them to do this? (Brecon Public)*

*You're forcing our children to either stay in Brecon and stay after-school for activities and missing the bus home, or going further away and coming home where there are no activities (Gwernyfed Public)*

The mechanics and implications of schools providing more daytime extra-curricular activities

*Gwernyfed provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities. P43 states the new school would be encouraged to provide as many extra-curricular activities during the school day. Can you explain how you see this working in reality and not impacting on learning or time in the evenings? (Gwernyfed Public)*

Reduced pastoral care within a larger school

*I love teaching in a small school. I'm in charge of pastoral care and I feel this is better in a small school. The teachers and the year heads and the form teachers know their pupils well; the pupils know everybody. The school is supportive as a community; younger students look up to the older students and the older pupils support the younger pupils. If you increase the sizes of the schools we're going to get a situation where pupils will barely know anyone in their year group let alone anyone else in the school (Gwernyfed Public)*

The loss of role models, support and mentoring for younger pupils if sixth forms are removed

*The recent Seven Brides for Seven Brothers production is a perfect example of why a sixth form environment needs to remain. It was fantastic and led by inspirational sixth formers who helped all of the years below them. Please don't get rid of it (Brecon Public)*

*Sixth forms are important to schools in providing mentoring to younger pupils...something for the younger children to look up to. The Seven Brides for Seven Brothers production;*

*without the sixth form that production would not have been able to take place. They provided key characters, worked backstage, provided props etc. (Brecon Public)*

*I'm an older sibling that has been through Brecon High School and I have had the opportunity to do Reading for Fun where I help Year 7s each morning with their reading. I've had the enjoyment of seeing them improve their English and reading skills. Removing the sixth form means this will no longer happen (Brecon Public)*

#### Fracturing friendship groups

*[Children] worry about the future of their school and their future. Llanigon school...when it closed, every single parent sent their child to a different school which broke up friendships. If this proposal goes through...a lot of parents don't want to send their children to Brecon. The closest school to parents in Hay will be Hereford. There's Crickhowell... Interfering with peer groups, undermining the future of their education...how can that possibly be good for the children in this area? (Gwernyfed Public)*

*How can a proposal that fractures children's confidence and their peer groups possibly be good for them? (Gwernyfed Public)*

### Teacher Impacts

- <sup>9.12</sup> It was said that the recruitment and retention of teaching staff is already difficult because of job insecurity - and that the possible removal of the challenge of teaching at A-level will further exacerbate this:

*I have real concerns about recruiting and retaining good teachers because they love the challenge of sixth form. I have real concerns that we will struggle to recruit teachers to this area in future with no sixth form...I want some reassurance that A-Level provision is not going to be diminished or diluted in this area and that my children have the opportunity to achieve the very best A-Levels by qualified teachers (Brecon Public)*

*I'm planning to come to sixth form here, and I know job security isn't secure; how do I know my teachers won't be leaving half way through a course and not getting a high level of standard? (Gwernyfed Public)*

### Community Impacts

- <sup>9.13</sup> Both sets of participants raised concerns about the future prosperity, wellbeing and cohesion of their communities should the proposals be approved.
- <sup>9.14</sup> Participants at Brecon focused mainly on the negative impacts of losing the sixth form and Welsh language stream at BHS, commenting that pupils attending schools outside their local area will find it difficult to attend extra-curricular activities, resulting in alienation and a general 'erosion of community cohesion':

*How are we going to build up our grass roots sports provision here in Brecon? Children will have to choose between sport and Welsh... (Brecon Public)*

*A study said that farming our children off from our local community is an erosion of community cohesion. They will not feel welcome in their own communities with their friends here and them being farmed off... (Brecon Public)*

- 9.15 At Gwernyfed, meeting attendees were strongly opposed to the proposed closure of their local school, which they felt would eventually also lead to the loss of its associated community clubs and groups (the latter being essential for well-being and cohesion):

*We have nearly 200 children playing rugby, recognised as one of the most successful community clubs in Wales...with an extremely close relationship with governors and staff of Gwernyfed High School. Any change to the school has the potential to affect the viability of our club. We are continually using each other's facilities and there is a seamless relationship between pupils and the club... Children want to play with new friends in new schools, so if the school goes, we will wither and die. With no junior section, you will have no senior section. It builds long-term health, and lays the foundations for good mental health... If the school closes, the club will enter a period of decline...* (Gwernyfed Public)

*People are worried their group/club will wither and die when their young people transfer to Brecon... If you decide to proceed with these proposals, you're signing our death wish. We'll see the funeral for not only our school but our sports clubs etc.* (Gwernyfed Public)

*As president of an arts organisation we make a great deal of use of this building; and we have a very close relationship with this school in terms of curriculum. It's not just sports; it's going to be arts as well. This school has 35 community organisations and 33 have told us that they will close. That will affect all 12 communities in this area.* (Gwernyfed Public)

- 9.16 Another significant issue at Gwernyfed was that approval of the changes would be very much against the will of the people and would result in the further depletion of essential services. This, it was said, will result in families 'voting with their feet' and leaving the area - leading to further falling pupil numbers (and financial premiums) and broken, ageing communities. Some of the very many typical comments were:

*If pupils are happy with Gwernyfed, parents are happy with Gwernyfed, the community is happy with Gwernyfed, what on earth makes you think we'll be happy to move our communities and children to another community while this one dies?* (Gwernyfed Public)

*You should realise people are not coming to Powys because there are no provisions for education, health and etc. People are not attracted here because of your lack of provision of services in the community. Falling numbers are the result of a poor service attracting few people to the area...* (Gwernyfed Public)

*We want to support Brecon; we want Brecon to do well. This school could help Brecon. Don't destroy it...the legacy will not be a shiny new building, but one shrouded in shame and disgrace. Each of our twelve communities will face a bleak future, with our most able pupils moving across the border. Some legacy* (Gwernyfed Public)

*Are Powys County Council willing to risk members of the community voting with their feet and leaving the county to obtain suitable education for their children; exacerbating the problem of reducing pupil numbers. They are future life-blood, our employees and our employers. We will not have the backbone we need in Powys to sustain it* (Brecon Public)

*They'll leave and take the money for the pupil premium with them. How can that be good for people around here and people in Powys?* (Gwernyfed Public)

*I don't want my daughter going to Hereford, but I don't want her going to Brecon either so she will be going to Hereford. Could we not have a through school in Brecon and keep Gwernyfed here to stop people going to Hereford? (Gwernyfed Public)*

*If you do that, young families will move away, all the houses will be occupied by old people like me... (Gwernyfed Public)*

*Gwernyfed students aren't going to come [to Brecon]...they will go over the border. It might work on paper but it won't work here because parents will vote with their feet. You have to deal with the reality and not what you want the reality to be (Brecon Public)*

*Closing this school will make councillors agents of destruction for this community and county. If you want people to not come here, and leave in droves, this is exactly the way to it. (Gwernyfed Public)*

- <sup>9.17</sup> Overall, there was a definite sense that the financial savings that will be realised as a result of PCC's proposals in no way compensate for the 'destruction and loss' they would ultimately bring, especially within the Gwernyfed catchment area:

*I can't believe that all this destruction and loss of what is inestimable value can really be for £300k. Even for many more times that, it's not right. (Gwernyfed Public)*

## Post-16 Education

- <sup>9.18</sup> Meeting participants were extremely concerned that the NPTC group does not currently have the capacity to deliver at least equal or better quality post-16 provision than is currently offered in South Powys in terms of teaching quality, subject and teacher availability and facilities such as science labs and common rooms. Some of the many comments made can be seen below:

*Some research I've looked at suggests that children learn best at the A-Level post-16 stage either in a dedicated sixth form college setting (not a general FE college), second best is an in-school setting with a large sixth form, third best is a general FE college which is what Powys are proposing. I don't want that experience for my child (Brecon Public)*

*What guarantees have you received from NPTC that will assure us parents that the appropriate teaching standards, subject availability and facilities will be available from the outset from the Brecon campus and will remain in the long-term? (Brecon Public)*

*I want to know who will be teaching AS-Levels and A-Levels. Will it be qualified teachers with degrees and professional qualifications and expertise in these A-level subjects? Key Stage 5 standards in Powys are excellent already; why are we risking the future of our pupils by sending them to a college with no track record of achieving success at A-Level (Brecon Public)*

*I was looking at consultation doc that points out that the A\* to E are 99% at Neath which are higher than Wales and Powys. But it omits the fact that Gwernyfed is 18% higher A\* to B than Neath (Gwernyfed Public)*

*In the three years where we have had students accessing Psychology, we have only had one student passing A\* - C. We had to get them private tuition because they were teaching the wrong syllabus (Gwernyfed Public)*

*At the moment the timeline gives the college seven months to go from 13 A-levels to a proposed 25. How on earth will they recruit the teachers they need and develop the space to do that? (Brecon Public)*



*I notice that some of the courses that are offered are science courses and I know you don't have labs at your Brecon campus so how will you deliver these? (Brecon Public)*

*What do they provide [at NPCT] for when they're not in lessons? Are there areas for them to go and be fruitfully occupied or are they turfed out into town? (Brecon Public)*

*Some of the info I've heard about provision by NPT says that there is no provision of labs, a common room and other things... (Gwernyfed Public)*

*I have an email from NPTC teachers saying that they do not have any working labs there, and we actually teach one biology student here at Gwernyfed; they couldn't get access at NPTC (Gwernyfed Public)*

*We're having students sent to us at Gwernyfed to study science because you don't have any labs. (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.19 Participants also noted the lack of assurance around sustainability and that all the advertised courses will continue to be delivered locally and not transferred to Neath or cancelled altogether once commenced due to student or teacher shortages - and about the lack of accountability in such an event:

*Who's to say the college will continue to provide? They have pulled the course my daughter was supposed to be doing this year. I have had to go out of county (Brecon Public)*

*In the proposal you say that NPTC will offer a minimum of 25 A- and AS-levels. Can you guarantee that all of these subjects will be offered at the Brecon campus and they won't transfer to Neath? (Brecon Public)*

*They can offer them, but if they aren't taken up by enough students they can then withdraw at a moment's notice. They made it clear...that Powys County Council could do nothing to prevent that, so if your child started that course they could do nothing to stop you taking it away or they could move it all the way to Neath! Something they've already done this year; at the beginning of the academic year they offered Performing Arts and it's been withdrawn and moved to Neath. And another pupil can only access her lessons in night school (Gwernyfed Public)*

*If a pupil has problems with NPTC, we can do nothing. (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.20 All this is compounded by a sense that Brecon and Gwernyfed pupils are not being offered the same choice of post-16 provision (that is, a sixth form in addition to a tertiary college) as others are across the county:

*I would like to record that I object to the proposal to turn Brecon High School into an 11-16 school...this proposal would mean that the children in the Brecon catchment area would be the only ones in Powys without an option for a sixth form in a school (Brecon Public)*

*It's quite clear that the choice of a sixth form should be offered to this community as it is being offered to all other Powys communities. It's not fair (Brecon Public)*

*We are all committed to having a sixth form in this area. Why is it happening here? Why isn't it happening across all of Powys at the same time because that's what's fair? (Brecon Public)*

*You might want to look at the North of the county where Llanfyllin High School notes how proud they are of their sixth form because of the outstanding contribution sixth form students make to their school. Why shouldn't students in Brecon have that opportunity to allow the younger students*

*to learn from the sixth form and see that development but also as sixth formers to be leaders and to take on that role? (Brecon Public)*

- 9.21 In light of the above, it was strongly suggested that the current arrangement - close collaboration between sixth forms and the college - is maintained:

*It is clear that the community wants a sixth form in close collaboration with the college for vocational courses. Some pupils want to have both and there should be strong collaboration between the two sectors because they both have something to offer. It should not be a takeover but a collaboration (Brecon Public)*

*The choice of A-levels from NPT can still be there, with two schools (Brecon Public)*

*You must listen to what people want here. They want a Welsh stream and they want a sixth form. I believe the role of the college is to do what the college does best and provide that vocational partnership. (Brecon Public)*

## Welsh Medium Education

- 9.22 There was grave concern that the transferal of the Welsh stream to Builth Wells High School would be to the detriment of Welsh culture in the Brecon area and also to a lesser degree in Gwernyfed:

*Please don't underestimate the negative impact your proposals will have on English and Welsh education and the Welsh language more generally in our community (Brecon Public)*

*You mentioned that the Welsh Government will be funding the new school in Brecon. Does the Welsh Government know you're destroying the Welsh language in this area? Poll in Hay school; 75% of parents will be sending their parents to Herefordshire, even before high school age. Will they fund it, based on the loss of Welsh language in this area? (Gwernyfed Public)*

*You are teaching our children that their language and culture play second fiddle to another country. I don't want my son to think it's unimportant and that English is more important. Should you not be promoting Welsh? Feel proud of your language and culture not ashamed of it and farm them off to other places. It's not a choice it's our goddamn right to speak Welsh on a daily basis (Brecon Public)*

*You mentioned that centralising provision will grow the Welsh language community. How do you see that panning out seeing as you are shipping people away from Brecon for their Welsh medium education? It looks to me like you are trying to kill the Welsh language in the Brecon area (Brecon Public)*

- 9.23 Moreover, participants in Brecon suggested that the proposals will make local parents think twice about choosing Welsh medium primary education for their children if there is no local high school Welsh medium provision available - with the overall effect that numbers of Welsh medium pupils will decline and ultimately affect the viability of both the Welsh medium stream at Builth Wells and of Ysgol y Bannau:

*I understand what you are trying to achieve regarding Welsh and that is a larger cohort of pupils to be able to provide a broader range of subjects at GCSE level. But what this plan does is undermine the numbers of people going into that medium because parents will not choose Welsh medium education for their children if they know they have to be bused. It will just about suffice for the people who are already in the system but parents will not actively choose Welsh medium provision in the Brecon area if they know their children will have to travel... This is especially for parents who are English speaking and take a leap of faith to put their children into Welsh medium because they*



*see the value of it. But they won't do that if they can't have their children continually educated in this system (Brecon Public)*

*This will have an adverse effect on the numbers of children wanting to have Welsh language education in the Brecon area (Brecon Public)*

*Won't this mean closing Ysgol y Bannau in future? (Brecon Public)*

- 9.24 One participant suggested that this will also mean fewer young people reaping the many benefits of bilingualism in future, as the following quotation demonstrates:

*Research has demonstrated that bilinguals have a better memory, are better at multi-tasking, have better selective attention and have a better ability to learn languages and mathematics. They are also better socially and show greater empathy towards others. In the long-term bilinguals have a five-year delayed onset of dementia compared to monoglots. (Brecon Public)*

- 9.25 Brecon participants also argued that the council's recent transport policy for Welsh medium education (that is, paying for pupils to be transported to Builth or even out-of-county to Ystalyfera) has damaged the prospect of strengthening provision at BHS and could be judged as pre-determination of the consultation outcomes:

*Regarding the Welsh education, the decision to provide transport tied one hand behind our backs here in Brecon but with that other hand we will fight to keep it (Brecon Public)*

*With the Welsh provision, we didn't have a hope in terms of trying to sustain it (Brecon Public)*

*In terms of numbers, why does the County pay for Welsh-speaking pupils to go outside county to learn Welsh? You are using numbers to close this stream (Brecon Public)*

*It's disgusting that you have been spending money on sending children to Ystalyfera; it would have been much better spent bringing us up to 2b status than making children have to travel. The Welsh ethos in this area is much stronger than it is in the Builth area (Brecon Public)*

*Can you explain how paying for children to be transported to Builth prior to the start of consultation is not considered pre-determination? (Brecon Public)*

- 9.26 It was also said that expecting pupils from Brecon's core Welsh-speaking area of Crai, Sennybridge and Trecastle to travel over 30 miles to Builth is unrealistic and will contribute further to the out-of-county pupil exodus given Ystalyfera is closer:

*The core of the Welsh-speaking area of Breconshire is Crai, Sennybridge and Trecastle which is 11 miles at least to Brecon. If you expect those children to travel to Builth that is over 30 miles... Is 31 miles to Builth for Welsh education satisfactory; I think it's not. We are failing our young people... (Brecon Public)*

- 9.27 A suggestion was thus made that PCC should: *look at not paying for children to go outside the county from Ysgol y Bannau and Sennybridge to bring the numbers up here in Brecon and keep the pupils in the county? I have friends who have sent their children to Ystalyfera to guarantee their education but looking at the numbers going to Ysgol y Bannau and Sennybridge, if you brought them to Brecon you would then have the same numbers as they have in Builth? (Brecon Public)*

- 9.28 Finally, there was also some scepticism that the anticipated critical mass of Welsh medium pupils will not materialise at Builth, meaning the promised wider range of subjects to be provided there will not either:

*Let's assume the 'only 30' don't transfer from Brecon to Builth and you don't get your critical mass, how are you going to fund an improved and extended curriculum in Builth?* (Brecon Public)

- <sup>9.29</sup> Overall, Brecon participants felt that the BHS Welsh stream has been intentionally downgraded in favour of Builth (as particularly highlighted by the aforementioned provision of free school transport for Welsh medium pupils to Builth and Ystalyfera) and that its loss is contrary to the will of local people, who recognise the essential contribution the Welsh stream pupils have made to both the school and the local community:

*You will be fully aware that the transfer of children from Brecon to Builth over the past year has had a detrimental effect on the Welsh stream at Brecon, adding to the demise of the provision due to poor investment and management over previous years...* (Brecon Public)

*If parents wanted a Welsh education for their child it was pretty much Builth or nothing. The numbers were bound to increase at Builth because you didn't give anyone a choice* (Brecon Public)

*How does removing the Welsh stream from Brecon High School fit with the criteria success factor that it should be politically acceptable at a local level? Brecon Town Council have said they are voting against it so how does that fit?* (Brecon Public)

*We welcome a new school but we want it to be 11-18 and we want it to have Welsh medium provision ... We will continue to fight for our new school which we need but it has to be an all-through school with Welsh medium provision* (Brecon Public)

*Welsh medium education and the sixth form are important to Brecon High school and always have been. They make it what it is* (Brecon Public)

*The Welsh pupils played a major part in the Seven Brides for Seven Brothers production. They provide a lot of the creative heart of the school because they have a background in Eisteddfods. The school orchestra has been depleted, the choir has too since some of them left for Builth. You are taking away our culture* (Brecon Public)

*I've gone through the Welsh stream at Brecon and it's been a privilege and a pleasure to be here. The stream does a massive amount for the school and outside school...* (Brecon Public)

## Consultation Process

- <sup>9.30</sup> A number of people at the Gwernyfed meeting voiced distrust of the council based on its alleged mismanagement and poor implementation of the previous primary schools reorganisation consultation in their area:

*Already been mentioned about the closure of primary schools in the Gwernyfed cluster and extent to which it undermines our faith in the Council to carry through promises* (Gwernyfed Public)

*Powys county council failed my children in primary schools; how can I be convinced that they won't be failed in secondary schools?* (Gwernyfed Public)

*How can we trust you? A lot of the animosity that you feel here is because many of us have already gone through the modernisation program of the primary schools. I remember sitting in a meeting similar to this and we were assured that none of the small primary schools would close down until the larger ones were redeveloped... Can I suggest you sort the primaries out before you think about the secondaries. After six years, porta cabins, not one brick has been laid in Hay. I can see a scenario where you close this excellent school, and do nothing in Brecon, just have a load of porta*

*cabins and in 10 years' time this school will be in ruins and a whole generation will be taught in porta cabins in Brecon receiving a substandard education... (Gwernyfed Public)*

*Considering your track record with the Gwernyfed primary school proposals which have yet to be delivered ten years on, how can you reassure us that you have the capacity and capability to deliver such widespread changes across the county? (Brecon Public)*

- 9.31 Participants also sought reassurance that the balance of opinion will be considered and that the consultation process will be in line with the Welsh Government's legal requirements and compliant with wider relevant legislation - which was doubted by several attendees:

*There is clearly a high level of opposition to the proposals, focusing mainly around the intentions around sixth form and Welsh medium learning (Brecon Public)*

*Does Powys County Council think the children of this county are important? Are you actually going to take any notice of young people's opinions? (Gwernyfed Public)*

*If you look at a new piece [of legislation] that's come in on the 1st April around the way in which wellbeing affects future generations. The Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015. No one quoted it (Gwernyfed Public)*

*In the draft Community Impact Assessment Powys claims to apply the contents of the Schools Statutory Code which every Local Authority must comply with. We've found five failures to comply with [this]... That means you're acting unlawfully (Gwernyfed Public)*

*You also claim that you are complying with the UN charter of the rights of the child. Sorry to disappoint you, but we have found six failures in your documentation. That's just the Community Impact Assessment. The convention underpins every piece of legislation in the UK that relates to the child. Every public body must comply to every part of it... (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.32 A lack of confidence in the democratic process was also evident from the comments made at Gwernyfed, where people accused PCC of: not listening to public concerns; not wishing to have constructive discussions; and having already made up its mind to proceed with the proposals:

*Please don't sit there and say this is a consultation exercise and you're just here to listen because we don't believe you. We assume that it's a done deal... (Gwernyfed Public)*

*I'm frustrated at consultation process. Anxiety and upset and stress has been caused by you, Powys County Council. You've taken a sweeping brush approach; and there's also a terminology called a cosmetic consultation (Gwernyfed Public)*

## Projections, Facts and Figures

- 9.33 Participants at the Gwernyfed meeting felt that not enough consideration has been given during the options appraisal to maintaining both sites in some form:

*12 outstanding schools exceeding against the odds in Powys 2009. Students first, rich opportunities, outstanding teaching, outstanding well-distributed leadership and ambition. Not one mention of buildings. Gwernyfed High School demonstrates many of these already and is working hard to achieve more. They do that by balancing the books. Maybe a 12th option is needed; a costed plan to keep both schools and avoid closures. (Gwernyfed Public)*

- 9.34 Furthermore, they said that local demographics (many families with school-age children for example) and population growth in light of local housing development should also have been factored in to the

pupil number assumptions in the case for change, specifically around the viability of maintaining the Gwernyfed site:

*Over the next 10 to 15 years the population is expected to increase 10 to 15%. The fact you're predicting a decrease of 10 to 15% is crazy (Gwernyfed Public)*

*If you're looking at Powys as a whole or Wales as a whole it's different to what it is here. There's not many flats around here; what you'll find is a lot of people with school-age children. Certainly on your own figures there's a rise in places; we're back up to 2012 figures in five years. It seems a very short sighted approach. (Gwernyfed Public)*

Figure 20: Other Issues and Sub-Themes from the Public meetings

Sub-Theme	Comments
Proposals are creating tensions between communities	<i>The tragedy of the proposals is that they have set community against community. It's disturbing that we have to have a conversation about which community is more Welsh – Brecon or Builth. Even parents have fallen out over these proposals. (Brecon Public)</i>
Impact of the proposals on businesses	<i>Without a local secondary school the area may not be attractive to younger people. There will be a reduction of young flexible part-time workers, so will you be supporting local businesses with business rate reductions? (Gwernyfed Public)</i>
Tertiary model may not transfer successfully to rural areas	<i>Welsh Government research (done by an independent professor) shows that whilst the tertiary model has done great things and lifted quality, that's mainly in urban areas. It also says that a one size fits all approach may not be the best option for rural Wales. (Brecon Public)</i>
Support at NPTC is lacking compared with BHS	<i>I've been to NPTC and have studied here at sixth form and I've had much more support. here. (Brecon Public)</i>
Student safety	<i>Do you think that security of the school has an impact on pupil numbers? When these proposals started in 2009 you've saying numbers have been decreasing since 2010... knock on effect? If you could secure the school, do you not think more people would come back to the area? (Gwernyfed Public)</i>
Additional levels of pupil stress	<i>Have you taken into consideration the stress its putting on students and teachers in the exam period? Personally I take a GCSE after school, additional maths. If I had to move to Brecon, my parents wouldn't be able to pick me up; around here I can get family or friends to pick me up. Would I just wait around? (Gwernyfed Public)</i>
Unachievable timetable for foundation of Shadow Governing Body	<i>6th September you're going to put it to the Cabinet then have a Shadow Governing Body in place by December... Given all the points raised, I think you're barking up the wrong tree. It's going to be an awful long time past December before you get that. (Gwernyfed Public)</i>
Teachers travelling between sites rather than students?	<i>Is there a possibility of teachers moving around rather than students? My understanding is that this is what the college does now. How come it hasn't been considered for the schools? (Brecon Public)</i>

Sub-Theme	Comments
Concerns over the robustness of the post-16 options appraisal	<i>According to the consultation document the options appraisal framework for Builth and Llandrindod shows a 13 to 9 split in favour of a sixth form within schools - but for this area it's a 10/10 split... Why has the provision here gone towards NPTC and not a sixth form within the school if it's exactly split?</i> (Brecon Public)
Funding uplift for the same Welsh medium a-level courses at Builth Wells High school	<i>I've had friends who came from Builth to Brecon who said we offered the same number of subjects in the Welsh stream if not more. They get £100,000 more for the subjects which doesn't seem fair.</i> (Brecon Public)  <i>[Builth] is getting much more money to deliver Welsh medium education and so we can't possibly deliver the same number of subjects...</i> (Brecon Public)
Condition of current Gwernyfed building	<i>In the consultation document for children you say one reason to close Gwernyfed is because some of it is old. Some of the best schools in the UK are in old buildings...</i> (Gwernyfed Public)

# 10. Written Submissions

## Analysis of statutory stakeholder responses

### Introduction

<sup>10.1</sup> During the formal consultation process, 29 statutory written submissions were received concerning the proposals for Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools. The table below shows the breakdown of contributors by type.

<b>Assembly Members/Members of Parliament</b>	
Chris Davies MP (2 submissions received)	County Councillor Melanie Davies
County Councillor Matthew Dorrance	County Councillor William Powell
<b>Other Political Groups</b>	
Powys County Council Welsh Liberal Democrats Group	
<b>School Governing Bodies</b>	
Brecon High School Governing Body (2 submissions received)	Ysgol Y Bannau
Gwernyfed High School Governing Body	
<b>Town/Community Councils</b>	
Andrew Jones – Chairman of Gwernyfed Community Council (4 submissions received)	Llanigon Community Council
Brecon Town Council	Maescar Community Council
Erwood Community Council	Merthyr Cynog Community Council
Felinfach Community Council	Painscastle Community Council
Llangorse Community Council	Talgarth Town Council
<b>Other Organisations</b>	
Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales- Estyn	Association of School and College Leaders
Gwernyfed Campaign Group (2 submissions received)	Rhosgoch & Painscastle Toddler Group
Parents at Clyro Playgroup	

<sup>10.2</sup> ORS has read all the written submissions and reported them in this chapter; none have been disregarded even if they are not expressed in a 'formal' way. It is a painstaking but necessary process to identify the main themes and issues raised by respondents.

<sup>10.3</sup> All submissions have also been reviewed by Powys County Council; meaning that any submissions that present technical arguments that require more detailed consideration have been evaluated by appropriate members of the consultation team.

<sup>10.4</sup> Submissions were initially classified on the basis of the type of individual or organisation submitting the response. They were then read in their entirety and the key themes and issues raised were collated, classified and reported using a standardised code frame.

- 10.5 Where multiple submissions present the same or very similar arguments, or refer to the same evidence or assumptions, they have been summarised collectively in the report of consultation findings without undue repetition. These summaries are presented in a thematic (tabular) format in order to identify the range of views and issues as well as common themes. This will ensure that Powys County Council is able to consider the important issues identified.
- 10.6 In accordance with Welsh Governments' School Organisation code, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales- Estyn's formal response to this consultation is included in full in Appendix 1.
- 10.7 Finally, it is important to note that the following section is a report of the views expressed by submission contributors. In some cases, these views will not be supported by the available evidence - and while ORS has not sought to highlight or correct those that make incorrect statements or assumptions, this should be borne in mind when considering the submissions.

## Main Themes Raised in Written Submissions from Statutory Stakeholders

### Pupil Projections

- 10.8 The Gwernyfed Campaign Group questioned the validity of PCCs pupil number projections, quoting miscalculations within the consultation document:

*946 [pupils] are shown as constant [in the consultation document] even though the plans involve the removal of the Welsh stream from Brecon and the transfer of the pupils to Builth Wells. Where does the number 946 come from? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*The table at the bottom of page 51 gives information about primary pupil numbers in Gwernyfed catchment. The totals given do not tally with the primary school figures given on page 69. The differences are not large but further undermine our faith in your calculations... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

- 10.9 The Group – as well as Councillor Melanie Davies, Talgarth Town Council and Felinfach Community Council – also insisted that projected numbers are projected to rise in coming years:

*In view of the fact - shown by your own data - that pupil numbers are expected to rise at Gwernyfed, please justify the reason given for closing the school... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*Based on the pupil number forecasts for Gwernyfed...surplus places at the school will be 15% by 2019 - within what you say is the Welsh Government's agreed maximum for Powys - and by 2021 the surplus falls to just 8%. You will note that these pupil number forecasts do not take into account the extra 104 children expected from the housing developments you mention on page 52... Based on the above, do you agree that the arguments of 'falling pupil numbers' and 'surplus places' have no basis in fact and should therefore be removed from this proposal and from the Outline Business Case for the Beacons Learning Campus submitted to the Welsh Government? Please explain why you want to spend tens of millions of pounds building a new school to resolve a surplus places issue which - by your own admission – will not exist by the time building is complete (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*Gwernyfed has the lowest surplus places at 20% and according to the data provided by the Council will achieve the required 15% by 2019; that's only three years away. The catchment is growing and only last week the National Park Planning Authority gave permission for over 80 houses in the Hay*



*area. This number was not factored in at the time of the proposal and will need to be considered along with other potential building developments (Cllr Melanie Davies)*

*Pupil numbers at Gwernyfed High School are already set to rise and by 2021 reach well over 500 (Felinfach Community Council)*

*There is a huge expansion of housing planned for the Bronllys area, so in a few short years there will in most likelihood be huge demand or even over subscription for school places. (Talgarth Town Council)*

- 10.10 In any case, the Gwernyfed Community Council challenged the assumption that surplus places are harmful to schools' viability: they were considered perfectly acceptable providing school budgets are managed effectively:

*Unfilled places are typically harmful due to the excess unproductive costs incurred. Unfilled places are thus only an issue where poor management and planning has failed to trim its teaching capacity to meet the needs of its pupil numbers. GHS has a balanced budget, has demonstrated diligent management of resources and has no underutilised teaching capacity. (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

- 10.11 Furthermore, the Gwernyfed High School Governing Body suggested that uncertainty around the future of GHS has had a negative impact on admission numbers - but that the school has now re-established its intake and is in a stable position once more:

*The uncertainty of the previous school reorganisation threat meant that parents moved their children to Herefordshire or Crickhowell and it has taken until now to re-establish our intake. (GHS Governing Body)*

- 10.12 In terms of pupil numbers, it was said that the proposals themselves may, in fact, serve to further exacerbate the issue of falling pupil numbers given that many parents in the Gwernyfed catchment area will choose to send their children out of county, into England or to private school (Christ College) in preference to the proposed new school in Brecon:

*Parents in Llangorse area also consider sending children to Christ College...Christ College both as a secondary school and a provider of Key stage 2 education has been omitted from the analysis and appears not to have been consulted on this matter... (Llangorse Community Council)*

*We have been told by up to 75% of parents in the Hay/Clyro area they will move to another high school if the proposal to close Gwernyfed receives cabinet approval... Why is the Council content to approve a proposal that will lose pupils, not only out of county but from the Welsh education system completely? How does this in any way address the issue of falling pupil numbers and surplus places? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*People will be looking to go over the English border for sixth form and other post-16 provision. This will also lead to Welsh pupils being relocated into the network of English primary and secondary primary schools feeding into that post-16 provision. In my opinion, we would then see a radical fall away in pupil numbers on the Powys side of the border and that would prove to be very, very damaging (Councillor William Powell)*

*It is not about how many students there are on each site, the critical consideration is how far apart the sites are and how long students would have to travel. Powys has not shrunk geographically in*

*the last five years. Crucially in this area, would our students opt to travel in to Brecon or head off to Hereford?* (Talgarth Town Council)

*Pupils are lost over the border, together with the funding they attract - and, crucially, the vitality that they would bring to our communities in the future is also lost.* (Councillor William Powell)

- 10.13 Finally, Estyn want further clarity around the projected pupil numbers and capacity of the proposed new school:

*The proposer refers appropriately to the current numbers of surplus places at both schools. Surplus places at Brecon High School currently stand at 36% and at Gwernyfed High School at 20%. However, the proposer does not provide a proposed capacity figure for the new school, or provide any information on projected pupil numbers at the new school.* (Estyn)

## Finance, Facts and Figures

- 10.14 Llangorse Community Council questioned why PCC *will not consider funding maintenance of GHS from its capital funds* - and asked whether the Council has set aside money for ongoing annual maintenance for the proposed new school to prevent it falling into disrepair.

- 10.15 Furthermore, the GHS Governing Body queried the £3.7 million 'backlog of repairs' figure quoted in the consultation document, asking whether it includes the cost of the recent renovation and re-fit of the Mansion House – as well as whether it is based on PCC's own service undertaking the work as opposed to potentially cheaper external contractors:

*Does this figure include the renovation and re-fit of the Mansion House as recommended in the last Access Audit, 2009, and estimated at £196,500? If so, then it includes works no longer required to make the teaching spaces accessible. We now estimate this work to be nearer to £70,000* (Gwernyfed HS Governing Body)

Is this figure based upon the cost of the Powys CC FMS service providing the work? If so, we would suggest there are alternatives that could reduce the cost by between 25% - 50%...by procuring externally. (Gwernyfed HS Governing Body)

- 10.16 The Governing Body also goes on to say that it has: *many other ideas of further cost savings, all of which can divert funds into raising educational standards. We currently manage the cleaning for the five primary schools; have set up refuse and recycling contracts across the cluster and our mini buses support activities that would not have otherwise taken place due to cost.* (Gwernyfed HS Governing Body)

## Transport and Travel

- 10.17 Respondents questioned the rationale of transporting pupils additional distances and the impacts this will cause for farming families (in terms of the time available for children to assist with the day-to-day running of farms) and to young people's attainment levels, access to educational and other opportunities, general well-being and connections to their communities:

*On page 20 of the consultation document, one of the risks states 'additional travel time has a negative impact on pupil well-being and attainment', yet offers no suggestion as to how this negative impact will be addressed. Has the impact regarding travel times been seriously considered?* (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)

*When looking at Critical Success Factors on page 14 the document states 'to provide post-16 provision that improves access to, and participation in, both academic and...' ... What does access mean? How does increased travel time contribute to improved access? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*Some pupils from the current Gwernyfed catchment area will be on a bus for up to 2 hours per day. The health and well-being of these pupils will be damaged by placing time, travel and cost burdens on parents to support friendships and after school activities (Felinfach Community Council)*

*We do not wish for our children to be stuck on a bus for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon day in day out. We feel that this will have a negative impact on their ability to concentrate and will leave less time for their broad interests and after school activities. Many of our rural children live on farms and a natural part of their lives is to take care of their animals and helping with farm chores. If the children are on the bus for 2 hours minimum per day there will be no time for these lovely, family orientated activities... (Rhosgoch and Painscastle Toddler Group)*

*Agriculture is the backbone of this part of rural Powys ... pupils from farming backgrounds play a huge role in the day-to-day running of their family farms. Can the Council justify the increased travelling times for these pupils who are going to spend significantly more time on a school bus rather than helping on their farms? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*For the students, they would have significantly longer travel times and their associations with the local community would be strained and in many cases broken. (Councillor William Powell)*

Indeed, Llangorse Community Council suggested that the prospect of additional travel time to Brecon may prompt Gwernyfed parents and pupils to consider furthering their education in Herefordshire, in contravention to several local and national policies designed to protect and meet the needs of rural Welsh communities:

*Closing GHS will extend travel time resulting in additional stress to pupils. Not being able to face journeys in excess of an hour will mean no option for many but to go against their cultural needs and attend a Herefordshire school. This contravenes the PCC "One Powys Plan" and does not promote community cohesion and meet the needs of rural Welsh communities. It contravenes all the following policies: the Welsh Language Strategy 2012-2017 [and the] Welsh Government learner travel guidance 2014 (Llangorse Community Council)*

*How does PCC justify driving pupils out of county and country and encouraging the Powys "brain drain" and its knock on effect on local business and future of the rural economy, particularly in respect of its One Powys Plan and Welsh cultural policies? (Llangorse Community Council)*

<sup>10.18</sup> Moreover, Llangorse Community Council questioned whether pupils or staff would be required to move between sites (with the implicit suggestion that it should be the former):

*Could PCC confirm that pupils will not be subjected to this procedure and it will be staff that move between schools rather than pupils? (Llangorse Community Council)*

<sup>10.19</sup> Felinfach Community Council and the Gwernyfed Campaign Group suggested that the proposals are premature and in need of review given that PCC's new travel policy is imminent:

*When is the Powys Cabinet due to consider a new travel policy and when and how will the new policy be reflected in these proposals?' (Felinfach Community Council)*

*Why have you brought this proposal to consultation before publishing or implementing the New Schools Transport Policy, and what does Powys CC plan to do to remedy its failure to give members of the public the opportunity to respond to the transport elements of this consultation in the context of the new Schools Transport Policy? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

- <sup>10.20</sup> Estyn would like to see a clearer risk management strategy from PCC relating to possible negative impacts that additional travel time would have on learners. They also want to see greater clarity on the exact provision planned for those learners having to travel more than one hour:

*Similarly, the proposer acknowledges the issues associated with the additional travel times faced by pupils currently at Gwernyfed High School travelling to the proposed new school at Brecon, as well as for Welsh-medium learners currently at Brecon High School travelling to the proposed new school at Builth Wells. However, although the proposer acknowledges that these could have a negative impact on pupil wellbeing and attainment, the proposer is not able to offer any risk management measures beyond stating that travel time would not normally be more than an hour. It does not explain what provision it would make for those pupils for whom journey times would be longer than an hour. While the proposer acknowledges that the increased travel time is likely to restrict pupils' access to after-school activities at the new school, it does not discuss the risk that this might also impact negatively on their ability to access after-school activities in their home area. (Estyn)*

## Quality of Education

- <sup>10.21</sup> Estyn is unconvinced that the proposals will demonstrate an improvement in current standards and outcomes for pupils :

*Overall, many aspects of the proposal receive appropriate consideration. However, the proposal does not sufficiently consider standards currently achieved at both schools or demonstrate how the changes will lead to improved standards in relation to pupils' outcomes or the leadership and management of the new school. It does not consider sufficiently the risks involved in the proposal, particularly given the short timescales of its proposals. As a result, it is Estyn's opinion that the proposal is unlikely to improve the present standard of education provision in the area. (Estyn)*

Moreover, Estyn state that current standards at the schools are not adequately explained:

*...The proposer makes appropriate reference to the outcomes of both schools' most recent Estyn inspections. It identifies correctly that Brecon High School remains in special measures and that Gwernyfed High School was removed from Estyn monitoring in February 2016. The proposer also refers briefly to the schools' categorisation within the National School Categorisation System. However, it provides no explanation of the context or detail for these judgements...Significantly, the proposer provides no analysis of the standards achieved by pupils at either school in terms of attainment at either key stage 3 or key stage 4.*

- <sup>10.22</sup> Llangorse and Erwood Community Councils doubted the wisdom and indeed legality of combining two schools with varying educational standards and cultures into one larger school - particularly when the underlying rationale for the proposal is, in its view, to eradicate BHS's debts:

*The proposal is clearly a merger of schools to deal with BHS debts. To suggest that this is not a merger is not acceptable. It is noted that a merger between a successful and a failing school is illegal. How does PCC explain that this is not a merger? (Llangorse Community Council)*

*This proposal is clearly an amalgamation/merger of two very different schools, both educationally and culturally. It is not the fault of GHS that education in Powys and particularly BHS, is in such a poor state. PCC have to take responsibility for that situation. Does PCC accept that it must take responsibility for this scenario and accept that it must not use its own poor performance and that of BHS as a factor to close a school that is functioning well?* (Llangorse Community Council)

*The current proposals are only to find a fundable solution to the problems at Brecon High School so that it gets a new school.* (Erwood Community Council)

- 10.23 The area's Community Council was particularly concerned that a new school would not be subject to Estyn inspection for several years following the removal of BHS's special measures status, effectively ensuring a lack of standards monitoring at that school:

*We are further concerned that the "rebranding" of the combined schools will effectively eradicate Brecon campus' Estyn rating, and defer further detailed inspection for at least three years. This is unlikely to be conducive to progress towards the standards sought by Estyn, although cosmetically useful for PCC.* (Gwernyfed Community Council)

- 10.24 Furthermore, stakeholders were worried that an effective 'merger' cannot guarantee current educational and extra-curricular standards are maintained for GHS pupils let alone improved. It was also suggested that a larger school cannot provide proper pastoral care in the same way a smaller one can - and that the widely held view that schools with a minimum of 600 are preferable is no longer generally accepted:

*How does PCC expect the resultant amalgamated school will comply with guidance in 1.3 of the WG schools organisation code in providing at least the equivalent standard of education for the pupils of GHS from day one?* (Llangorse Community Council)

*Can Powys CC guarantee that the quality of education in the merged school would be at least as good as the current high standards at Gwernyfed?* (Felinfach Community Council)

*GCC believe that these strategies would bring about very significant reductions to the level of academic outcomes for local pupils, with additional harm to health, well-being and social activities* (Gwernyfed Community Council)

*This is a breach of the Statutory Schools Organisation Code: 'there should normally be evidence that the alternative would deliver outcomes and offer provision at least equivalent to that which is currently available to those learners.' Can the local authority explain why it thinks a breach of statutory responsibility is acceptable? Can Powys County Council explain how the closure of Gwernyfed High School and Community Organisation meets [this statement]?* (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)

*A smaller school has clear benefits over a larger school in respect of quality of life and pastoral care, every child known by every teacher; this strengthens each pupil's personal development* (Llanigon Town Council)

*It is the strongly held opinion that breadth of academic choice is a relatively low priority, and greatly outweighed by the personal, social and welfare benefits of a small school... GCC notes the 2011 report A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Rural Secondary School Consolidation: A Report to Gwynedd County Council by James Foreman-Peck... [which] throws into doubt the orthodoxy favouring schools of a minimum of 600 pupils. GCC understands that the Welsh Government has adopted these findings and is no longer pursuing a 600 pupil threshold.* (Gwernyfed Community Council)

- 10.25 Some responses suggested that PCC is removing a leadership team on an upward trajectory at Gwernyfed in favour of a new and untried formula - and is neglecting the fact that the school itself has improved significantly over the past few years in terms of educational standards and outcomes in developing its proposals:

*The Governing Body at Gwernyfed has been acknowledged as being effective in its role by both Estyn and ERW (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*The school is developing a depth of skill and experience across the board that builds resilience into the future of the school. Estyn noted this development when they visited the school in February 2016... The good work of the Governing Body over the last five to six years has been swept aside ... How can the Council declare an ambition to establish an effective and resilient leadership team and then destroy one that already exists? (Gwernyfed HS Governing Body)*

*The consultation document states that the poor quality of education and learning outcomes in some schools is unacceptable. This cannot be applied to Gwernyfed High School. In its formal consultation meeting with the Governing Body, the Council formally acknowledged that the school is on an improvement journey. The significant improvement in standards and learning outcomes has been recognised not only by Powys County Council but also by ERW, ESTYN and the Welsh Government. In fact, the Fischer Family Trust Aspire demonstrates that Gwernyfed is now ranked 8th in terms of progress across the whole of Wales at Level 2+. (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

## Governance and Leadership

- 10.26 Stakeholders desired more clarity around the composition of the Shadow Governing Body and how PCC will ensure sufficiently strong leadership to enable the best possible start for the proposed new school - especially given that the current Gwernyfed Governors' vehement opposition to the Council's proposals means it is highly likely that most will leave their posts:

*The structure of the temporary Governing Body will be critical in this proposal and whilst a promise has been made that this will be made up of equal numbers of Governors from the two schools this is not required in the legislation and more clarity is requested (Association of School and College Leaders)*

*The manner in which a new governing body will be selected for the proposed new school is unclear. Given that the current Governing Body of Gwernyfed are completely opposed to these proposals it would be unlikely that they will commit to a school they do not believe in. The talents that have contributed to the ongoing improvement journey at Gwernyfed will be lost to the new school. (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

- 10.27 The challenge of a single leadership team ensuring consistent quality across two very different sites was also raised as a concern, particularly if an acting Head of School is not employed in the two original schools to allow the head teacher to focus on their planning and implementation duties in relation to the new one:

*Felinfach Community Council asks PCC to describe how it envisages a shared head teacher, governing body and leadership will operate effectively and efficiently on a dual-sided school and what the impact on either school will be when Gwernyfed's standards are already improving and Brecon is struggling financially and educationally? (Felinfach Community Council)*



*When the head teacher of the new school is appointed there is not sufficient provision in place to allow the planning and implementation of a new school unless there is an allowance for an acting Head of School to be put in place in their original school. (Association of School and College Leaders)*

- <sup>10.28</sup> Estyn raise concerns around the risks associated in trying to establish a new leadership team and staffing structure in the proposed timeframe, and question whether this will result in tangible improvements to governance and leadership:

*In a few cases, the proposer fails to identify significant aspects of the proposal as a risk. For example, it does not include as a risk the challenges associated with the proposed timescales for implementation. In particular, the proposer does not acknowledge the challenges for the successful establishment of the new school when the new leadership team and staffing structure will not be in place until May 2017...It identifies appropriately that the transition to the new school will provide substantial additional workload for the shadowing governing body and appointed leadership team, and how the council aims to support this process. However, the proposer is less clear about how the proposal will result in improvements in the quality of leadership and management once the new school is established. (Estyn)*

## Buildings and Estates

- <sup>10.29</sup> The Gwernyfed Campaign Group was concerned that PCC will dispose of Gwernyfed's building and community assets well below their market value and sought more information about the valuation process. They also desired reassurance that the Council would, in the event of sale, put contingency plans in place to ensure that community facilities are maintained and accessible to local people in future:

*Given that Powys County Council suggest the site should be sold seriously below market value can the Local Authority: explain why the valuation is so far below market value? How they arrived at this conclusion? The process of calculation used? Or is this just a figure plucked out of the air? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*Can Powys County Council, given it intends to sell the site, make clear how those facilities could be retained for community use in the middle of another development and whether community activity charges would be maintained at an affordable level for the groups currently using the facilities? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*Given that Powys County Council have a responsibility under the Statutory Schools Organisation Code to facilitate replacement community facilities where a school closes, can the local authority: explain how it plans to make it possible for community organisation's to continue in the area? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

Furthermore, the Group wondered where PCC will find the £3+ million required to enable this - and suggested that it would be wiser to spend the money on ensuring GHS's disability compliance and retaining what they consider 'one of the best schools in Powys':

*Where they are going to find the £3 million + to make this possible? Explain why that this course of action is better than spending £3.5 million to make Gwernyfed disability compliant thereby negating the need to spend on replacement buildings whilst retaining one of the best schools in Powys.... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*



- 10.30 Llangorse Community Council also raised concerns that the potential loss of recreational activities in Gwernyfed may be coupled with the loss of recreational green spaces on the site of the new-build Brecon school development:

*It is noted that this area of land is outside of the BBNPA LDP development boundary and designated as recreational land. Whilst Brecon is supported in its bid for a new high school Llangorse Community Council does not support PCC being allowed to build on longstanding recreational land. Such land is essential for the health and wellbeing of the public. It is suggested that recent Welsh Government guidance supports the retention of recreational land (Llangorse Community Council)*

*If building on recreational land is to go ahead how does PCC mitigate this? Is alternative recreational land being offered nearby? (Llangorse Community Council)*

- 10.31 There was widespread acceptance that BHS requires a new building, but its current Governing Body was concerned over *the lack of capacity at the proposed new school and the ability of the school to meet the future needs of the community. They are also concerned around the security of the funding available and the timeframe for building the new school and impacts on the current building in the interim.* (Governing Body of Brecon High School)

## Pupil Impacts

- 10.32 Respondents complained that PCC's proposals represent the removal of choice for some parents and pupils within the current Gwernyfed catchment area:

*For those living in the majority of Llangorse Community Council area it means pupils are likely to have no option but to attend a new school at Brecon for secondary education. Llangorse Community Council opposes the removal of any parental choice for secondary school education in this manner...* (Llangorse Community Council)

- 10.33 It was said that the proposals create an unequal playing field in terms of pupil access to and participation in after-school activities - and that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the Gwernyfed area will be double disadvantaged in accessing to the full range of extra-curricular activities because of restricted transport:

*It would be more difficult for GHS pupils to participate in after-school activities than their Brecon-based counterparts. The proposal is thus clearly less favourable to GHS pupils than those living in Brecon It is further remarked in the consultation document...that those pupils who would be reliant on school transport would be particularly disadvantaged in respect of access to after-school activities. It is therefore clear that this policy will differentially harm the educational experience and outcome of those families who rely on school transport; typically that will mean those families on the lowest incomes. This proposal must therefore fail any Equalities Impact Assessment due to particularly harming pupils from the lowest income families (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

*Children miss buses, have doctor's appointments, want to attend extra-curricular activities after school, etc. The alternative public transport system...is limited to a first thing in the morning to late afternoon/very early evening transport model running every two hours. This is a poor alternative travel system for the complex needs of families without their own transport (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*It is likely that our children who will be sat on a bus for at least 2 hours a day will suffer educationally and socially. They will be disadvantaged compared to children living in Brecon who*

*will be able to attend after-school activities and clubs whilst children travelling from our community will find it much more difficult to attend. Currently some children attend after school clubs at Gwernyfed HS and are collected by friends or parents. However picking up children from Brecon would involve travelling an additional 20 miles, 44 miles in total (Painscastle Community Council)*

*Llangorse Community Council area, like so many areas in this rural part of Wales, has no public transport and for those travelling longer distances to a school in Brecon there is an issue of inequality as pupils will not be able to access such extra-curricular activities. How does PCC justify treating pupils on an unequal basis? (Llangorse Community Council)*

*What the Cabinet is proposing will, as a detailed Equality Impact Assessment would show, have the greatest impact on students who come from more deprived background and learners with disabilities. I am not confident that Powys County Council has detailed how it would mitigate this impact and therefore, the proposal is not sound. (Councillor Matthew Dorrance)*

- <sup>10.34</sup> Some stakeholders also commented that PCCs recent primary and secondary school reorganisations have affected some local pupils to the point where their basic rights are being violated:

*How does PCC justify putting some pupils through this process on more than one occasion in their 3-18 years of education? (Llangorse Community College)*

*A generation of pupils will suffer a disrupted education (Erwood Community Council)*

*Where in the documentation is it evidenced that Article 24 [of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child] has been complied with? The plans to close Gwernyfed risks diminishing quality of health as the accessibility to local community health services will no longer be easily accessible. What if anything does, Powys County Council intend to do to remedy this? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

## Teacher Impacts

- <sup>10.35</sup> Stakeholders questioned whether the proposed timetable for forming the new school entity is feasible given that negotiations around staff appointments and contracts may be complex and time-consuming:

*The timescales proposed are unrealistic and the timing of the consultation and the process of appointing a Headteacher does not allow sufficient time for the subsequent appointment of staff within the timeframe which may disadvantage the school in appointing the most appropriate staff... (Association of School and College Leaders)*

- <sup>10.36</sup> Furthermore, it was said that: uncertainty around job security could lead to the imminent loss of high quality staff; PCC's Human Resources department is currently too overstretched to cope with changes of this magnitude; and that the Council must clarify whether the whole range of potential staff and pupil travel costs has been taken into account:

*The lack of clarity regarding security of contracts for staff is creating uncertainty and pressure on staff who may well be tempted to leave the schools and weaken the provision. ... Will there be additional resources provided to Human Resources, who are already overstretched, to manage such a programme? (Association of School and College Leaders)*

*[There is a need to] clarify whether the following have, or have not, been taken into account? Staff travel costs for: the leadership team travelling daily; weekly departmental teachers' and middle managers' meetings; teachers travelling to teach subjects across both schools; and non-teacher travelling - KS4 students wishing to access GCSE options only available on one school site will need*

*to be transported every Tuesday and Thursday at an estimated cost of £20,000. (Gwernyfed HS Governing Body)*

## Community Impacts

- <sup>10.37</sup> Stakeholders stressed the case for retaining GHS in part because of the disproportionately negative impact its loss would have on community cohesion, culture and wellbeing (as evidenced by experiences of school closures elsewhere in the catchment area – Rhosgoch in particular):

*Gwernyfed represents the focal point for quite a dispersed rural community. It is fed by the two main towns of Hay and Talgarth and the many villages and farmsteads of a deeply rural hinterland, close to the Herefordshire border. The identity of our community and its many achievements are very well tied in with the school (Councillor William Powell)*

*GHS has very strong links with the local community and so the Governing Body asks: how can these be sustained and developed when our young people are attending school away from their local community as the preferred option suggests? (Gwernyfed HS Governing Body)*

*Painscastle Community Council says its community has recently been affected by the closure of Rhosgoch Primary School and that since this closure there has been a decline in social cohesion in the area: informal activity loosely based around the school has diminished and parents no longer meet and chat at the school gate. (Painscastle Community Council)*

- <sup>10.38</sup> Indeed, it was argued that this negative impact will be so significant as to contravene the Statutory Schools Organisation Code that PCC is applying to this process:

*Given that local authority claims to be applying the Statutory Schools Organisation Code, can Powys County Council explain where in the code it gives any credence whatsoever to the right of a local authority to take actions to close a school, as applied to Gwernyfed High School, where it is self-evident the action will destroy communities' quality of life, culture and cohesion? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

- <sup>10.39</sup> A particular worry was the detrimental impact closing GHS would have on the area's sporting, arts and other community groups, many of which make significant use of the school buildings currently - and the lack of mention in the consultation document about specific mitigations against this impact:

*The closure of Gwernyfed HS will also cause the removal of...sports and community facilities, which are heavily relied on by over 30 local sports, arts and community groups for their continued activities and survival. The adverse community impact of closure would be excessive (Welsh Liberal Democrats)*

*Felinfach Community Council says that the closure of Gwernyfed School will have a detrimental impact on sports clubs and community groups that are integral to the social and economic community and asks: 'how is Powys CC going to alleviate this impact?' (Felinfach Community Council)*

*There are a large number of sports and cultural activities held at Gwernyfed School one being the Rugby Club. This would all be lost as pupils would feel obliged to remain in the school in Brecon for these activities and this would have a knock on effect on the community of Gwernyfed (Erwood Town Council)*

*The Sports Centre at Gwernyfed School managed by the School is also made available to the public with both indoor and outdoor sports facilities which are enthusiastically utilised by many groups*

*which make a significant contribution to health and wellbeing in the district. There is a drama studio which holds a variety of arts activities so closure of the school could mean the loss of Glasbury Arts (Erwood Town Council)*

*Gwernyfed High School provides excellent sports facilities in the sports hall and on the sports pitches outside. It also provides a venue for formal and informal meetings and events in rooms of various sizes. There are no similar facilities near to our community and at a time when the public is being encouraged to be more active, closure of this facility would appear to be a retrograde measure. We do not believe that it will be feasible to retain these facilities if the school closed (Painscastle Community Council)*

*The Statutory Schools Organisation Code makes clear ...that the LA has a responsibility at the consultation stage to recognise that where school facilities close but are extensively used by the community an assessment of where alternatives can be found and if necessary enhancing other buildings etc. has to be carried out. None of this is explained. (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

<sup>10.40</sup> The economic impact of the school's loss on local businesses and the housing market was also highlighted as a key concern, as the following typical quotations demonstrate:

*The sale of properties in the area would be affected as most potential buyers with children would consider the availability of local schools when contemplating a move (Erwood Community Council)*

*Hay and Clyro are thriving communities and we worry that there will be a negative effect for all the young families in the area if the local secondary school closes. There will be less reason for people to move to this area because it will have poor secondary school provision. Would people still choose to move here with a long bus ride each way to secondary school? We need to help rural communities stay connected, not increasingly isolate them (Parents at Clyro Playgroup)*

*From the Llangorse area, parental journeys to GHS to collect children after out of school activities or extra study lessons result in parents stopping on route and spending money in businesses in Talgarth, Bronllys and Three Cocks etc.... Is it right that PCC encourage the transfer of such business/associated activity away from rural communities and smaller towns to one larger town centre? (Llangorse Community Council)*

*Closing Gwernyfed will have a detrimental effect on local businesses as people will naturally gravitate towards Brecon rather than Hay or Three Cocks. This will impact on all of us as we have a lovely range of independent shops in the area that need local people to use them, rather than those shops in Brecon (Parents at Clyro Playgroup)*

*"Many local people are employed by Gwernyfed High School, or in the supply chain that supports the high school – leading to a loss of employment which would affect the local economy"...Page 47 of the consultation document. Has Powys Council calculated the specific number of jobs that would be lost...? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*GCC believes that removal of education from the Gwernyfed site will cause significant hardship to local businesses and will cause economic harm in the long-term (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

*Businesses currently within close proximity have strong links within Gwernyfed HS, offering invaluable work experience and fundraising events. Businesses have confirmed their serious concerns that these links would be lost if the school closes, how will Powys County Council counteract and reconnect these broken links between our communities and local businesses? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*One business conducted a questionnaire and 40.5% of respondents stated that they made visits to the businesses as a result of visiting the school. (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

- 10.41 That families will 'vote with their feet' and leave the area - or indeed not be attracted there in the first place - because of the lack of secondary education provision was a worry, particularly in relation to changing demographics and ageing communities:

*If the community is denied its successful local secondary school, our community is going to have very serious problems. This will doubtless be reflected in the local housing market and will also make it less attractive for younger people, looking to have families in the near future. This would have a profoundly detrimental impact upon the shape and character of the local community - and undermine its sustainability (Councillor William Powell)*

*Powys CC admits the closure would negatively affect the housing market and also make the area less attractive to newcomers – this will inevitably have a harmful effect on whole communities and the demographic balance in communities. Families will be less keen to move to the area, communities will be made up of an ageing population and businesses will be adversely affected and unable to attract quality staff (Felinfach Community Council)*

*Removing facilities for young people and local communities in general will lead to a decline in their resilience. We have real concerns that closing the school will lead to our community being populated by an ageing population as young people leave and few families with children move in because of the lack of facilities. (Painscastle Community Council)*

- 10.42 Painscastle Community Council and the Gwernyfed Campaign Group both raised the prospect of a decline in Young Farmers Club membership as a result of GHS's proposed closure and the dispersal of its pupils to various schools:

*Rhosgoch has a very strong Young Farmers Club and members have attended school together. It is anticipated that if GHS closes and children attend different schools, it will be much more difficult to sustain this club (Painscastle Community Council)*

*Has the Council considered that the proposed school closure would certainly see a decline in YFC membership and participation of pupils in Gwernyfed catchment areas as a result of families moving out of the area? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

- 10.43 Finally in terms of impacts, it was said that GHS helps its primary feeder schools financially through joint procurement exercises and external contract management, but would evidently be unable to maintain this assistance were it to close:

*Our Business Manager looks for best possible value in all procurement, and this year has been able to pass on significant savings to our cluster Primaries, for example, waste management, janitorial supplies, refuse collection and educational resources. Gwernyfed High School also manages the cleaning staff for the catchment primary schools. There are also plans to develop the possibilities for further procurement savings for the primaries in the future. Will the council acknowledge that the proposals will adversely impact upon the primary school and their opportunities to make financial savings? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

- 10.44 Llangorse Community Council called for wider local consultation, including a much more detailed economic and community impact assessment in both school areas to assess the resilience and capacity of communities, local businesses and primary feeder schools to absorb the proposed changes:



*Can PCC explain why they have not consulted directly with [affected] Community Groups...and why there is such little respect for these highly valued often voluntary organisations within our rural communities? Can PCC explain how it proposes to keep the community facilities open and accessible to all, as they are now? (Llangorse Community Council)*

*Can Brecon as a town absorb the impact of circa 400 extra school children aged 11 to 18 and associated implications? A full explanation and availability of facilities in Brecon with appropriate Community Impact Assessment would be useful. (Llangorse Community Council)*

Estyn argue that PCC needs to demonstrate how it will mitigate against the risks identified in its own equalities and community impact assessments. For example, Estyn suggest that PCC should consult with parents electing other schools other than the proposed new school:

*The proposer has considered the likely impact of the proposal on a range of groups, including pupils with Special Educational Needs, pupils from low-income families and Welsh-medium pupils. The proposer has undertaken draft equality impact assessments for pupils from both Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School. They identify clearly how pupils at both schools might be affected by the proposal but do not at this stage identify any measures to mitigate this. The proposer has also carried out a draft Community Impact Assessment which suitably acknowledges the significant issues faced by the communities within the Gwernyfed catchment area should the proposal be successful. However, it does not identify measures it would take to address these. (Estyn)*

*The proposer appropriately includes these disadvantages in its analysis of risks associated with the proposal, together with the measures it intends to employ to manage them. Overall, its identification of risks appears to be fair and balanced. However, in a few instances, the proposer does not discuss these or its risk management measures in sufficient detail. For example, although the proposer identifies the risk that some parents may arrange for their children to attend schools other than the new school, it does not identify sufficiently well how it will engage positively with parents to reduce this risk. (Estyn)*

## Post-16 Education

<sup>10.45</sup> Many comments made by statutory stakeholders underline a sense of inequity that parents and pupils in south Powys will not have the same choice of post-16 delivery models as those in the rest the county. Some of the many typical comments were:

*The removal of sixth forms would leave the students of the Brecon area without the same equity of choice around post-16 as offered to students in the rest of Powys (Governing Body of Brecon High School)*

*There is no equity across Powys in the recommendation. I do not understand the logic behind the recommendation, if the Cabinet are content to close Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School, stripping the sixth forms and Welsh Language out of the educational offer in this part of south Powys and develop a new area school on the recreation grounds at Brecon for the reasons out lined, why are they not looking to do the same at Builth and Llandrindod? (Cllr Melanie Davies)*

*Why is the Council prepared to deliberately discriminate against post-16 learners in the Gwernyfed and Brecon catchment areas by withdrawing from them alone in the whole county the option of taking A-levels in a High School? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*If sixth form provision and Welsh had been provided (as a dual stream option) for both 'area schools', I would have been at least reassured that there was equity of education in the south of the County even if I had opposed the plans. (Cllr Melanie Davies)*

<sup>10.46</sup> Furthermore, there is a sense that entrusting local post-16 education to an untried and untested provider with limited accountability to PCC is a risk. Particular concerns were around: a perception of poor educational standards and outcomes at NPTC; reduced access to teachers and the support and pastoral care they can offer within a sixth form environment; the possibility that NPTC could withdraw provision from the Brecon campus at any time should student numbers render it unviable; and whether the promised breadth of A-level choice will materialise in reality. Some of the many typical comments can be seen below:

*Can the Council explain the justification for replacing an A-level provision that produces 67.7% A\* to B with one that produces only 50.2% A\* to B? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*Last year, 50.2% at NPTC got A\* - B grades, compared with 67.6% at Gwernyfed. What assurance can Powys CC give that the A-level standards achieved at Gwernyfed school will continue to be achieved let alone improved upon if delivered by NPTC? (Felinfach Community Council)*

*[The proposal] provides no demonstrable prospect of an improvement in educational outcomes at either pre- or post-16 levels in the catchment areas covered by both current schools - in particular the planned transfer of all post-16 provision to the NPTC Group of Colleges by September 2017. In the absence of any indication of how that provision will be delivered in Brecon, is considered by the WLD Group to be a reckless proposal in current circumstances (Welsh Liberal Democrats)*

*Although the current consortium model has its limitations [it is] highly unlikely that the range of A-level provision promised by NPTC offers any guaranteed improvement in terms of choice or quality assurance. Furthermore, comparators with performance at Neath and Port Talbot campuses does not ensure that they will be replicated at Brecon (Governing Body of Brecon High School)*

*Council [was advised at a previous meeting] that the results at the Brecon campus of NPTC Group of Colleges were poor. Given that you are aware of this information and that you advised full Council of this, I do not see how Powys County Council can enable NPTC Group of Colleges to be responsible for the sole delivery of post-16 education in Brecon... (Councillor Matthew Dorrance)*

*At the public meeting held on 20th April...NPTC stated that their intention was to operate Brecon campus with the same team as is currently employed at Neath. It is thus clear that teaching staff would be parachuted in for brief periods of the college week. Students would have very restricted access to their tutors, and nothing close to the "open door" policy applied at GHS would be remotely possible (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

*Has Cabinet considered the possibility that, should NPTC's Brecon Campus prove unviable, NPTC may threaten to withdraw unless the other south Powys sixth forms are closed also? What stance will Cabinet take on this? What do you plan to do to prevent this scenario evolving? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*What assurance can Powys CC give parents and young people that the full range of A level subjects will be offered at the new campus and continue to be delivered from the site into the future? (Felinfach Community Council)*

*What is the guarantee that NPTC will be able to offer the full range of A Level subjects and do so to a high standard? (Chris Davies MP)*



*As the College is not linked or accountable to the Council, what is there to prevent it from cancelling or reducing courses, or pulling out of the area completely at any time? Can the Council and NPTC Group guarantee that they will increase A-level provision from 14 subjects to 25 by 2017, especially in light of the evidence that suggests they will not achieve the predicted number of pupils? And what is the nature of the “commitment” from NPTC? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

- 10.47 Indeed, in relation to the latter point, several respondents were of the view that PCC’s estimates of potential student numbers at NPTC are highly optimistic given many students are likely to look outside Powys (and even Wales) for their post-16 education - and even if accurate could not sustain the proposed 25 A-level courses:

*The estimated 150 students who would attend the Brecon Campus would not be able to sustain the provision of 25 A-Level courses (Erwood Community Council)*

*Please explain how NPTC arrives at a figure of ‘up to 201’ students attending the new college (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*Even at their most optimistic, NPTC is only predicting about 150 students, yet NPTC have promised to offer 25 different A-level courses leading to an average class size of five. (The Welsh Government states that the minimum viable class size at A Level is eight.) The average size of sixth form Colleges in the UK is over 1,700 pupils. GCC greatly doubts that Brecon campus with 150 students would be sustainably viable. (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

- 10.48 Some suggested that incentivising NPTC to move into the Brecon campus (without evidence of sufficient pupil numbers to make the breadth of courses being proposed viable) reflects a wider strategic ambition toward a Powys-wide tertiary system at post-16 level:

*The college’s willingness to contemplate the expenditure of some £25 million on expanding their footprint in Brecon suggests that they have not lost sight of their ambition to take over sixth form provision of all six South Powys Schools. (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

- 10.49 The balance of opinion among statutory stakeholders was that the current South Powys Consortium model of post-16 education provides better quality for pupils, even if it offers less subject choice. They thus strongly desired maintaining the status quo; that is, both BHS and GHS continuing to deliver academic A-levels, with support from NPTC in the delivery of vocational options:

*We have made the South Powys Consortium post-16 offer work. Our students like it. We have offered to run transport at a reduced cost than currently stated. Standards have been maintained. This is an alternative option which has not been fully explored, suggesting that the consortium approach to delivering A-levels has been dismissed without the Cabinet understanding the value of this approach. Our position is that Gwernyfed and Brecon should both continue to deliver A-levels with NPTC focusing on the delivery of vocational options. This is a model that is delivered successfully in other parts of Wales. This model will ensure that our students continue to access the high quality post-16 academic education to which they are entitled (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

*The governors of Brecon High school firmly believe that NPTC has a valuable role to play in delivering an excellent vocational package that can collaborate with a school based sixth form to develop and offer greater choice (Governing Body of Brecon High School)*

*The Governing Body of Brecon High School is firmly committed to ... the retention of school-based Sixth Form provision (Governing Body of Brecon High School)*

*The school must include a sixth form (Merthyr Cynog Community Council)*

*Last month the Welsh Government published a report...called Improving the Performance and Efficiency of sixth forms in Wales. In rural areas, it notes, the tertiary approach would be “extremely hard to operationalise”. (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

- <sup>10.50</sup> Gwernyfed High School Governing Body questioned how NPTC plans to finance improvements to its Brecon Campus - and if via a loan, how it will manage the high interest repayments (while also maintaining and investing in its buildings), especially in the event of less student revenue than expected:

*You say on P21 of the Consultation Document that ‘[NPTC] is also planning to invest in new facilities which will enhance the post-16 learning environment,’ but you do not provide any explanation of how NPTC plans to finance this investment... If NPTC plan to borrow, and assuming they are able to borrow at a similar rate (4%) to the prudential borrowing open to Local Authorities, then annual interest payments alone will be in the region of £500,000 on the £12.5m loan they require. We know...that the college is banking on revenue of £500,000 from the supposed 201 students. Explain how NPTC plan to repay their loan, as well as maintain and invest in their Brecon Campus building stock, given that their annual revenue from the Brecon college will only cover their interest payments. (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

- <sup>10.51</sup> Finally, Estyn state that there is insufficient evidence around how the reorganisation of post 16 education into a single site at Brecon will improve quality and outcomes for learners:

*The proposer refers to the standards achieved by both schools in relation to A levels, and compares these appropriately with results for Powys, Wales and for the NPTC group of colleges. Although the proposer argues that it does not anticipate that there would be a negative impact on outcomes for post-16 pupils, it does not outline sufficiently how the transfer of post-16 provision from both schools would have a positive effect on the standards achieved by pupils at this stage. Overall, the proposer does not demonstrate how the reorganisation would have a positive impact on the standards achieved by pupils at any key stage. (Estyn)*

Estyn state that inequity in choice for Welsh medium learners at post 16 will not be addressed in the short-term at least:

*With regard to post-16 provision, the proposer’s view that an increase in the numbers of English-medium post-16 pupils on a single site would enable the provision of a broader range of subjects and qualifications seems reasonable. Similarly, the proposer asserts that the increased number of Welsh-medium pupils on the Builth Wells site of the new school in mid-Powys would lead in time to an increase in the number of available subjects at the school post-16. However, there remain questions about equality of opportunities for post-16 pupils choosing to study through the medium of Welsh in terms of the range of courses available to them. (Estyn)*

## Welsh Medium Education

- <sup>10.52</sup> Stakeholders argued that removing the Welsh stream from BHS without a significantly improved alternative Welsh medium offer elsewhere will lead to reduced number of parents choosing to educate their children through the medium of Welsh. This, it was felt, will inevitably impact on the cultural and linguistic fabric of south Powys:

*GCC believes that the closure of GHS would provoke the loss of many young people across the border to Herefordshire for their education. This would lead to a loss of local cultural identity, and in particular a reduction in Welsh culture and Welsh language skills (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

*For many Builth Wells High School is a long distance to travel and a barrier to the development of the Welsh language in South Powys (Llangorse Community Council)*

*It is difficult to comprehend that Powys County Council are content to create an environment where parents will choose to remove their children from their Welsh cultural heritage to ensure the high quality of education they know their children deserve in the rural setting they choose. Could this movement of pupils results in surplus places in the new build Primary Schools? How will the Welsh Language Commissioner feel about pupils leaving the Welsh education system? How will this help community cohesion? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

<sup>10.53</sup> It was also said that a likely reduction in Welsh medium primary pupil intakes at Ysgol Y Bannau and Sennybridge (which in itself was considered highly regrettable) may starve Builth Wells High School of the critical mass of pupils it needs to expand its dual stream provision and ensure it is sustainable:

*Brecon has a thriving Welsh medium primary school and I am concerned that its future will be damaged if you proceed with the proposal. Sennybridge CP School will also be damaged if Brecon lacks Welsh medium secondary provision [Councillor Matthew Dorrance]*

*Moving Welsh medium provision from Brecon entirely represents a risk to the number of children who will chose their education in Ysgol Y Bannau and, as a result, reduces the critical mass available at KS3 and KS4... This then has a direct negative influence on siblings as they move to English medium schools in readiness for transitioning to English medium high schools (4 children have left Ysgol y Bannau for September 2016) (Ysgol Y Bannau)*

*The success of the proposal to broaden the Welsh medium offer is reliant on sufficient critical mass and assumes that there will be sufficient numbers transferring across to Builth Wells to make this viable. Less than half of those parents currently choosing Welsh medium provision will chose to send their children to Builth to continue their education in Welsh. This is less than expected and is a blow to PCC plans for a critical mass to enhanced and expanded Welsh medium offer. (Ysgol Y Bannau)*

<sup>10.54</sup> Furthermore, a dual stream by its very nature was considered somewhat uncertain in terms of sustainability - and a possible reason for some parents' decision to send their children to a more 'secure' Welsh medium educational environment at Ystalyfera:

*It is evident that many parents have chosen to send their children to the Welsh medium school at Ystylafera, and while this is not an easy decision for them, it does offer stability and certainty for their children for the five years that they could not guarantee in the dual stream at BHS. The uncertainty that exists within a dual stream system is unfair on the pupils. (Ysgol Y Bannau)*

Indeed, Ysgol y Bannau commented on parents' willingness to allow their children to travel long distances to secure a quality Welsh medium education, and suggested that the establishment of a Welsh medium secondary school for south and mid Powys would be welcomed and well-supported:

*The fact that many choose to send them out of county for Welsh provision demonstrates that many are willing to travel if the provision is secure and of sufficient quality. Similarly, Ysgol Y Bannau attracts pupils from a large catchment area and we are sure that parents would support in the same way should a Welsh medium secondary school be available (wherever it may be). (Ysgol Y Bannau)*

- <sup>10.55</sup> Ysgol y Bannau also requested ‘a fair analysis’ of the results of Brecon and Builth Wells High Schools’ Welsh streams to enable parents and primary schools to make comparisons between the two schools and judge the reasonableness of the proposal to centralise provision at the latter:

*Ysgol y Bannau has established strong links with BHS over a number of years and, even though the provision hasn't been consistent the quality, as shown by the GCSE results in the Welsh stream, outperforms the equivalent school averages... PCC need to produce a fair analysis so that parents and us as a school can compare the current provision since this is at the root of decisions around merging the Welsh medium provision at Builth Wells. (Ysgol Y Bannau)*

- <sup>10.56</sup> Overall, stakeholders would prefer to see Welsh medium provision supported in the Brecon area at least until a fully bilingual 2a/2b school can be established to serve mid and south Powys - especially given that the only Welsh medium primary school in Powys is situated across the road from BHS:

*The Governing Body of Brecon High School is firmly committed to...the continuation of Welsh-Medium education within the Brecon community (Governing Body of Brecon High School)*

*The WLD Group opposes the current proposal to remove Welsh-medium provision from Brecon High School, as this flies in the face of logical education policy, given that the only Welsh-medium primary school in south Powys is situated opposite the entrance to Brecon High School. (Welsh Liberal Democrats)*

- <sup>10.57</sup> Estyn suggest that PCC’s assumption that a greater critical mass of Welsh medium pupils will lead to a broader curriculum and greater differentiation of pupils is reasonable, but would like greater detail on how this will improve on current standards:

*In terms of Welsh-medium provision at key stage 3 and key stage 4, the proposer suggests that the increased number of Welsh-medium pupils at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new dual-stream school in Mid-Powys would enable the school to set pupils according to ability for some subjects. The proposer argues that this could have a positive impact in terms of outcomes for Welsh-medium pupils. However, it does not provide evidence for its view that setting improves standards. (Estyn)*

Estyn also highlight that PCC has not given sufficient consideration to alternative provision should the proposal for a new dual stream school in Builth Wells not be approved:

*In terms of Welsh-medium provision, the proposer does not consider the risk that its proposal for a new dual-stream school in mid- Powys might not be approved. (Estyn)*

## Alternative Options

- <sup>10.58</sup> In addition to the retention of the status quo (excepting the need to build a new school at Brecon), several stakeholders urged PCC to give further consideration to alternative options, including a through-school at Brecon:

*Brecon Town Council recognises the urgent need for the development of modern, fit-for-purpose secondary educational facilities in Brecon, and calls on PCC to do all it can to access the opportunities available under the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme. However, the Council also firmly believes that a new school should offer a full range of post-16 opportunities to make it an attractive choice for students and professionals; and that it should offer full Welsh medium provision to nurture and enhance the Welsh language and culture in the community (Brecon Town Council)*

*The Governing Body recognises the challenges faced in providing secondary education in Powys, particularly in terms of financial impediments in relation to the requirement for a 'critical mass' of pupils. It supports proposals to reach such a critical mass to secure the school's future. However, the Governing Body does not feel that transformation of education provision should be limited to secondary education only. It believes that this must include provision for ages 4-18 - as well as post-16 (academic and vocational) and Welsh Medium education... Through the creation of a bilingual 4-18 through school, the Governing Body would promote the uptake of Welsh while also providing parental choice, generating the necessary critical mass to offer sustainable bilingual teaching... (Governing Body of Brecon High School)*

*A rebuild of a 3 to 16 years (through) school at Brecon...could centralise resources within the whole town and be part financed by the sale of primary school sites. This would allow Brecon pupils to have their own new school with no requirement to involve Gwernyfed pupils to 'make up numbers' in order to seek financial support from Welsh Government... (Llangorse Community Council)*

*We understand that GHS and BHS support a proposal to build an all through school at Brecon and include pupils from Mount Street primary school...thus allowing GHS to remain as it is now. This would appear to be a transformational project that would meet all the 21st century schools criteria and assist with budgetary matters in Brecon... (Llangorse Community Council)*

*The Governing Body urges PCC to re-visit option 7. They believe that a through school (3-18) for Brecon would achieve many of the Council's aims: it would provide the desperately needed new building; create a critical mass of learners; wipe out Brecon High School's deficit; and potentially secure the match funding being sought from Welsh Government. The Governing Body fully supports Brecon High School's wish for this to be accepted as the preferred option. For Gwernyfed, this would: retain a high performing secondary school that is ready and willing to work with the Council to explore closer working relationships with its primary cluster; safeguard the health and wellbeing of young people; and secure the future of the rural communities that depend so much on GSH's existence. (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

<sup>10.59</sup> Furthermore, the Welsh Liberal Democrats proposed the following alternative proposal:

*Both Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools should be retained as 11-18 schools for the foreseeable future;*

*PCC should work on proposals to either: create a new 3-18 school in Brecon; or build a new 3-11 school on the same or an adjacent site as a new 11-18 school in Brecon;*

*Consideration and consultation should begin in to the closure of Mount Street Infant and Junior Schools, with provision to transfer as per above;*

*Work to create a seamless, fully-integrated post-16 learning system in the Brecon, Gwernyfed and Crickhowell High Schools catchment areas should commence immediately (or as soon as practically possible) so that in future all post-16 learning in this part of Powys is planned and funded in a fully-collaborative system involving the three schools, the NPTC Group of Colleges and the main Work-Based Learning providers operating in the area; and*

*Work should begin in preparation for the disposal of the Mount Street Infant and Junior School sites, to produce a capital receipt to assist in the funding of the project.*



## Consultation Process

- 10.60 Many of the comments made underline a sense of mistrust and a lack of confidence in PCCs decision-making and implementation processes, in some cases based on its alleged mismanagement of the previous primary schools reorganisation consultation in the Gwernyfed catchment area:

*TTC has much deeper concerns about the decision-making process itself: it has no confidence in the decision-making abilities of the current PCC Cabinet, which does not appear to have the necessary expertise or levels of competence required to make such a fundamental decision about secondary education (Talgarth Town Council)*

*The Group says it feels let down by unfulfilled promises made about the closure of Rhosgoch and thus questions how it is expected to believe new promises being made about secondary education in the area (Rhosgoch and Painscastle Toddler Group)*

*The Playgroup comments on PCC's very slow proposed changes to Clyro School under the Primary Schools Modernisation Programme and thus doubts that it is capable of successfully carrying out such extreme changes to the secondary school system (Parents at Clyro Playgroup)*

*Erwood Community Council says that the lack confidence in PCC's leadership as it has failed to progress the primary schools modernisation programme. (Erwood Community Council)*

- 10.61 A number of concerns were raised either around inaccurate or missing/incomplete information in PCC's documentation in relation to, for example, budgets, predicted spend and the financial cost of the proposed project - as the examples below demonstrate:

*Why is the Gwernyfed budget share given as £1.929m on page 60 and £1.694m on page 36? What is the true funding per pupil figure for Gwernyfed? (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*We refer you...the Outline Business Case for the Beacons Campus Project. This table details when you plan to spend money on building the proposed school. It shows 'New Build Capital Cost' expenditure as: Year 0: £50,000; Year 1: £41,000; Year 2: £295,000; Year 3: £11,333,000. Therefore, by Year 3 (2019-20) - the year the new £20m school opens - you have only spent £11,719,000 (a quarter of the £45m Beacons Campus budget). You still have over £8m to spend on the new school. Please explain how you plan to open a £20m new school having spent only £11,719,000 on its construction. (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

- 10.62 Furthermore, stakeholders raised concerns around the transparency and technical precision of the options appraisal processes, citing inconsistencies and mistakes that erode their faith in the accuracy of the consultation document:

*In our opinion, the appraisal exercise...is flawed and has been slanted in favour of the preferred option. 'Ticks' and 'double ticks' are arbitrary, subjective and do not appear to be directly linked to factual data. The significance of the 'Xs' in some columns has not been explained. Some aspects of the matrix on page 101 are utterly bizarre - the first line, for example: 'to significantly improve the learning outcomes for learners...' Somehow, for this objective, every option gets a tick. Even doing nothing gets a tick (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*It comes as no surprise that Option 4 is classed as non-achievable, since it is apparently to "establish a new English-medium Secondary School in Gwernyfed" but the school would operate "from a single site in Brecon". This sort of sloppiness makes it impossible to take the matrix seriously... Please explain why negative impacts (such as 'avoids negative social and economic impact on communities*

*within the Gwernyfed catchment') have been omitted from the appraisal exercise.... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*The decision you took to provide transport to Builth Wells before the consultation on Welsh medium education in Brecon concluded has in my view predetermined the outcome of this process (Councillor Matthew Dorrance)*

*The campaign team members, obtained, via a Freedom of Information request, a copy of the County Council's outline business case for the new campus in Brecon... By withholding the document the Local Authority has acted unlawfully and has severely compromised its own Consultation process because of a major pre- determination action. This should be a reason for abandoning the whole process... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*What is not explained is how an option meeting the criteria can receive two ticks or why, if it meets the criteria, it only gets one tick. For instance the first criteria is 'to significantly improve the learning outcomes for learners across the ability range'. Each option gets one tick including the status quo... The Framework is shown to be deeply flawed, the marking pointless and the short-list thereby arrived at of no value whatsoever... What weighting matrix has been used in deciding which of the two options arrived at by the discredited Options Appraisal Framework was preferred? Why has the 'clear disadvantage of no secondary education in the Gwernyfed area, with additional travel for pupils' and the 'requirement for significant capital investment to build a new school' been discounted in favour of an option that is described as 'challenging operationally' but 'not insurmountable' (when the operational challenge is predicated upon the limited view of a through school that involves all 13 primary schools as feeder schools), even when it is described as having 'added benefits of improving transition between primary and secondary phases and provides a greater level of savings to the Council'? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

- <sup>10.63</sup> Other concerns were around: the lack of consultation with affected pupils and parents in 'other' schools such as Crickhowell; and the lack of consultation generally at a formative stage:

*It is noted that some pupils attending Crickhowell High School also attend GHS or BHS for some "A" level provision. It would, however, appear that parents of pupils at Crickhowell High School and its catchment area primary schools have not been duly consulted about this current proposal. Can PCC explain why that sector of the public has not been duly consulted? (Llangorse Community Council)*

*Given that Powys County Council claims to be applying the Statutory Schools Organisation Code can the Local Authority explain where in its documentation it can demonstrate how it is implementing Principle 3.1 in that document as applied to Gwernyfed High School? Gwernyfed is in the final stages of consultation and neither the school, parents, children, or community organisations were consulted at the proposals formative stage (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*The schools and community were not consulted before the publication of any proposals. This has resulted in mistrust and deep opposition. (Association of School and College Leaders)*

- <sup>10.64</sup> Finally, a couple of stakeholders suggested that the outcome of the consultation is predetermined: the first on the basis that PCC has already agreed to provide free school transport to pupils wishing to enter the Welsh stream at Builth Wells; and the second on the grounds that it withheld its outline business case for a new Brecon Campus, despite lodging it with Welsh Government prior to the start of the consultation process:



*The decision you took to provide transport to Builth Wells before the consultation on Welsh medium education in Brecon concluded has in my view predetermined the outcome of this process. (Councillor Matthew Dorrance)*

*The campaign team members, obtained, via a Freedom of Information request, a copy of the County Council's outline business case for the new campus in Brecon... By withholding the document the Local Authority has acted unlawfully and has severely compromised its own Consultation process because of a major pre- determination action. This should be a reason for abandoning the whole process... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

## Balance of Opinion

<sup>10.65</sup> As the following quotations demonstrate, there was overwhelming opposition to the proposals across stakeholders who responded via a written submission:

*Gwernyfed Community Council is entirely opposed to the proposal to close GHS and remove 11-16 education to a larger high school in Brecon and the removal of 6th Form education to NPTC Group (Gwernyfed Community Council)*

*Erwood Community Council objects to the proposed closure of Gwernyfed High School (Erwood Community Council)*

*Felinfach Community Council is concerned about PCC's proposal to close Gwernyfed High School (Felinfach Community Council)*

*[The proposal] is strongly opposed at all political levels within the area - by the local MP, the local constituency AM, all the local members of Powys County Council, all local community councils and every local voluntary sporting, cultural and community group; and opposition to the proposals is virtually universal among individual local residents (Welsh Liberal Democrats)*

*The proposal severely damages the reputation of Powys County Council among the general public, as it includes the complete closure of the only one of the four mid Powys high schools not currently in Special Measures, to be operating within budget to at least satisfactory standards (as judged by Estyn) and in buildings some of which are barely 10 years old; and is also blessed with excellent outdoor sporting and recreational facilities (Welsh Liberal Democrats)*

*[The proposal] carries huge elements of educational, financial and general project risk, which far outweigh any potential educational or financial gains (Welsh Liberal Democrats)*

*Maescar Community Council expresses deep concerns at proposals that could bring to an end Welsh-medium and sixth form education provision at Brecon High School. The Council urges PCC to put in place measures that will ensure that this provision is maintained within Brecon for the long-term (Maescar Community Council)*

*Llanigon Community Council strongly objects to PCC's proposal to close Gwernyfed High School and replace it with a new 11-16 school in Brecon (Llanigon Community Council)*

*Llangorse Community Council has obtained feedback from residents that there is strong opposition to the proposals. This is mainly linked to the removal of post 16 education at GHS and the closure of GHS. Whilst the Community Council understands that there are some educational merits to the proposal and the difficulties faced by PCC with funding cuts, the many negative factors within the overall proposal far outweigh any positives (Llangorse Community Council)*

*The Governors of Gwernyfed High School do not accept that the closure of the school and the removal of secondary education from the Gwernyfed catchment area is an appropriate response to the pressures the Council faces. (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)*

Indeed, the general sense was that, for all the reasons outlined above, the negative impacts of the proposed changes far outweigh any proposed benefits, which are in no way appropriate answers to PCC's current challenges – financial or otherwise. Furthermore, it was said that the proposals represent unworkable urban solutions to rural issues, and that parents in rural areas must retain the ability to send their children to a school that reflects their values and lifestyles:

*Merging schools to create larger establishments is a city solution that only works when the schools are within walking distance of each other - not in a rural situation where students must be transported over tens of miles (Talgarth Town Council)*

*The closure and consequences flies in the face of the contents of the Donaldson Report which stresses the need for creative education as well as cohesion between education and communities, the Maguire paper stressing the need for wider models of education in rural areas which are not dependent on larger buildings, the Peck study which found that smaller secondary schools are not costlier or less effective in rural areas because in part of greater community involvement... (Gwernyfed Campaign Group)*

*The rural nature and geography of Powys requires a model to the provision of public services which is different to provision in an urban area. The sparse distribution of the population outside the larger towns, hilly landscape with narrow twisty roads means that centralising services in larger towns disproportionately impacts on the rural population (Painscastle Community Council)*

*Gwernyfed is a happy successful school which has strong roots in the local rural community...rural children have a different set of core beliefs that are reinforced and supported by each other. We, as parents, should have the choice to send our children to a secondary school which is sympathetic to our rural way of life. (Rhosgoch and Painscastle Toddler Group)*

Figure 21: Other Issues and Sub-Themes from Stakeholder submissions

Sub-Theme	Comments
Big lottery funding	<i>Due to the purchase of land being involved with the Big Lottery investment, it is understood that the Big Lottery have an interest in the site for 80 years not 20 years as specified in the consultation document. (Llangorse Community Council)</i>
Environmental impacts	<i>The number of pupils who currently walk or cycle to school...would drop to zero. (Gwernyfed Community Council)</i>
Health and Safety risk	<i>There will be the same number of classes with the same number of students and the same number of IT devices ... does the Council agree there can be no savings on the cost of technicians and that any cuts to technicians would create an increased Health and Safety risk? (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)</i>
Transport and capital costs placing stress on PCC budgets	<i>Increases to the cost of transport for children who are transferring schools would put further pressures on Powys County Council's budget, along with the massive capital investment of building two new schools.(Chris Davies MP)</i>
Not reflecting curriculum	<i>It is our view that the Council's preferred option...demonstrates that no thought</i>

Sub-Theme	Comments
policy changes in Wales	<i>whatsoever has been given to the substantial curriculum changes now being developed across Wales... This proposal focusses on the established curriculum and fails to reference Successful Futures and Qualified for Life... (Gwernyfed High School Governing Body)</i>
Gwernyfed repairs backlog – PCC to blame	<i>The Council has identified a back log of repairs needed at the school, as a County Councillor I find this a highly embarrassing reason for closure. If this is true, it is the failing of successive Cabinets of Powys County Council and not of the School and Governing Body. However the school is not run down, it is a fantastic setting for learning, I believe we should be investing in this truly unique environment. (Cllr Melanie Davies)</i>
Further consultation is required if additional changes are made in future	<i>Should this proposal as it stands be approved by the PCC Cabinet...and subsequently there becomes a lack of funding or policy change to progress matters, then it would appear that running one school on two sites will enable PCC to close either school site and transfer pupils to the remaining site at any time without a new school being built and without any further consultation. This situation is totally unacceptable. (Llangorse Community Council)</i>
Pre-determination of planning applications	<i>It is surprising that this consultation is about the closure of two schools when planning permission for a new school on the proposed site has not been sought/granted. It would appear to pre-determine any future planning application. In this regard, can PCC justify its position regarding the timing of the consultation to close two schools? (Llangorse Community Council)</i>
Challenges of transferring first year 12 cohort to NPTC not outlined	<i>The proposer does not consider the challenges associated with the transfer of the first cohort of Y12 pupils from the existing school to the NPTC group of colleges in Brecon by September 2017. (Estyn)</i>

# 11. Written Submissions

## Analysis of public responses

### Introduction

- 11.1 During the formal consultation process 409 written submissions were received from individual residents (405) and local businesses/non-statutory organisations (4) concerning PCC's proposals for Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools. It should be noted that the majority of submissions were from people living and/or working within the Gwernyfed catchment area, which explains the volume bias towards views from this area in this chapter.
- 11.2 ORS has read all the written submissions and reported them in this chapter, with some detailed summaries also provided; none have been disregarded even if they are not expressed in a 'formal' way. It is a painstaking but necessary process to identify the main themes and issues raised by respondents.
- 11.3 All submissions have also been reviewed by Powys County Council; meaning that any submissions that present technical arguments that require more detailed consideration have been evaluated by appropriate members of the consultation team.
- 11.4 Submissions were initially classified on the basis of the type of individual or organisation submitting the response. They were then read in their entirety and the key themes and issues raised were collated, classified and reported using a standardised code frame.
- 11.5 Where multiple submissions present the same or very similar arguments, or refer to the same evidence or assumptions, they have been summarised collectively in the report of consultation findings without undue repetition. These summaries are presented in a thematic (tabular) format in order to identify the range of views and issues as well as common themes. This will ensure that Powys County Council is able to consider the important issues identified.
- 11.6 Finally, it is important to note that the following section is a report of the views expressed by submission contributors. In some cases, these views will not be supported by the available evidence - and while ORS has not sought to highlight or correct those that make incorrect statements or assumptions, this should be borne in mind when considering the submissions.

## Main Themes Raised in Written Submissions from the Public and Non-Statutory Organisations

### General Opposition

- 11.7 It is important to note at the outset that the submissions were overwhelming opposed to the proposals. Furthermore, the local campaign group within the Gwernyfed catchment area has been active in mobilising public interest in the consultation, which is reflected in the overwhelming number of responses against the closure of the school.

### Comments (77)

*The sheer numbers at the consultation meeting at Gwernyfed should tell you what the people think. This is not just a small but vocal action group. This is the people en-masse – the ones you represent.*

*The way the Council is handling change across South and Mid Powys is damaging our young people's education, their wellbeing, the retention of students, our communities and our faith in local democracy. Our community is united against the proposed plans and will 'persevere' to protect the heart of our community.*

*It is very difficult to put into words just how strongly I and a huge number of other people feel, as this proposal would be to the detriment of pupils both present and future and to the community as a whole.*

*How can it be in any way helpful to young people today to give them a message that there is no point in striving to do well, provide an excellent service and keep within a budget as this will not be rewarded but likely to be completely ignored if it does not suit somebody else's agenda? This is the message that young people will take from the closure of Gwernyfed.*

## The Case for Change

- 11.8 The projections, facts and figures underpinning PCC's case for change were challenged in many of the written responses. For example, while the consultation document cites falling pupil numbers and surplus school places, it was argued that uncertainty around the future of BHS and GHS has been partly responsible for these trends. Conversely, it was said that positive investment in the two schools would attract families to the area - thus increasing pupil numbers once more.
- 11.9 Despite one submitter agreeing that a critical mass of 600 pupils is necessary for the schools' future success, many challenged the assumption that this number is needed to make a school viable and felt that no evidence had been provided to show that that 'bigger' is 'better'. On the contrary, it was reasoned that Gwernyfed is a good school and that its size simply reflects its rural location.
- 11.10 It was also suggested that future housing developments in the local area will increase student numbers and address the surplus places issue. Furthermore, some responses highlighted PCC's own projections, which show that a single new school could be oversubscribed within a very short time and suggested that the Council should consider the longer-term picture by supporting secondary schools at both Brecon *and* Gwernyfed.
- 11.11 On the other hand, others asked how PCC can possibly predict where Gwernyfed parents will send their children given that other high schools may be closer or easier to access than Brecon. As such, they felt that the number of pupils projected to attend the new school could have been overestimated.
- 11.12 Finally in terms of the case for change, some respondents felt that the Council is being disingenuous in its framing of the consultation. They claimed that the primary purpose of the proposals is to eradicate BHS's debt and access capital funding - effectively sacrificing one school for another new one. Many doubted the legality of this.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Student numbers and surplus places	<p><u>Constant uncertainty to blame for falling student numbers</u></p> <p><i>One of the biggest concerns cited as being responsible for PCC's proposal to close and merge the schools is falling pupil numbers. However, is this not a self-fulfilling prophecy? If you create uncertainty over the availability of secondary education, are you not going to, at the very least,</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
(119)	<p><i>make people with children not move to the area or to consider to move away if already resident here? Furthermore, on reviewing your consultation document, this admits that pupil numbers are increasing.</i></p> <p><i>Pupils, parents and staff have faced uncertainty and turmoil about the future of Welsh provision at Brecon with many parents and pupils having had to make extremely difficult and contentious decisions about the future of their education based on rumours and scaremongering. As a result, increasing numbers have opted to leave [Brecon] high school.</i></p> <p><u>Projected pupil numbers for the proposed new school could be overestimated</u></p> <p><i>Reduces overall surplus places - how much research has PCC conducted to determine actually how many pupils from Gwernyfed will transfer to Brecon and not other schools? Surely some current Gwernyfed pupils would then be nearer other secondary schools, potentially outside the county...</i></p> <p><i>Forecast is for 1092 pupils in merged school by 2021 but this is projected from figures that include Welsh stream and sixth form. This should be 200 fewer using the 2016 figures, meaning the new school would be struggling to achieve 900 pupils. ... PCC want to build a new school in Brecon for a capacity that Brecon can easily accommodate.</i></p> <p><u>Projected pupil numbers for the proposed new school could be underestimated</u></p> <p><i>Forecasted figures show that by 2020 there will be a combined total of 1092 spaces, therefore, the school will already be at capacity not allowing for any future new homes. How does the council propose to accommodate additional children over the 1100 that they have allowed for?</i></p>
Legality of the proposals (43)	<p><i>Is the proposal to close Gwernyfed legal? You are closing a yellow category school, out of ESTYN monitoring, to merge it with Brecon, a failing school in red banding and in special measures. The fact that you close both schools and open one new school is just trying to find a way round the legalities of shutting a school that is performing well.</i></p> <p><i>If approved NPTC would offer 25 AS/A Levels but you do not confirm if they will be offering chemistry as they do not currently have a viable chemistry lab. Surely under the Welsh Assembly Education policy which states you are not allowed to close a school if it disadvantages the pupils and their welfare, you are now illegally disadvantaging them?</i></p>
Writing off BHS's debts (35)	<p><i>It is blindingly obvious this whole reorganisation is to write off the debts that Brecon High has racked up in the past. This was caused by someone else's mistakes and mismanagement. Why should our children be punished for this?</i></p> <p><i>PCC seem to have strong conviction in closing Gwernyfed to write off a suggested £1.2m worth of debt accrued by Brecon High School. He is supported by a very dedicated teaching staff and group of Governors, who could not wish for a more passionate, educated and talented chair of Governors in Reverend Ian Charlesworth. Gwernyfed High School is, as a result, experiencing a renaissance in the results the pupils attain. Yet, Powys Council seem hell bent on overlooking this in favour of supporting their proposal through statistics. If ever there is a clear example of considering statistics over real life, this is it.</i></p>
GHS being sacrificed to save BHS (31)	<p><i>It does appear that Gwernyfed is being sacrificed in a reorganisation with political reasons that have nothing to do with the standard of education provision for local children.</i></p> <p><i>Why does a fantastic high achievement school need to be used as a sacrificial lamb through bad management of another school. This surely is teaching our children that even though you do well and achieve your targets the bad wins in the end! I think you will agree that this isn't a valuable</i></p>



Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<i>life lesson...How do I tell my worried, upset and angry children that a bunch of short sighted people in the Council want to close their fantastic school to wipe the slate clean for a failing school?</i>
Population, housing and new homes (19)	<p><i>National Parks housing data has revealed that 137 houses could be built opposite Brecon High school by 2020. The total build proposed for Brecon by 2020 could be as many as 273 houses. 152 houses are also possible in Talgarth as well as 80 houses possible in Hay. All of these are in the catchment area for the proposed new school. The new school will be at capacity as soon as it opens in 2019/20; surely provision needs to be made for additional spaces/housing in the area and this must be taken into consideration when looking at the option to remove the sixth form from Brecon High School.</i></p> <p><i>Figures quoted in the consultation document for future pupil numbers are very misleading. It appears that consideration has not been given to the house building projects that have already started or are in the planning process.</i></p>
Size of proposed new school (18)	<p><i>I am very concerned about the vision to close a brilliant school, and spend £750,000,000 of Welsh Assembly funding on a new school in Brecon. And this is proposed without any evidence that large schools improve the education of attendees over good quality smaller schools.</i></p> <p><i>The consultation also claims the merger will create a 'critical mass' of pupils and reduce unfilled places. There are many examples of highly successful schools that do not fit this model. Fairfield across the border in England only has 450 pupils. If Welsh government policy requires such a minimum, we would argue their policy is not fit for purpose in rural areas and would ask PCC to take this up with the new minister for education, the assembly member for Brecon and &amp; Radnor Kirsty Williams.</i></p>
Ethical Issues (10)	<i>You say you have a duty to take into account the impact of your decisions on people with protected characteristics but please answer for me, what about a pupil's Human Rights to have a full educational life as in being able to attend extracurricular activities?</i>

<sup>11.13</sup> A small minority (3) of responses expressed support for the proposals: they recognised that the status quo is no longer sustainable and felt that the changes could offer pupils more opportunities access to facilities. One typical comment was:

*Parents and the communities should focus their attention on not opposing change, but on how best to radically improve the schools and education services that their children deserve. The status quo is not an option, it is not economically feasible and is the wrong choice educationally. We should all instead be demanding a much better education service which is economically viable now and in the future and which seeks the best possible education to secure our children's future. In today's and tomorrow's world small secondary schools, housed in old buildings with out of date equipment and culture which lacks ambition, some saddled with debt should have no place in our thinking. if we were starting from scratch we wouldn't start from where we are and the opportunities presented by this re-organisation and capital injection should be wholeheartedly seized upon, nurtured, supported. The council should be supported in making this work and held to account for if it fails.*

## Quality of Education

<sup>11.14</sup> Respondents were sceptical that merging GHS and BHS would improve educational quality at the former, particularly for pupils affected by uncertainty or transition to the new school at important exam



stages. Moreover, it was argued that PCC has failed to provide any evidence to suggest the proposals would be of benefit, and that its aim for the new school to be 'as good' as the current ones in terms of standards is unacceptable. In fact, it was felt that merging a 'failing school' with Gwernyfed would cause standards to slip there which, parents said, would encourage them to send their children out of county or into neighbouring English schools rather than to Brecon.

- 11.15 Being part of a larger school was thought to be disadvantageous to pupils in terms of increased bullying and absenteeism, both of which could affect performance. In addition, the loss of close relationships between pupils and teachers as well as having to get used to new teaching styles within larger classes could, it was said, have a negative impact.
- 11.16 Furthermore, there were concerns that the current close ties between GHS and local businesses that provide important work experience would be jeopardised, further affecting pupils' development.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Pupils moving out of county/ Wales (27)	<p><i>If these proposals are implemented I would send my kids to Fairfield. I have noted that, conveniently for Powys CC, Fairfield is listed as "currently oversubscribed", which leaves me in the invidious position of having NO CHOICE about my children's education. This makes me feel desperate and furious with the high handed and smug attitude of the council. I do not wish to move out of the area but nothing is off the table now - my kids are my priority.</i></p> <p><i>Brecon High School has had an undesirable reputation for many years. We would not send our children there once the Gwernyfed campus closes. Our nearest school would then be in England. We already travel out of Wales into England for A&amp;E, hospital appointments, and a dentist and request your help to protect borderland children from losing their Welsh identity completely.</i></p>
Impact on student-teacher relationships (20)	<p><i>I think that by closing our school it will take a negative impact on students as they would have to get used to new teachers and the new teachers would have a different teaching method and that would take time to get used to as the pupils would have possibly learnt a topic in a different way.</i></p> <p><i>It would be hard to make new relationships with teachers at Brecon because it's a bigger school than Gwernyfed and teachers would be confused about which pupils are which.</i></p> <p><i>As year 11 pupils, we raised concerns about whether we would lose A-level teachers in Gwernyfed High School sixth form halfway through our courses due to closure and lack of job security for staff... How can you justify allowing this to happen and for pupils to be placed in this situation?</i></p>
Lack of evidence that quality will improve (9)	<p><i>The proposal by Powys CC does not provide any evidence that closing Gwernyfed High School will improve the standards of its young people. Where and when we will see such evidence?</i></p> <p><i>How can Powys CC guarantee that the quality of education under the new system would be at least as good as the current high standards at Gwernyfed? Merging a failing school with Gwernyfed will lower standards not improve them!</i></p>
Impact on educational outcomes (9)	<p><i>My first concern is how the educational standards may be damaged in the transfer between Gwernyfed and the new "super-school". At Gwernyfed, when you are in year 7, it takes time to settle into the new educational environment, to get used to the teachers and establish friendship groups. By the end of year 7, the pupils' environment is familiar and learning is a lot easier than it was when everything was new to them. To have everyone move schools again would be set the majority of students back in their education because they have to go</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>through the transition period again, which would probably last for about the first year. The plan for the school is to raise educational standards and surely this wouldn't be happening if the entire school is set back due to the transition.</i></p> <p><i>In my GCSEs I hope to get mostly A's and some A*'s. However, to achieve this I would need to make sure I focus and am not messed about by becoming a new school. In September 2017, you wish to combine both schools to form a new one on the current sites. Now, I would currently be doing my GCSE's at this time, and if anything, it would affect my performance.</i></p>
Impact on work experience (3)	<p><i>We [Hay Veterinary Group] currently have good links with the school providing work experience for pupils. This is an excellent link to the young people in our community which we fear would be diminished if the children are all based in Brecon or other schools in Herefordshire. The children who attend our practice during work experience placements from Gwernyfed High School are almost without fail articulate, confident, polite, mature young people. They are well prepared for their placements and well-supported.</i></p>

11.17 There was particularly strong support for GHS and a lack of understanding as to why PCC is proposing to close it. Indeed, the current subject range, quality of teaching and strong leadership at the school were praised and thought to reflect the: positive relationships between staff and pupils; excellent academic results (especially compared to other schools); positive progress made since the last Estyn report; and satisfactory staff recruitment and retention record. The current small size of Gwernyfed was also considered to be an asset in continuing high standards in that it allows teachers to dedicate more time to students. In addition, parents described the invaluable support the school has provided to pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

11.18 Moreover, despite one respondent describing the management team at Brecon High School as 'failing', a few responses commended the staff there for their hard work in trying to improve the school and recognised that there have been improvements since its placement in special measures.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Educational attainment at GHS (127)	<p><i>With a number of the high schools in Brecon and Radnorshire in Special Measures, the fact that the Authority is looking to get rid of one of its best performing schools beggars belief Gwernyfed is a successful school that produces great results, indeed it is one of the most improved schools in Powys. 96% of GCSE students achieved 5 A*-C grades in 2014 (32% more than the national average that year), and all A level students went to their first choice university, including some of the top Universities in the UK. 1/5 of all A* Maths GCSEs in Powys are achieved by Gwernyfed High School.</i></p> <p><i>Gwernyfed has been producing excellent results and the students are passionate about staying there. They are also keen to ensure that their siblings have the opportunity to go there too. Doesn't that say something about the quality of the school?</i></p> <p><i>Last year, the Year 11s achieved the second best results the school has ever seen, so I don't see the reason why anyone would want to shut us down when our standards at the moment are so high.</i></p>

<p>Quality of teaching and leadership at GHS (69)</p>	<p><i>Gwernyfed has an outstanding record of staff recruitment and retention who all teach to an exceptionally high, professional standard. The staff are also willing to go the extra mile, whether it's extra revision sessions at lunchtime or after school to ensure that their pupils feel calm and stress-free for their upcoming examinations. The work the staff put in with the primary to secondary transition allows you to feel safe and secure and not disrupt the actual learning that is taking place.</i></p> <p><i>These Key Stage 4 statistics are fantastic and it's all down to the brilliant relationship between pupils and their teachers, both putting the work in to achieve their full potential and go on to do greater things.</i></p> <p><i>The foundations to build 'Strong communities in the green heart of Wales' are in place at Gwernyfed. Our head teacher, John Williams is excellent. He is naturally gifted to be a head teacher and has the respect and trust of his pupils and the local community.</i></p>
<p>Ongoing improvements at GHS (36)</p>	<p><i>Gwernyfed is one of few in the County to have consistently managed a balanced budget and have an excellent track record of staff recruitment and retention. Indeed I myself feel privileged to have worked in such a unique workplace for nearly 12 years. There are many more exceptional aspects of this school, we are constantly evolving and improving, as evidenced by our recent Estyn monitoring visit and the fact that we are banded a 'yellow' school.</i></p> <p><i>Gwernyfed has shown that it has been going from strength to strength when looking at its student grades and I can't quite understand why you feel it's the best action to take to break something that is doing so well.</i></p> <p><i>A new building may provide a catalyst for [improved educational outcomes], but it is not a prerequisite. There is a plan to develop and improve Gwernyfed and it seems to be working. If the school felt supported by the Council rather than under siege by it, it is possible that the results could be even better.</i></p>
<p>GHS quality owing to size (27)</p>	<p><i>Personally I never experienced any type of bullying or saw anyone else being bullied whilst being a student here. I think that was due to it being a smaller high school rather than a large one. I also think that due to it being a smaller school the grades tend to be better and due to my current knowledge I have heard that it boasts some of the best grades in Powys.</i></p> <p><i>My daughter has a smaller class this term to the last few terms and she has come on leaps and bounds, she has gone from extra help in class to nearly top. She couldn't cope with a bigger school and larger classes.</i></p>
<p>Standards at GHS to other schools (14)</p>	<p><i>Apart from Crickhowell High our school is the only one not in special measures locally. I cannot believe that PCC expect us to accept merging with a school in special measures which is also in debt and believe that we could benefit from this in any way.</i></p> <p><i>We do agree that Brecon High needs a new school but this should NOT be at the loss of Gwernyfed. Every child in Powys deserves to be offered high standards of education and it is our understanding looking at the schools in our area that Gwernyfed is offering the best at the moment. ... As Gwernyfed is the only high school in the area not in special measures, they are delivering the education in South Powys.</i></p>
<p>GHS as an inclusive school (13)</p>	<p><i>Gwernyfed has an inclusive ethos; supporting all students and enabling them to reach their full potential, developing them to articulate their own opinions and express their views.</i></p> <p><i>Our Daughter...has a condition called Fragile x syndrome. She has attended Gwernyfed High School since year 7 and as parents we feel that Gwernyfed High School has met her needs far better within a supportive community environment. The School has also helped her to gain invaluable work experience at a range of industries, which has led to her obtaining two part</i></p>

	<p><i>time jobs. Gwernyfed High School has provided [daughter] with amazing support in conjunction with the educational Psychologist. Although she has continued to struggle with English, the High School has been relentless in their assistance and provided her with extra lessons and tuition. The head teacher has also shown his commitment to ensure getting [name] through any difficult stages.</i></p> <p><i>A few years ago you very kindly took an interest in a matter concerning my son and the struggles he was experiencing in school due to dyslexia. I was so grateful and encouraged by your genuine interest and in sharing your own experiences of dyslexia that we were able to help [name] address many of the problems which were causing so much anxiety at that time. I have regular meetings with the learning support team which is always productive. He is never made to feel uncomfortable about any issues connected to his reading or writing and because of this boost to his confidence has thrown himself in to all sorts of out of school activities including Cadets, YFC and Gwernyfed Rugby Club. With regards to the possible closure of Gwernyfed, I feel it is all too easy to focus on statistics and budgets, which of course have a place in the decisions that are to be made. However, the opportunities Gwernyfed High School has given my son to grow and shine and be celebrated are due to the skill and dedication of its staff and the maturity and kindness of its pupils.</i></p>
Quality of staff at BHS (7)	<p><i>I have been consistently impressed by the dedication and commitment of the staff who have time and again gone the extra mile to assist my children in achieving their potential, despite teaching in a building that is no longer fit for purpose.</i></p> <p><i>The head, staff and governors are fully committed to ensuring that the school moves successfully out of special measures and as the latest Estyn monitoring report suggests is making successful progress in this respect.</i></p>
Choice of subjects at Gwernyfed (3)	<p><i>The school may be relatively small but it still offers a good choice of subjects, this year they have introduced Agriculture as a GCSE option. This school knows its child and responds to their needs.</i></p>

## Buildings and Estates

- 11.19 Respondents sought more clarity around the possible options for the disposal of the GHS buildings and grounds if the school is to close. Some expressed concern around site falling into disrepair, while others doubted that PCC would be able to retain the co-located community leisure facilities for community use.
- 11.20 Respondents were largely in favour of a new school for Brecon but there were worries around planning and the short timeframe which led some to question whether any development would happen in the near future. There was a clear sense that PCC is culpable for the decline in the quality of BHS's school buildings and that capital funds should be invested into improving or replacing them using a phased approach.
- 11.21 Moreover, it was stressed that improvements to or a new school for Brecon should not be dependent on the closure of Gwernyfed - though many suspected that the conditions of accessing Welsh Government capital funding will require a new build.

Sub-theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
Alternative proposal to refurbish (16)	<p><i>This proposal is financially unsound. The interest on the borrowed amount will be far in excess of the money required to keep Gwernyfed High School open. The saving is a mere £300,000 per year! The capital investment required to maintain both schools will be far less than £20 million. Keeping the schools open and sustaining the thriving economy that surrounds Gwernyfed High School would cost far less.</i></p> <p><i>It is stated in the consultation document that the amount needed to refurbish both school, namely around £20 million, is the amount you are proposing to borrow from the 21st Century Schools Programme. Would this not be better used to refurbish both schools allowing education to continue on both sites as preferred by the community, pupils and staff, rather than subjecting Gwernyfed and Brecon pupils to education in a “super school”?</i></p> <p><i>Why is a new school building needed? If the estimated backlog maintenance cost for Brecon High School is £15,581,541 then surely the proposed 20 million to build a brand new school is more than enough to refurbish the existing Brecon High School building and bring it up to the required standard. The school is currently large enough to be refurbished in sections, why not close off sections of the school and refurbish bit by bit.</i></p> <p><i>Jeremy Patterson noted that ‘it would be possible to spend capital money on the maintenance backlog at Gwernyfed but there would need to be a proper business case’ (Gwernyfed 2:02). I believe the Governors are willing to present this if they have not done so already.</i></p>
The future of GHS (14)	<p><i>Page 17 - sale of existing school sites. Who does the council consider to be potential buyers of the school sites? In particular, Gwernyfed as a listed building and with, I believe, listed views, may prove difficult to sell.</i></p> <p><i>(Reference to: mid Wales Mental hospital) There are signs of demolition throughout the site and many of the original slates (believed to be worth in excess of £1 million) have been stripped from the roofs. The hospital serves as a physical representation of the Council’s manifest incompetency. Gwernyfed High School would suffer an identical fate in the event of its closure.</i></p> <p><i>Mention was made of selling the Gwernyfed site while ‘trying to retain the sports facilities’. I find it difficult to believe you would be able to find a buyer who would be happy to allow community use of those sports facilities. I would also like to know whether the potential repayment of the £345,403 Lottery grant was actually included in the tables of figures provided in the consultation document.</i></p>
New buildings at Brecon urgently needed (8)	<p><i>The building Brecon High School pupils are expected to learn in a building which has not changed (bar the odd exception) since I left in 1992 – they should be learning in a safe and visually stimulating environment, which is certainly not happening at the moment. If the proposal to have a ‘super school’ does not go ahead I trust that Powys are still going to honour our pupils with a new build which is well overdue and certainly deserved?</i></p> <p><i>The pupils, teachers, parents, governors and the community of Brecon and its surrounding areas have no objection to the need to replace the outdated, ill-fitting and frankly unsuitable building that is Brecon High School. However, your methods of doing so are questionable. This is the second proposal for building a new school building, the first involved the leisure centre and this latest, the college. Neither have been acceptable to the community, what other proposals do you have?</i></p>



Sub-theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
Fund new build school at Brecon but maintain GHS (5)	<p><i>There is no objection to Brecon having a new school, but, in times of economic crisis, why spend what will no doubt be in excess of £50 million when a new school for the Brecon area could be built for much less? The amount of money saved by a merger is debatable, since the cost of transport would be huge, not to mention the congestion which already occurs outside Brecon High School every day of the week.</i></p> <p><i>Why not simply use the £22 million to rebuild Brecon High School and leave the successful and well-loved Gwernyfed out of the equation?</i></p> <p><i>Explain why a much cheaper alternative than the current proposals, of using the £20M for the New School Building, plus retaining Gwernyfed High School, plus revamping the existing Coleg Powys buildings in Brecon, is not considered a viable option. Put the £24M currently ring-fenced for the private NPTC Group to much better use by making essential repairs to existing high school infrastructure; for providing leverage for community and local business investment in schools maintenance; for partnership projects with clubs, societies and businesses to support extra-curricular activities.</i></p>
Timetable for new site (5)	<p><i>The timetable of events scheduled for the new Brecon campus is very tight. The Brecon Beacons National Park has to approve any building application and can delay building projects for many months until they are happy with the planning application.</i></p> <p><i>The site will have to be demolished and cleared, before you even think about undergoing the construction work. I'm not talking months, this is a matter of years. This will have major effects on the unlucky pupils that are doing their GCSE's.</i></p> <p><i>Will the dual site proposal not become two schools, left in limbo, for many years to come?</i></p>
PCC's culpability for the condition of buildings (4)	<p><i>One of the reasons given for the proposal is the current backlog of maintenance issues at both the Gwernyfed and the Brecon sites. It is the ongoing responsibility of PCC to manage these costs, to anticipate them and make provision for them. The current backlog is therefore a clear indicator of incompetence at PCC. Why does PCC highlight its own incompetence and use it as a justification for their own proposals?</i></p> <p><i>The fabric of Brecon High School is said to be so poor that the school needs rebuilding. Who is responsible for monitoring the condition of Powys schools? Answer, please. Who ignored the fact, or, even worse, was unaware that the school was in such a state until it was too late? Is there no rolling programme of repairs to the public buildings in this county?</i></p> <p><i>How dare a council, too incompetent to keep on top of these basic requirements, turn around and use them as an excuse to close a beloved community high school? It beggars belief.</i></p>
Location of the new site (4)	<p><i>Also have they secured land/site for this building? My understanding is that the site currently identified has deeds attached to it and it has been given to Brecon for recreational use only. If this is true and they have to look at another plot how easy will that be and where will it be and how long will it delay the build?</i></p> <p><i>I am also concerned that a new campus in Brecon, if modelled on the old style gives the children far too a great a freedom to slope off into the town. The great advantage of Gwernyfyd is that it is an enclosed community, which creates a sense of security and belonging for the pupils. The children are conspicuous outside of the school premises, so that their safety and discipline is more effectively ensured.</i></p>
Phased Approach (1)	<p><i>I propose that Powys go ahead immediately with a new building in Brecon, and that the new school be open in 2017/18 AT THE LATEST. From a Freedom of Information Act request I have</i></p>

Sub-theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>made it appears that Powys CC has enough money to build a 1000+ student school without dependency on the 21st Century schools programme. I object to the statement in the proposal that the sale of the existing Brecon High School site goes into the Councils General Accounts, not into the school itself or to funding the school. The new build should be a phased project, with the immediate phase 1 delivering a new school for the existing students at Brecon (1000+ spaces), with phase 2 to be developed pending a decision on closure of Gwernyfed and Phase 3 the building of a 6th form centre to include ALL pupils in the current Brecon/Gwernyfed/Crickhowell catchment. These should all be submitted as one planning application with separate build dates.</i></p>

## Funding and Finance

- 11.22 The balance of views suggested that the savings being proposed do not compensate for the cost to communities (especially in the Gwernyfed catchment area) if the proposals are approved - and some questioned whether or not these savings would, in fact, be swallowed by unforeseen costs or interest on capital loans.
- 11.23 For Gwernyfed catchment residents, the fact their school runs a balanced budget and that a large repayment to the Big Lottery Fund would be required in the event of closure made the proposed saving difficult to accept.
- 11.24 It was argued that the closure of BHS and the writing off of its debt supports the widely-held view that the proposals are driven by financial considerations rather than making improvements to the quality of education and pupil wellbeing. Furthermore, there was concern that once the school's financial situation has been rectified, further changes will stall.

Sub-Theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
GHS operating within budget (56)	<p><i>Gwernyfed is managing to deliver excellent quality education to their pupils, whilst operating within a balanced budget. Brecon will have accrued a budget deficit of around £1.4 million. Can you explain to me how has this been allowed to happen?</i></p> <p><i>Our School has fought hard to remain within budget and we must not close at Brecon's expense. We appreciate that Brecon needs a new school and we will support this.</i></p> <p><i>You stated in the B&amp;R that the "current structure is no longer fit for purpose, the fall in pupil numbers, and the resulting pressure on resources mean the status quo is not an option". Surely if Gwernyfed are managing to balance their finances with the number of pupils they have, the argument does not apply to this school.</i></p>
Proposals are financially driven (32)	<p><i>Policy is being dictated by how to get out of budget problems rather than the wellbeing of the community and its children.</i></p> <p><i>Out of 14 points made in the disadvantage box relating to the status quo half of them (7) were financial. Isn't the proposal meant to be about education standards?</i></p> <p><i>Gwernyfed appears to be being put through this process solely to enable Powys County Council to access 21st Century schools funding from the Welsh Government to build a new school in Brecon. I'm not stating that Brecon don't deserve a new school, but Powys should</i></p>



Sub-Theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>find the necessary funds elsewhere rather than closing Gwernyfed.</i></p> <p><i>I can see a situation developing in which the two schools are merged in September 2017, Brecon High School debt being written off and nothing else happening for years to come, whilst my children suffer the consequences of indecision, failure to deliver and being 'educated' in limbo.</i></p>
Big Lottery Fund (14)	<p><i>Also I am angered that the Big Lottery Fund had not been in contacted before the proposals were drawn up. To my knowledge it was awarded in 2005, not 2004 as the council stated in the document and there was a clause stating the local authority cannot change the status of the school without an approval letter from the Lottery because it has an interest in the building for at least 80 years, to which the Council could not close the school until 2085!</i></p> <p><i>The all-weather sports pitches at Gwernyfed were purchased using £371,000 lottery fund and they retain an interest in the property for 80 years, if that is the case and Powys County Council proceed to close Gwernyfed, will they have to pay back the £371,000?</i></p>
Savings not worth the cost to communities (10)	<p><i>As I understand this proposal, as stated in the consultation document, the total monetary savings will be in the region of £350,000. Is it really a forward thinking and "transformational" for Powys County Council to propose to uproot communities, force children to sit on transport for hours per week, move pupils and staff to a school that none of them want to attend, all to save £350,000?</i></p> <p><i>The finances of the proposed scheme are also extremely troubling. Powys County Council argue that the proposed scheme would save £300,000 per year. However, the modernisation would require funding totalling around £20 million, the interest on which would almost certainly eliminate any such saving.</i></p> <p><i>The WG School Organisation Code also states that in relation to proposals where substantial upfront capital investment is required (for example to support a substantial remodelling, refurbishment or a new build project), the costs and savings of the proposals should be calculated over the lifespan of the relevant building, and compared against the costs and savings associated with the maintenance of the status quo.</i></p>
Lack of clarity around long-term costs (3)	<p><i>Under the heading 'overall affordability', p154 of the Outline Business Case states that "The proposed cost of the project is £46,997m (including optimism bias) over the 60 years of the expected lifespan of the campus. It is anticipated that the optimism bias will be fully mitigated (or under a 2% ceiling) by FBC stage". It is extraordinarily difficult to make any sense of this figure. Firstly, it is necessary to assume that the sum should be £46,997k and not £46,997m, and that it refers to the capital costs, in which case the '60 year lifespan' becomes irrelevant as capital costs are fully incurred by the end of Year 5. If the bias is included, there seems to be no reason why the Project Risks should not be included. At the best this is simply sloppy, at the worst, there is something else going on...</i></p> <p><i>It is noted on p154 that "The Local Authority will look to finance their element of cost through prudential borrowing" but it is nowhere stated what the cost of that borrowing will be. This cost will be an annual drain on the council's resources until (and if) the borrowing is repaid. It cannot be ignored in assessing overall affordability.</i></p> <p><i>Is there a contingency plan? For example if the project exceeds the budget or the construction company goes bankrupt halfway through the build? Please also confirm how much the council will need to borrow to fund this proposal or what cuts to other local services will be</i></p>

Sub-Theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
	<i>made to fund it?</i>

## Governance and Leadership

- 11.25 Historical issues around the leadership and management of BHS were noted as a cause for concern. Indeed, addressing any leadership and governance deficiencies - including support from PCC - was considered more important than new bricks and mortar.
- 11.26 Establishing the right leadership team was considered critical to the success of a school, but respondents were concerned that PCC has offered little reassurance as to how they would ensure the right people are appointed.

Sub-Theme (number of comments)	Comments
Improve leadership not just buildings (6)	<p><i>The culture within a school and consequently pupil outcomes is hugely dependent on the schools leadership team. This is something that Gwernyfed has clearly got right at the moment and something that I suspect is less successful at Brecon High School. Can PCC guarantee that they can create a leadership team that is as dynamic, and as effective as the current Gwernyfed team, under their new proposals, and if so, how?</i></p> <p><i>My over-riding concern...is that the proposals do not address the core issues surrounding Brecon High School as a failing school. The best buildings in the world will not counter the impact of poor leadership and poor management not only at school but at County levels. I am convinced that the basis of your proposal is financially driven and not pupil focused. Unless steps are taken to put right what is fundamentally wrong with the school, which has been so for many years, we will find ourselves five or more years down the road with a bigger debt and more pupils being failed by a third rate education. A good school needs dynamic, inspirational leadership and excellent management. Put those in place and the buildings can be built when you've actually identified a need, a place and the money to build them...</i></p> <p><i>A merger would conveniently write off the large debts accumulated by Brecon High School. What assurance do we have that the culture of mal-administration that has got Brecon into these difficulties does not get carried over to the new school on the same site?</i></p>

## Transport and Travel

- 11.27 Many written responses expressed concern - and indeed anger - around the negative impact additional travel would have on pupils, which some argued directly contradicts the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 11.28 It was said that many pupils in the Gwernyfed catchment area already spend long periods of time travelling to and from school, and that any increase would be unacceptable. Indeed, there was concern that longer days and time spent travelling between the two sites would severely impact on their quality of life by: restricting their social lives; impacting on their ability to attend after-school clubs; and causing tiredness. The lack of reliable public transport and access issues for pupils in more isolated, rural areas was also predicted to result in increased non-attendance at school.

- 11.29 The burden of potentially having to transport their children to and from a school much further away so they can attend after-school clubs was noted by pupils' parents and family members, many of whom said they have neither the time nor financial means to do so. There were also concerns that farming families would be impacted by the proposals, as their children would not be home from school in time to assist in the running of the farms and develop their future farming careers.
- 11.30 Furthermore, the cost of providing more pupil transport was thought to represent 'removing one problem, and creating another'. It was suggested that the money would instead be better spent improving the quality of education in the existing schools. In addition, it was alleged that new School Transport Policy has not been considered by PCC in formulating its proposals which, to some, renders the consultation invalid.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Impact of travel on participation in extra-curricular activities for children, parents and family life (119)	<p><i>I fail to see how the organisation of a fleet of buses at different times could be laid on to accommodate all the attendances of school clubs, societies, sporting and creative activities. Buses would have to travel to villages, communities and farms over a huge rural area. Not feasible. Imagine the times some of these children would spend on these buses, The only people who would benefit would be the owners of the bus companies and one dreads to imagine what the costs would be.</i></p> <p><i>I would also like to know how the extra travelling would affect my life outside of school as I attend Gwernyfed RFC on a Thursday and a Sunday. On a Thursday I may not be able to go if I had to travel half an hour more and then do my homework and eat some tea I may not be able to get there in time.</i></p> <p><i>As grandparents we help out after school when both parents are working, If this proposal goes through we will be required to make a 40 minute round trip to pick up from after school activities. Negative effects: elderly drivers, petrol expenses etc. But most negative the loss of independence to the children having to rely on others to get home.</i></p> <p><i>Can the council also justify the added pressure this will have on parents who will inevitably have to spend more time, which they can ill afford and money, which they may not have, collecting children from extra-curricular activities from a school that Gwernyfed pupils don't need?</i></p>
Increased travel time (116)	<p><i>Pupils risk up to 3 hours a day travelling, unless they choose to move across the border to a nearer school which many have said they would.</i></p> <p><i>The bus journey from Hay to Gwernyfed is already up to 45 minutes, so why are you suggesting that my time learning is better spent travelling?</i></p> <p><i>I live on a farm in the isolated rural community of Gwenddwr and travelling to school takes two hours every day. Should the decision be made that I have to attend Brecon High school, I will face a journey of at least another 30 minutes.</i></p>
Impact of travel on pupils (62)	<p><i>For my own children, the closure of Gwernyfed would result in them having to travel nearly two hours per day on a school bus. This would not only result in tiredness but would also reduce the time available for them to complete home-work and revise for exams.</i></p> <p><i>I also wonder how the county plans to transport these children to and from Builth when the weather is inclement. It is a well-known fact that bus companies regularly cease to operate when the roads are dangerous for safety of all those involved. This can only have an adverse effect on attendance and a detrimental knock on effect for standards as these children</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>become more persistently absent during harder winters.</i></p> <p><i>Powys County Council have commented that pupils from Gwernyfed and Brecon schools will travel between the two sites. This fills me with dread. The time spent travelling to and from the sites will either reduce my learning time or increase my school day.</i></p>
Cost of extra travel (33)	<p><i>And if county are willing to pay for transport to out of county schools (as has been the practice to date), are they also willing to pay for transport for parental choice of English medium provision such as King Henry VIII? Surely this money would be better spent improving the existing provision at a local level to secure high standards of teaching and learning.</i></p> <p><i>I understand it would cost £225,000 in new transport fees. Is this worth the difficulties it would create?</i></p>
Impacts on farming families (10)	<p><i>Children will be home much later from school and farmers relying on them to help with the chores will no longer have this assistance. Some of these children may well be looking to a career in the farming industry but if they don't have the experience then they may consider other options and our farming industry will suffer greatly.</i></p> <p><i>They (PCC) will take away opportunities to learn family trades such as on the farm. Not all children want to go to University!!</i></p>
Transport Policy (8)	<p><i>The document contains no information on how the increased travel figures were obtained. Are they based on the 'Old' Transport Policy or the new one that cabinet is refusing to reveal until after the consultation is over?</i></p> <p><i>New School Transport Policy is to be considered 'in due course'. How can the consultation be valid when the information on the extent and limitations of that policy is not being made available? The Welsh Government's Schools Governance and Organisation Branch states, that 'local authorities in Wales are required by law to provide home to school transport for pupils to their nearest suitable school, if it is beyond the statutory walking distance, even if it is located in an English local authority's area'. It has been rumoured that the Powys 'New Schools Policy' will define a 'suitable school' as one offering the Welsh Bacc. If so, the policy would be a clear attempt to subvert the legal requirement stated by the Welsh Government, and the failure by Cabinet to include this information in the Consultation Document would be a clear attempt by Cabinet to subvert the consultation process.</i></p>

## Other Pupil Impacts

- 11.31 Comments were made on the effect continued uncertainty around the future of their local primary and secondary schools is having on pupils' wellbeing. Not knowing where they will study for their GCSEs and potentially having to move between school sites was described as stressful for pupils, while other worries included: losing friendship groups; not being able to make new friends because of the 'rivalry' between the two schools; and a larger school resulting in fewer available places for sports competitions and other events.
- 11.32 Moreover, parents from the Gwernyfed area were of the view that their children's health would be put at risk through: spending more time on public transport as opposed to walking to and from school; having longer days with less sleep; not having access to the school nurse who is local to their area; and potentially being exposed to negative influences in the Brecon area (such as drug use).

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Fragmented friendship groups (57)	<p><i>Sustaining friends can be particularly hard for rural children who can be bused long distances to their secondary schools then returned to their local villages unable to meet up with friends out of school due to a lack of adequate transport. Even where families have access to their own cars, especially in rural areas, the running costs can be prohibitive and responding to children's social needs may be low on the list of essential trips to be afforded (Ridge, 2002, 2007, 2009).</i></p> <p><i>A wider catchment will cause problems, such as groups of friends having to meet up in local towns, currently our children visit each other's houses, but with friendships formed over such long distances we would no longer be able to do this, and the result will be groups of children in towns on evenings and weekends, I don't want this for my children, and I'm certain Councils won't.</i></p>
Uncertainty (33)	<p><i>As I am a year 8 pupil I am starting to think about my GCSEs. Having the stress of the school proposed to close and not knowing where I will take my GCSEs is very daunting. Will I take my GCSEs in a familiar environment with the teachers I know? Will I be moving schools half way between the important studying, disrupting my learning? Will I have to get used to different ways of teaching? Overlapping the things I have already learnt? I don't know, nobody knows. This is the pressure all of the year 7, 8 and 9 pupils are under, and it just isn't good enough.</i></p>
Other health/ well- being impacts (29)	<p><i>Being transported to school means children will have far less exercise than they do now, unable to walk to and from school and hours spent on the bus, especially for the person first on who will also be the last off at the end of the day. Having lived in my village for two years now I have the pleasure every school day to see happy, fit and healthy school children walking the two miles back home after their lessons have finished for the day. Totally against the government's obesity initiative.</i></p> <p><i>A major concern of attending a Brecon based school is the difference in cultural life, particularly within school hours. It appears that there are issues with the use of recreational drugs in such town schools and I strongly feel this is something which should not be imposed on pupils from a different cultural background in the interests of pupil health and wellbeing.</i></p> <p><i>If Gwernyfed school were to close the children would no longer be under the care of the local school nurse that we have regular contact with. A school nurse working in Brecon would not have the time or opportunity to travel out of her area to a regular meeting with our primary care team and so the sharing of regular information in a timely manner would not happen. We should not lightly throw away a system that can bring vital information to help protect our local children.</i></p>
Emotional impacts (26)	<p><i>Another, big concern for me is the impact the proposal will have on my personal life. If the plans go ahead I will be forced to move to Hereford; as much as I love adventure, this would be very stressful for me and could have drastic impacts on my education. Moving would mean adjusting to a new environment in or near a large town which would be a big change as I come from a small village where everyone knows everyone.</i></p> <p><i>Do you realise what you are doing and the worries and pressures that you are enforcing on pupils that are attending the school? Think of all the children that are in Primary schools, especially year six pupils who are anxious about transferring as it is. The pressure YOU are putting on pupils, parents and families is not acceptable.</i></p>
Inter-school tensions (18)	<p><i>There has been an ongoing rivalry between Brecon High school and Gwernyfed High school for many years and merging the two schools may not be an ideal plan for then it could promote</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>conflict.</i></p> <p><i>Furthermore, you are putting two rivals in the same school. That will have massive effects on behaviour, pupil's attitude in lessons and you would be destroying a healthy rivalry. There will be many fights which will bring down the standards of the school which is not the objective of this proposal. The pupils simply don't want to be in the same class as their rivals.</i></p>
Impact of large school (7)	<p><i>With such a big school, there will be less opportunities to take part in representing the school at events such as sports competitions with other schools because only a limited number of pupils can take part and there would be more pupils to choose from. I think that I could miss out on such opportunities and this would not be fair and equal.</i></p>

## Staff Impacts

- 11.33 Without the challenge of teaching at A-level and with the added pressure of job insecurity affecting morale, it was feared that Powys will struggle to attract and retain the best teachers - leading to a drop in overall teaching standards.
- 11.34 There were also responses around teachers potentially being required to travel between the two sites: people asked whether this would detract from time spent in the classroom - and whether they would be reimbursed for additional travel costs.
- 11.35 PCC was criticised for its lack of support for staff, and it was suggested that the Council should try to help staff overcome the issues within their schools rather than continually threaten closure. There were also questions around whether PCC has capacity to develop and process new staff contracts, as well as time to recruit new members of staff before the proposed opening in September 2017.

Sub-theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
Retention/ recruitment (22)	<p><i>Teachers with an interest in their subject are keen to stretch their skills and develop their knowledge in teaching sixth formers. These are the teachers we want to inspire our children across the range of subjects through the school. Without the prospect of teaching A-levels and with the equipment and resources A-level provision brings, will have a negative impact throughout the school. Have you considered the potential loss of inspirational and talented teachers we currently have? Workers in Powys are currently on average the lowest paid in Wales, have you considered the additional impact this decision will make on the difficulty of attracting bright, talented and motivated teachers for our children in Brecon?</i></p> <p><i>What is your plan to hold on to good teachers, who with so much uncertainty will surely be looking to secure alternative positions at other schools? What incentives are you offering them whilst their workload and class sizes increase, job security decreases, uncertainty and lack of job satisfaction increases? Lack of commitment and support from the local authority may result in lack of commitment and support from teachers to children.</i></p>
Travelling between sites (14)	<p><i>Teaching staff will have to work together over two sites. Will this take away valuable teaching time from the pupils?</i></p>



Sub-theme (numbers of comments)	Comments
Job Insecurity (10)	<p><i>Surely Powys County Council has thought about the staff and that they are struggling to find new jobs in different places as many schools don't have enough room for more staff. Clearly the staff work hard in school and after school in different clubs and it seems to us that you have not thought about them whatsoever.</i></p> <p><i>The health and wellbeing of members of staff and pupils of both schools should be paramount. Does the council understand that if the schools remain as a dual site, then future numbers of pupils and experienced, well trained staff may decline at Gwernyfed due to the uncertainty of this situation and is this yet another way to close Gwernyfed, "by the back door"?</i></p>
Staff Morale (7)	<p><i>Powys CC betrays a tired and uncaring attitude towards teaching and support staff and School Governors and fails to acknowledge the extreme demotivation caused by the loss of two in-school sixth forms under the current proposals.</i></p> <p><i>As a parent I am dismayed by your lack of support for the current staff and students of any high school in Powys and in particular Brecon. Yes, Brecon may be facing challenges at present, however, I find your responses deplorable. From my observations, whenever there is a problem in a school in Powys, your response is to threaten to close the school and pile on more pressure. As a council you have enormous impact on the staff, pupils and governors of a school and yet distance yourselves from the consequences. There is an obvious impact on the motivation and self-esteem of the teaching staff and I question your role of this impact on the mental health and well-being of these staff. What are your strategies for addressing the stresses and negative impact of these current proposals on our children and their staff?</i></p>
Staff Contracts (5)	<p><i>Are you confident that the Human Resources department is sufficiently staffed to deal with this matter efficiently, as the timeframe is very tight?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think that you have sufficient time in your timetable to appoint a new Head, re-structure, negotiate new contracts and slot in's plus redundancies all before September 2017 - all of which need to comply with employment law and your employment policies?</i></p> <p><i>Will there be pay protection for ALL staff who lose a higher paid post?</i></p>

## Community Impacts

- 11.36 A range of community impacts were identified by respondents from the Gwernyfed area, whose submissions reflect the important role the high school plays within the local community. There was deep concern that, should it close, the impact on the local area would be deep and far-reaching.
- 11.37 Specific worries were that: educated, talented young people will leave the area, leaving an older population and a low-skilled local community; pupils and their parents will use facilities in the Brecon area, putting the Gwernyfed catchment area's economy at risk; an area without a local high school is discouraging to families; and that local facilities such as the leisure centre, sport clubs and cultural groups will face an uncertain future. Consequently, it was predicted that the proposed closure of GHS would effectively divide the community.
- 11.38 In addition, the range of facilities that would be made available at Brecon Leisure Centre while the new school is being built was questioned: reassurance was sought that there would be sufficient capacity for adequate provision in the interim period.



Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
The future of community facilities (234)	<p><i>What plans does the Council have to help community groups, sports clubs and cultural groups continue in light of the fact that they may lose many pupil members and volunteers as a result of these changes. How will the contingency put forward by PCC address the impact that moving children to a Brecon based school will have on Talgarth, Glasbury, Hay etc. will have on clubs and societies.</i></p> <p><i>I have been told that there is an obligation to continue to provide community activities on the Gwernyfed site as a result of National Lottery funding provided on that basis, for years if not decades to come. The idea that the facilities would continue to be available and adequately maintained if Gwernyfed closes is highly implausible.</i></p> <p><i>If facilities at Gwernyfed are lost, where will they be replaced? How much will this cost the council? Why have these costs not been included in the final figures/costings? If the facilities at Gwernyfed are maintained how will this affect the capital receipt of the sale of the Mansion House at Gwernyfed? How much will the value of the site be devalued?</i></p>
Demographic change (ageing population) (96)	<p><i>A community devoid of a school is a dead community, no young families will want to come here, you are like the pied piper spiriting youth away, no youth to support local business, to breathe new life into a community of old folks.</i></p> <p><i>In the absence of a viable secondary school, the towns of Talgarth and Hay on Wye, which have become exceedingly popular locations for people to both visit and settle, would die as young families would no longer find the area a suitable place in which to bring up their children. In sum, the impact on this tightly knit community would be devastating.</i></p> <p><i>Rhosgoch where I live has lost its primary school and we already feel the pervasive loss to the community and lack of young families moving to the area.</i></p>
Impact on businesses – closure/ unemployment (53)	<p><i>Rural businesses will be affected by a loss of trade. How can these negative effects to the local economy &amp; job losses be overlooked and ignored?</i></p> <p><i>The closure to Gwernyfed would also have a devastating effect on our family's school transport business. We have enjoyed a near 50-year working relationship with Gwernyfed high school and about 17 years ago decided to relocate our depot to Three Cocks in order to better serve in particular the Gwernyfed school bus contracts. Because of this close proximity we take great pride in being able to respond to any transport request almost immediately, and also offer the Council good value for money. The closure of this school would almost certainly mean unemployment for most our 18 plus staff and seriously affect our local suppliers many of whom are small businesses...</i></p> <p><i>The garden centre in Three Cocks which continues to win Garden Centre of the Year award would be adversely affected as the parents and grandparents who conveniently call in there when collecting children from afterschool activities will no longer make this stop. This will mean less local people will be employed at the garden centre and will have a negative and financial impact on the local community.</i></p>
Role of GHS in community life (47)	<p><i>Gwernyfed plays a central role in the life of the community. Extensive use is made of the sports centre, which is now managed by Gwernyfed High School itself, and now fully booked up with local community activities and sessions. As well as this, the playing fields are constantly being played on by pupils in the school as they play club rugby at Gwernyfed Rugby Club, the drama studio hosts music workshops and the minibuses take both pupils and</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>ex pupils outside of school to many fixtures for their local sports clubs. There are strong links with a wide range of community and sports groups, as well as with the Hay Festival, a renowned literature festival. The school has a positive working relationship with the primary schools and exceptional transition arrangements.</i></p> <p><i>The 'Impact Assessment' carried out was presented in such a way that did not clearly present the full extent of the negative impact on the local communities, not least pupils, parents and staff at the schools involved.</i></p>
Impact on the local economy (41)	<p><i>An educational void, as is being proposed, will lead to an exodus of working age families, taking their talents with them. Businesses, struggling to find either the workforce they need or the customer base, either fail or choose to relocate to pastures greener. A low-skill local economy prevails, and unemployment soars. Social problems follow, and local amenities and public services become unsustainable...</i></p> <p><i>The focus for their social life will be on the towns which will draw them away from the countryside and their country pursuits. We need to try and keep our children in the countryside otherwise farming will continue to become a job for old men.</i></p> <p><i>If our children go to school in Brecon, we will shop in Brecon, get our fuel in Brecon and generally spend more time in Brecon due to the nature of picking up and dropping off children at different times. The economic impact of this must also be a concern.</i></p> <p><i>I have undertaken research into the 'brain drain' of some of our most talented young people out of Wales. This research demonstrated clearly that once we lose our students to study or work in England, they are unlikely to return.</i></p>
Housing/ housing market (29)	<p><i>I am currently selling my property in Glasbury. It's been on the market for some time as I am selling a business connected with it. Every time, without fail, that I show somebody around the house, they ask where the nearest school is.</i></p> <p><i>We are told that there are less numbers in our schools but there is a commitment to more housing in Talgarth, Bronllys and even Felindre! These houses will remain empty if there are no schools to draw people in. What a total waste of money!</i></p>
Impacts on local primary schools (26)	<p><i>Hay Primary and other primaries in the Gwernyfed cluster currently enjoy a number of benefits from their proximity to the school: the use of mini-busses; access to sports facilities; access to additional learning resources; ease of integration when pupils leave the primary school etc. These things are of great value to the primary schools. How will they be replaced under PCC's proposals?</i></p> <p><i>If we assume Gwernyfed closes and also assume that you fulfil the commitment to build new primaries in the catchment, I foresee that you will in very short time face a greater surplus of places in the newly built primaries caused by the emigration of families to areas served by a secondary school i.e. Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, etc. Can you confirm that this scenario has been considered and planned for?</i></p>
Community health and wellbeing (17)	<p><i>Gwernyfed offers facilities to numerous sports clubs for adults and children alike. With obesity growing and fitness becoming an ever increasing problem taking away important facilities like these will only add to it. We do not live in city or town where these facilities that are easily accessible so take them away and you will have a population that will put greater pressure on our creaking health service.</i></p> <p><i>I use the community sports centre, due to a life-long condition, where exercise using weights,</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<i>is an essential part of keeping well. If the community facility were to be closed, it would be impossible for me to get to Brecon to attend the leisure centre there.</i>
Impact on businesses - labour force (11)	<p><i>Businesses would be put under further pressure by the withdrawal of students who make up a significant proportion of their labour force.</i></p> <p><i>They don't want to have to move their families out of the area as local employment prospects dry up and the county shifts towards a low-skill/low-pay economy.</i></p> <p><i>Professionals such as doctors, teachers, business people, investors, would be far less likely to settle here without the community corner stone that is Gwernyfed and the thriving, dynamic and re-generating community it supports.</i></p>
Community cohesion (6)	<p><i>The ongoing uncertainty over the proposed school re-organisation is divisive, splitting communities who should be working together to find an affordable, acceptable solution to the challenges of providing financially viable, high quality education, near to home for all our children. Neither school wishes to see the other close; both accept that there is much to be gained from collaboration; both, I am sure would be prepared to accept a compromise rather than closure.</i></p> <p><i>Powys CC talks about being at the heart of rural communities, but this proposal will have the effect of tearing communities apart and pitting families against each other as they vie for places at over-subscribed, preferred schools in England rather than send their children on a long journey to an unproven school in Brecon.</i></p>

## Equalities

- 11.39 Respondents generally argued that PCC's proposals would accentuate existing rural deprivation and do nothing to help create equal educational opportunities.
- 11.40 While both high schools potentially losing their sixth forms (when others within Powys are not) was considered unfair, the proposals were mainly criticised for only benefiting Brecon pupils, while 'punishing' those within the Gwernyfed area. In particular, it was said that children from poorer families would not be able to participate in after-school activities if having to rely on school transport - and that, more generally, the ex-Gwernyfed pupils would be disadvantaged educationally by the demands of additional travel to the proposed new school in Brecon.
- 11.41 The potential effect of the proposed changes on vulnerable students was also noted, with respondents asking what measures will be put in place to support them.
- 11.42 Finally, the way in which the risks identified as a result of PCC's Equalities Impact Assessment will be considered was questioned.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Only Brecon pupils benefit (21)	<p><i>How is it that the report constantly states the advantages relating only to the Brecon pupils and disadvantages (and advantages for that matter) to Gwernyfed pupils are disregarded? The report concentrates on Brecon pupils at the expense of Gwernyfed pupils.</i></p> <p><i>The needs of Brecon and Gwernyfed are different. Gwernyfed is a rural school in a rural</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>community. It is certainly not fair for the communities surrounding Gwernyfed to lose their school, whilst Brecon gets a brand new one. As elected members you are mandated to manage and enhance the sustainable quality of life and environment for local citizens and communities and do so in a fair and equitable manner for all with due regard for the outcomes of your actions. Tell me, where is the enhancement of the quality of life for future generations of children in the Gwernyfed area? How is this sustainable, equitable or fair?</i></p>
Unfairness re only BHS and GHS losing their sixth forms (17)	<p><i>Why should the pupils of Brecon and Gwernyfed be disadvantaged as the only pupils in Powys without access to a 6th form provision in the secondary school of their choice? Potentially the school where they achieved GCSEs, developed productive relationships with their teachers and where they could further develop their educational aspirations.</i></p> <p><i>How is it fair/ equitable that if this plan is enacted, Brecon and Gwernyfed high schools will be the only two Powys high schools who will lose their capacity to offer 6th form education.</i></p>
Disproportionate impact on poorer families (9)	<p><i>This will result in discrimination as only the more well-off families will be able to take these (after-school activities) up. The less well-off families will be dependent on their children catching the one bus back from school in the evening as not only will they not be able to afford to drive back and forth but will not be able to take the hours out of work to do so.</i></p> <p><i>One of the advantages of the preferred plan would be to “develop an inclusive education model, meeting the needs of vulnerable learners”, whilst the ‘disadvantages’ list in the same section admits that “students living in the current Gwernyfed catchment may find it more difficult to access after school activities due to living further away”. These two statements are clearly contradictory - It seems that Powys is intent on granting a somewhat less inclusive educational experience to vulnerable students living in the Gwernyfed catchment than those living in the current Brecon catchment. Poor families will be subject to the most basic denial of equality of opportunity – that based on incomes.</i></p>
Impact on education (9)	<p><i>When applying to University additional activities are key, this will mean our children in the Gwernyfed catchment will be disadvantaged in their applications and they may well have to lower their sights on their first choice university.</i></p> <p><i>The impact of long journeys for pupils travelling from the current Gwernyfed catchment area will affect not only those pupils, but all pupils in the school – mainly because the capacity to learn after an early start and a long journey will be diminished but also because a large number of children will be excluded from the opportunity to join in with extra-curricular activities. This will create an inequality of opportunity for pupils in the same school – a two tier education system.</i></p>
Equality impact assessment (4)	<p><i>Vulnerable learners may suffer: on page 110 one of the weaknesses listed of the post-16 proposal is: ‘does not provide a clear learning pathway within a school environment.’ This directly relates to vulnerable students and should be acknowledged and addressed in the Equality Impact Assessment.</i></p> <p><i>Where is the cross referencing between the Equality Impact Assessment and the Risk Assessment? The Equality Impact Assessment identifies many, many RISKS.</i></p>

## Urban Solutions for a Rural Area

- 11.43 PCC's proposals were generally criticised for being more suited to densely populated urban areas and failing to consider issues specific to the rurality of Powys - such as difficult transport networks and naturally smaller schools.
- 11.44 In the same vein, it was considered unfair to merge two schools that are so different both geographically and culturally - and so PCC was urged to revisit models in use in other rural areas in Wales and beyond.

### Comments (6)

*The proposal...may look the most suitable option on paper and may be an option for an urban environment but in a rural setting and in the real world it is a poor option.*

*There are significant contrasts between them. Brecon High School is a town school, where pupils are brought up in an urbanised area, and the nature of this is very different to Gwernyfed High School, a very rural school incorporating many local communities with children brought up differently to those in Brecon.*

*Small can be good. Big does not necessarily mean better, and a model that can work in densely populated urban areas is NOT the answer in a sparsely populated rural environment.*

## Post-16 Education

- 11.45 Some respondents complimented the quality of post-16 education at the two current schools and could not understand how the loss of their sixth forms could be of any benefit to pupils. Others rejected PCC's claim that the current range of A-Level subjects is insufficient; on the contrary, it was argued that some pupils do not want or need greater choice, while others would prefer to settle for a more limited range of subjects delivered in smaller, good quality sixth forms than risk their educational future with an apparently untested provider in the form of NPTC.
- 11.46 There were, however, a few comments around the poor choice of A-level subjects, inadequate facilities ('outdated' science labs for example) and poor teacher retention within the current high schools.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Existing quality of sixth forms (12)	<p><i>Nothing that I have heard or read from anyone has convinced me that there is a valid argument for [removal of the Sixth Form]. The Sixth Form needs to remain for countless reasons. You only had to hear the words spoken by several very brave pupils at the public meeting to see how important it is.</i></p> <p><i>Gwernyfed offers a broad range of the core academic A-levels (in association with other schools) that many pupils who attend sixth form are likely to want to take (quality is always better than quantity). In the past there have been few negative issues with the A-levels offered at Gwernyfed so what advantage is being gained by shutting it and who would benefit from the proposed closure?</i></p>
Quality of education more important than subject range (4)	<p><i>With regard to A levels I believe it is essential for students to have continuity with their teachers through to A levels. I also do not see the need to have a multitude of subjects to choose from when entry into universities is on the point system. Surely it would be better to offer a smaller core of subjects which guarantees enough pupils in each subject to enable the subject to be taught for the two years.</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>Gwernyfed is a community school where every pupil is known by every teacher, and the core subjects are taught to a very high standard. Given the choice between a more distant school offering greater subject choice and the current slightly restricted curriculum, we would favour the later every time. Greater subject choice does not outweigh the negatives of the merger.</i></p> <p><i>I want to stay in Gwernyfed and do not think PCC should prioritise choice (number of subjects offered) over quality of teaching and overall educational experience. I hope to study science "A" levels and note that I cannot find Chemistry (a basic academic "A" level) on the vast list of courses on offer by NPTC.</i></p>
Agreement that changes need to be made (3)	<p><i>Gwernyfed has a very poor choice of subjects to study at sixth form as evidenced by the relatively small numbers of children who stay there for sixth form.</i></p> <p><i>As it is now, I don't think the sixth form works very well. The youngsters don't have a pleasant environment to work in, or somewhere to relax, if they have free lessons. Science labs are outdated. I have looked at a sixth form college in Merthyr for my youngest. I feel that she has been disadvantaged in year 11. She has had two changes of teacher in the three sciences, a change of teacher in English and Welsh in the past 8 months, that can't be good in the final GCSE year.</i></p>

- 11.47 Many responses highlighted serious concerns about NPTC's educational standards and capacity to deliver the broad range of courses promised at the Brecon campus. The College's apparently poor reputation and lack of local accountability were also criticised; in relation to the latter, people commented on their own and others' experiences of courses being cancelled due to low numbers. Furthermore, current facilities (such as the science laboratories) at the College in Brecon were considered poorer than those at GHS in particular.
- 11.48 A further reservation was whether sufficient good quality staff could be recruited to teach for only 'a couple of hours a week'. Also, there was worry that they would not be as available and supportive as sixth form teachers who have built up a relationship with their pupils over a number of years.
- 11.49 Respondents typically did not wish to see post-16 education provided by an out-of-area organisation, leaving PCC with reduced control and influence; in fact, some accused the Council of abandoning their responsibilities in this respect. It was also alleged that PCC is using capital funding as an incentive to commit NPTC to Brecon, leading to accusations that the consultation outcome is predetermined.
- 11.50 There was also some distrust of NPTC's intentions and fear that its main focus is profit over educational quality. Respondents also questioned what would happen if the College decides it is not financially viable to continue its Brecon-based provision in future.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
NPTC - facilities (50)	<p><i>At the meeting, one of the representatives from the College was asked about A-Level provision at the College in Brecon, and in the course of his answer, mentioned that the College had a laboratory. ONE laboratory! Compared with separate Biology, Chemistry and Physics laboratories at Gwernyfed, how does moving A-Level Science studies to a single laboratory in Brecon "significantly improve the learning outcomes for learners", to quote your aspirational words in the Consultation Document? And even if all A-Level Science lessons can</i></p>



Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>be timetabled in this one laboratory, will the apparatus available for students compare with the excellent facilities currently available in Gwernyfed? If it were removed from the school, GCSE students would have to be taught by watching a screen or by textbook rather than by direct, live demonstrations round the front bench, which I believe is unforgiveable in an experimental subject.</i></p>
NPTC - quality of education (46)	<p><i>The consensus in our area is a total lack of confidence in the quality of provision this group will offer our older learners. Their results are evidence of this- 50.2% achieved A*-B grades, compared to Gwernyfed who had 67.6% equivalent.</i></p> <p><i>I also note that within NPTC's brochure, they directly compare their Gifted and Talented A level results with general national figures, which seems to imply a better relative pass rate than is actually achieved.</i></p> <p><i>If this proposal goes ahead where will my son get quality A level teaching? It won't be at NPTC. The results they boast have nothing to do with the Brecon campus. There is no confidence in the college locally and you will drive people away.</i></p> <p><i>I do not have confidence that this proposal can work in this rural area and provide me with the quality of education that my High School can. I really want to attend Gwernyfed but am sick of worrying about it and am seriously considering Hereford sixth form College.</i></p>
NPTC - choice of subjects (44)	<p><i>How can you guarantee that pupils will receive the full range and quality of courses at A-level in NPTC college rather than in a high school sixth form?</i></p> <p><i>In the document (it might be a typing error) the new school will offer no chemistry, meaning anyone wanting to pursue a medical career cannot do so ... more people will result in turning elsewhere for their education.</i></p> <p><i>Does NPTC have a legally binding agreement to provide the required 25 A Level subjects from one location, in Brecon? What is the duration of any such agreement?</i></p> <p><i>Some of my son's friends enrolled on courses and due to the low numbers are now being transported to Neath to access the course, which is more additional excessive travelling.</i></p> <p><i>I myself taught for the NPTC group (on the BTEC performing arts course, during the time that Coleg Powys was making the transition to NPTC group). I left this job after 8 months as the organisation was so poor; I would go so far as to say, shambolic. That particular course petered out due to lack of organisation and eventually ended, meaning students had to relocate to the Neath campus. This scenario could happen again with any of the courses (including A levels) that NPTC group offers. What a disaster that would be for Brecon's A-level students.</i></p>
NPTC - quality of teaching staff (10)	<p><i>We are not convinced NPTC will be able to recruit enough well qualified staff to a rural school.</i></p> <p><i>Where would staff be found to teach for what may well be only a few hours per week, spread out over several days?</i></p> <p><i>As a parent I will want my child educated at a school based sixth form by teachers who know her, who have inspired her, who know what she has already learnt, not random tutors who drop-in for a couple of lessons a week and can't be found at break-time for a quick question, or leading extra curricula activities, trips overseas, clubs etc.</i></p>



<p>Finances for proposed new build (10)</p>	<p><i>I understand that it has been proposed that £24 million is “given” to NPTC to improve their facilities in Brecon. Is this not foolhardy, considering the fact that following surveys in Gwernyfed, the vast majority of Year 11 and Year 10 pupils stated that they will go to Herefordshire for their education rather than to NPTC in Brecon and PCC will not have any say as to how this is spent?</i></p> <p><i>The proposal states that the Beacons Campus Project “may also include new facilities for NPTC Group of Colleges”. Is it the intention to publicly fund the facilities offered by a private company (NPTC) which operates for commercial gain, in order to make this proposal commercially viable for that company?</i></p> <p><i>What facilities might NPTC, a private company operated for profit, expect to be gifted by Powys in order to deliver the promised post-16 curriculum? What legally-binding guarantee does Powys Council have to protect this investment of public money into a private company, and over what period of time does NPTC Group guarantee to deliver these services in return for the investment in the facilities it will use to underwrite its business?</i></p>
<p>NPTC - motives, accountability and track record (5)</p>	<p><i>The proposals being made by Neath Port Talbot are thus not credible. It seems entirely possible that they are using the current proposals as a ‘Trojan Horse’ to further their ambition, clearly stated in a letter to the Welsh Government, to take over all post-16 provision in South Powys.</i></p> <p><i>They (the local population) don’t want to see the all-important post-16 education (the launch-pad to children’s future careers) handed over to an organisation from outside the area, which has no local accountability and who will withdraw or scale down the local provision as soon as it starts to look financially challenging to them.</i></p> <p><i>Why does the LEA insist on spending £24m on improving the college campus so that an out of county provider can take control with no input from Powys?</i></p> <p><i>We feel PCC’s proposal to hand over post 16 education to NPTC is a complete abdication of its responsibilities. Powys county council would relinquish any influence over its post 16 education - what happens in the future if standards drop or NPTC decide the Brecon campus is peripheral or loss making and leave?</i></p>

- 11.51 In addition to the above, it was claimed that the lack of local school-based sixth forms would encourage some parents to send their children to out-of-county colleges and schools, including those over the border in England. This, it was claimed, would not only impact on post-16 pupil numbers in Powys, but also on students’ right to be educated in their own country. There was also concern around additional transport costs, which it was feared families and pupils would be responsible for.
- 11.52 Additionally, those who had been affected by the closure of John Beddoes sixth form explained that the loss of those at BHS and GHS would lessen the provision and choice of school-based post-16 education in Powys even further. The negative impact of the changes at John Beddoes on pupils was also noted; for example, an inability to attend after-school clubs in their own areas due to excess travelling times.
- 11.53 Respondents also championed the benefits of having sixth form pupils within schools: they were described as role models for younger pupils and were thought to offer a great deal in terms of tutoring and mentoring. Furthermore, the continuity of education offered by school-based sixth forms was considered essential in terms of improving pupil performance and encouraging those who wish to further their education.

11.54 Alternative suggestions from written submitters included: merging Brecon and Gwernyfed sixth forms; and teachers travelling to different sites or carrying out 'Skype tutorials' to reduce travel and disruption for pupils, while still providing a range of subjects.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Parents/pupils moving out of county/Wales for post-16 education (63)	<p><i>Even more students will move to Hereford Sixth Form College if Gwernyfed closes which will exacerbate the problem of less money into Powys - there will be even less money to spend on those students wishing to continue their sixth form education in Brecon. Surely this is contradictory to what the council wish to achieve?</i></p> <p><i>I will have to put them on a bus to Herford Sixth Form college in ENGLAND, paid for by myself which I can't really afford. There will be no room for everyone at Crickhowell sixth form. Why should we send our children to school in England to secure a decent education? It is shameful. Why should Brecon be the only area without a school sixth form? Why are you ruining the future of Brecon's children?</i></p> <p><i>Have you considered the number of parents and pupils who want their child educated in a high school sixth form and will therefore move their child to Crickhowell, Abergavenny or Christ College for example and the impact this will have on the 'predicted' pupils numbers for NPTC college courses?</i></p>
Benefits of school-based sixth forms (16)	<p><i>How are you going to compensate those pupils in the lower years who would benefit from the mentoring and tutoring provided by sixth formers in school, for example in maths, reading, drama and sports? How are you going to compensate for the lack of opportunity for those sixth formers who would mentor and tutor younger pupils? The benefit to their self-esteem, consolidation of their own learning and the opportunity to add such opportunities to their university applications and CVs? Pupils in Year 11 currently deliver Peer Mentor Training to those pupils in Year 9 - how is this going to be facilitated with no Year 11 pupils in school?</i></p> <p><i>Brecon High School and its pupils would be impoverished if it lost its sixth form. If its older pupils had to travel a long distance to enjoy schooling to a level needed if they wished to go to university or college those pupils would be liable to be dissuaded from pursuing their education further or, if not dissuaded, will be handicapped by long daily journeys.</i></p> <p><i>The advantage offered by a teaching environment where teachers with long-established insight into pupils' character and educational characteristics will be thrown away.</i></p>
Alternative suggestions (7)	<p><i>If the most popular A level subjects were taught at the school in a regular sixth form, the more "exotic" subjects could be taught as tutorials, with maybe the teacher travelling rather than the pupils (to reduce the carbon footprint), or via skype, or distance learning.</i></p> <p><i>Why must the sixth forms at both Brecon and Gwernyfed be removed? If the council aspires to having sixth forms that have over 150 pupils and Brecon currently has 83 pupils with Gwernyfed having 79 pupils making a combined total of 162, why can't the two sixth forms be combined and delivered from a single site at Brecon High School, the larger of the two sites?</i></p> <p><i>I also feel that the sixth form could be organised better with teachers moving sites rather than students. Busing and taxiing students from one school to another is an enormous cost for the tax payer. Whereas teachers working on different sites is cheaper, easier, quicker and much less hassle. It will mean that the schools will need to work together to create sixth form timetables, but that is not very hard to do.</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<i>In light of the projected increase in pupil numbers from the current low, investment in two separate schools acting in concert to provide a wide range of A Levels may be a better way forward retaining as it would, a through-school provision in each site (and the advantages of continuity and pastoral care that this brings) as well as retaining at least some choice for pupils and parents.</i>
Transport cost for pupils/families (2)	<i>PCC has no obligation to transport people to NPTC whilst the new school is being built as it is not run under Powys, it is a Neath Port Talbot operation, and this means that the transport implication costs will be personal to families and would amount to a significant amount of money per week.</i>
Limited equivalent options to GHS in Powys (2)	<i>My daughter's 'catchment' school (John Beddoes in Newtown) lost its sixth form two years ago and was downgraded to a mere 'campus' of Newtown High, an impossible journey away. Now Powys cabinet is planning to close Gwernyfed High School, the only secondary school in Powys with a Sixth Form that is remotely geographically possible for us.</i>
Impact on sports activity/clubs (example John Beddoes) (1)	<i>I have seen the effect of closing John Beddoes sixth form in Presteigne by PCC and I know what a negative impact it has had on sports in Powys and in neighbouring Herefordshire. My son plays golf and once players are 16+ they cannot enter the Powys Schools Teams because they no longer go to school in Powys. The boys who previously played Junior League matches and took an active role in YFC are no longer able to as they board at Hartpury in Gloucestershire - with their parents having to be placed in this ridiculous situation when their children are only 16, having extra financial burdens as well as additional travel inconveniences owing to PCC taking away their local 6th Form.</i>

## Welsh Medium Education

- 11.55 Equity of choice and access to Welsh-medium education was regarded as a right - and moreover essential to ensure the continued vibrancy of the language in Brecon and its surrounding areas.
- 11.56 As such, PCC was accused of being discriminatory in discouraging Welsh language use among young people in the area; the expectation was that many pupils, especially from South Powys, would attend or transfer to their local English medium school instead of travelling long distances on public transport to Builth Wells High School. It was thus suggested that the projected number of pupils entering the Welsh stream at Builth has been overestimated.
- 11.57 The removal of the Welsh stream from BHS was thought to make little sense when Ysgol y Bannau - a category 1 Welsh language primary school - is located in such close proximity. Indeed, many concerns were expressed around the negative impact of the proposal on pupil numbers at Ysgol y Bannau - as well as on facilities and community life in the area.
- 11.58 Some responses criticised PCC for its recent policy decisions and a lack of support and funding for BHS - all of which have apparently undermined the Welsh stream there. Several respondents also said that the case for change document is somewhat disingenuous and misleading insofar as constant uncertainty around the future of the school's Welsh stream has, in fact, been a significant contributing factor to its declining pupil numbers and educational quality.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Choosing English over Welsh Medium Education/ would refuse to travel to Builth (43)	<p><i>I know many parents who already state that they will not put their children into Welsh if this goes forward, which I completely agree with... but Brecon and the surrounding areas will be losing our Welsh language and you are backing parents into a corner to make that choice. It's not fair and bad for Brecon as a town not to mention our children's futures!</i></p> <p><i>If this plan goes through, there is no chance of my daughter continuing to receive a Welsh education after she leaves primary school. This will be a matter of deep regret for us. Reluctantly, she will receive the rest of her education in England.</i></p> <p><i>The effect is not just on grades but by going to schools out of Wales they will not be taught Welsh which will create a large area in the east of Radnorshire where the language will be lost. This would not be a temporary loss but a loss forever.</i></p>
Impact on Welsh primary school provision (20)	<p><i>If this provision is removed the number of pupils starting at Ysgol y Bannau will decline, some are already questioning their decisions even before the consultation has been completed. With two thirds of the children coming from English speaking families they will not consider putting them into Welsh education if they then have to travel to Builth to continue with their Welsh education, they will choose English medium from the beginning. Some parents are already planning to remove their children from the school next term.</i></p> <p><i>I have already spoken with at least four different families in the last two months who have opted out of sending their children to Ysgol y Bannau in the next academic year for the simple reason that they have been led to believe that there will be no continuation of first language Welsh at the nearest Comprehensive school.</i></p> <p><i>You might not have any plans to close the Ysgol y Bannau but your proposal is already having a detrimental impact: pupils being removed prematurely from Welsh medium education altogether. The school is likely to close in the future.</i></p>
Risks to the Welsh language in the local area (19)	<p><i>The removal of teaching in Welsh sends a negative cultural message for the community, particularly when considering the recent changes to the Welsh Language Act. How are you going to address this and develop a population of Welsh speakers within the community of Brecon? The Welsh language grows and develops not only through the teaching of subjects in Welsh, but by the interaction of those in the 'Welsh' stream with those in the 'English' stream. How are you going to address this deficit by the loss of the Welsh Stream in Brecon High?</i></p> <p><i>Without your investment, the Welsh speaking community in south Powys will be deprived of its younger people as they will inevitably draw towards the [Builth Wells High School] community. You are doing nothing to encourage future generations to link with their local community in an aging population.</i></p> <p><i>The amount of Welsh spoken in this area is going to reduce dramatically. This contradicts the Welsh Government's plans to increase the use of Welsh language. Our grandchildren are being denied the opportunity to learn Welsh in their community and it seems unfair and discriminatory that at long last there are plans to invest in a new school at Brecon but our grandchildren will not benefit from these new facilities.</i></p>
Travel for Welsh medium provision – impacts (16)	<p><i>If the decision is taken to proceed with the decision to move the Welsh stream out of Brecon and ask Welsh speaking children to travel 50 plus miles a day to Builth High School there will be a high price paid by the students singled out because they speak the language of their country. Having to ask them to leave the clubs they are members of, asking them to travel 52</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>miles a day, asking them to say goodbye to their friends, asking them to have less time at home in the evenings, asking them to get up an hour and a half earlier, asking them to have less free time after school work, does not in my opinion make it better for our students.</i></p> <p><i>Those pupils wishing to learn through the medium of Welsh are currently travelling to Builth. However there are also question marks over the future of Builth so how far are you prepared for your Welsh students to travel in order to learn in the language of their culture?</i></p> <p><i>I am a pupil from Ysgol y Bannau in year five. I am writing to you to say I really want to keep the Welsh stream in Brecon High School. I do not want to go on a bus to Builth every day because I do not know anyone from that area and will not feel comfortable or confident there.</i></p>
Lack of local Welsh medium provision in Brecon is discriminatory (14)	<p><i>I believe the Welsh assembly government must relook at their decision to consider funding a new school in Brecon that does not include welsh medium education, thereby discriminating against welsh speakers. For those with the ability to ‘pop’ their children the 52 mile trip you may class this as an inconvenience but for those who can't you must accept you are going to be discriminating against them by taking away their welsh medium education.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, if a new school is built in Brecon but Welsh medium education is relocated to Builth, one might conclude that the pupils electing to access the Welsh medium education are in fact disadvantaged – indeed, discriminated against by removing their access to a newly built school.</i></p> <p><i>A term used in the Brecon High School Consultation event was “Equality Education”. How is moving Welsh speaking children out of their community so they can move forward with their Welsh language promoting and providing “Equality Education”? It is in fact marginalising them and pushing them away from their local community, which I feel is also a serious case of discrimination towards the Welsh Language.</i></p> <p><i>Families who would like to choose Welsh medium education from low income families will have to choose between Welsh and quality of life [due to travel times/cost] ... Low income families with special needs will be unable to carry on through the medium of Welsh which would be an advantage in the job market.</i></p>
Facts and figures supporting the proposal are misleading (7)	<p><i>The reason that the numbers of children not choosing to attend the Welsh Medium stream in Brecon High School is a self-fulfilling prophecy created by scare mongering.</i></p> <p><i>These statistics are the result of council’s own failings. Over more than a decade the council has failed to effectively communicate its vision for Welsh medium secondary education in South Powys and has cast doubt on the viability of continued Welsh medium secondary education provision in Brecon. Unsurprisingly, parents have not had the confidence to commit their children to an uncertain educational future. Dozens of children are now educated at Ysgol Gyfun Ystylyfera and elsewhere (requiring in some cases around trip of more than 40 mile each day). How ironic it is that the result of Council's failure to set a compelling vision is now being used, via the consequential statistics, to justify removal of provision in Brecon. It’s shameful.</i></p> <p><i>Until the free transport to Builth, numbers in Brecon were on the increase and BWHS on the decrease. By projecting these figures forward, you will have more Brecon families in BWHS than Builth families. Consultation has not been run fairly...PCC has deliberately misled families into thinking the decision to close Brecon High School Welsh-medium provision has been made. This has led to falsifying numbers in the consultation document.</i></p>



Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Transitioning from primary to secondary (6)	<p><i>The school (Brecon) has a positive working relationship with the primary schools and exceptional transition arrangements. As a pupil at the school myself, the work the staff put in with the primary to secondary transition allows you to feel safe and secure and not disrupt the actual learning that is taking place.</i></p> <p><i>I for one fail to see the sense in this proposal for a number of reasons, not least given that there is a Category 1 Welsh language primary school fewer than 100 meters away from Brecon High School. Where is the nearest Category 1 school to Builth High School?</i></p> <p><i>Ysgol Y Bannau currently has a very successful Welsh-medium after school club called, 'Y Gorlan' and employs Welsh speaking children from the sixth form of Brecon High School providing opportunities to use Welsh in the community and earn some pocket money. Y Gorlan would struggle to find Welsh speaking people to work these odd hours 3.30 - 5.30 and therefore would either end up being English only or closing.</i></p>
Lack of critical mass- undermines the case for consolidation (5)	<p><i>Figures for Builth's Welsh-Medium Year 8 and 9 have not risen much or even at all. This does not engender confidence in "improved provision" and argues against a critical mass ... fewer people will enter in the first place, more will go out of county after KS2 ... those who have gone to Builth have simply transferred from one local Welsh stream in Brecon to another Welsh stream twenty miles away.</i></p> <p><i>The core Welsh-speaking population in South Powys is within the Brecon High School catchment not the Builth Wells catchment. Parents are unlikely to choose for their children to travel the extra distances to and from Builth Wells. So the critical mass will not happen, with a net result of reduced Welsh-medium provision overall.</i></p> <p><i>Powys should have a Welsh Secondary school, but Powys does not have the numbers to do this and by trying to force children to a central point will simply not work. Powys needs to look at ways to increase numbers in Welsh medium within Primary schools to create the numbers that can filter into the Brecon Welsh stream.</i></p> <p><i>I do not believe that the numbers used in the consultation regarding the numbers of pupils transferring to Builth from Brecon are in any way correct. All of the many parents I have spoken to in the Brecon Welsh stream none are thinking of transferring to Builth. We ourselves have not been asked where we would send our children if Brecon were to no longer be able to educate children in Welsh. How were these numbers arrived at? Who plucked these numbers out from the data? Are they just a guess?</i></p>
Impact on community life and facilities (4)	<p><i>The impact of these able and talented students on the cultural life of Ysgol y Bannau and Brecon High School and the community is enormous; orchestral events, school productions, debating competitions, carol concerts are all events that are woven into the creative fabric of the school day and after school rehearsals and are then transposed out into the local community... There have always been Welsh language items in these events and the school and community will be all the more diminished because of it. For the officers of county to suggest as they did in the consultation meeting that these students will be compensated by Welsh medium clubs and societies is both an insult to the teachers of Sport, Music and Drama within the school and a complete fallacy.</i></p> <p><i>There is already a Welsh medium primary school and even Welsh medium nursery provision in Brecon, taking away the opportunity for these children to continue their education in their home town does not seem like a consistent and well thought out policy. Are the council planning on shutting down these facilities as well?</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Consultation Document is skewed toward Builth Wells option (2)	<p><i>As soon as I start reading the draft language impact assessment we can see the information within it is skewed towards the council's preferred outcome. Looking at 'Welsh language activities provided by the schools' this is completely wrong and as it is referred to at other points in the document it is important to be correct.</i></p> <p><i>Brecon high has many activities carried out in welsh, it has its annual eisteddfod taking place on the 15th April with categories in welsh, second language welsh and English that will involve the whole school celebrating the welsh culture in and around Brecon. The carol service held at Christmas in the cathedral in Brecon was a memorable occasion with both welsh readings and songs by welsh speaking students that was very well attended and enjoyed by the community. Students from the welsh stream are regular contributors to 'papur bro, y Fan a'r lle' the Brecon and Radnor welsh supplement. Regular Welsh for adults courses are held on the campus numerous times a week. Some children even attend a local welsh group in our village of Talybont helping people who are learning the language. None of these are mentioned in the document. Why? ... As soon as I start reading the draft language impact assessment we can see the information within it is skewed towards the council's preferred outcome...</i></p>
Decision to support Welsh medium in Brecon has failed to materialise (1)	<p><i>In 2014 a report done by the council identified that the largest number of respondents who would prefer a designated welsh medium school were those in the Brecon catchment area. In 2014 the council also insisted they would bring Brecon up to 2B status. At some point the council has reneged on this commitment to Brecon High school welsh stream. Why has this been the case as it is a fundamental reason that the decision has been made to favour Builth over Brecon for the Welsh streams location.</i></p>
Lack of financial support for Brecon (1)	<p><i>The consultation report refers to support that was given to Brecon High School from 2011 in respect of increasing Welsh medium provision. There has only been the additional financial element given as part of the funding agreement in the fair funding formula. The Authority promised to work towards Brecon High achieving 2B status, however, under the fair funding formula and because of the number of pupils being less than Builth it was inevitable that Brecon High could not provide the same provision. There was no attempt whatsoever by the Authority to rectify this issue by giving Brecon High the necessary funding to do so like Ysgol Bro Ddyfi used to receive additional funding because it was a small school in order for them to deliver the curriculum. Likewise the same should have happened in Brecon High School but despite numerous attempts the Authority chose to ignore the requests. Was this a deliberate act by the Authority to make the provision at Brecon High School even less viable</i></p>

11.59 The balance of views called for the preservation of the Welsh stream at Brecon and there were suggestions to: increase pupils numbers by ensuring local primary school pupils (including Sennybridge) attend BHS; invest the money saved on pupils travelling to Builth into the recruitment of good quality Welsh medium teachers; and allow teachers to travel between the two sites to enable both to remain open. Others said they would accept a lesser range of subjects if at least some Welsh medium education could be retained at Brecon.

11.60 There was also general support for strengthening Welsh-medium provision across Powys as a whole: while some proposed Welsh-medium staff pooling across primary and secondary schools, others called for PCC to commit to establishing a fully Welsh-medium secondary school to serve South and Mid Powys.



Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Support for the existing Welsh stream at Brecon (4)	<p><i>You could also boost the numbers in the Welsh stream at Brecon High School by stopping sending pupils across the border to Ystalyfera. Paying for children to be schooled out of county just seems ludicrous to me. I was also extremely shocked to hear that Sennybridge Primary School has been designated as a feeder school for Ystalyfera. Crazy! If you look at the pupil numbers in the nursery class at Sennybridge Welsh Stream and the number in the nursery class at Ysgol Y Bannau (and made parents aware that you wouldn't be paying for them to be schooled out of county or bussed to Builth) you would see that there are enough children between these two schools to have two classes in the Welsh stream at Brecon High school.</i></p> <p><i>I would imagine the money paid out on buses would pay the salaries of quite a few Welsh medium teachers who could be used to boost the Welsh stream at Brecon High School rather than making the pupils travel. Or, as an alternative, why don't you get the teachers to travel between Brecon and Builth High Schools? Give the teachers a travel allowance, keep the Welsh streams open in both schools and save yourselves some money?</i></p>
Offer some local Welsh-medium provision (4)	<p><i>Many parents at Brecon High School and Ysgol y Bannau would accept a reduced number of subjects through Welsh at Brecon High School if it allowed their children to remain locally.</i></p> <p><i>Support Welsh speakers in their own communities rather than shipping them away. We would rather see some Welsh education available in Brecon than see one that may offer more choice in Builth.</i></p> <p><i>Provide free transport to Brecon as well as Builth; give local families the choice; stimulate both schools to work hard at improving its offer and PCC can demonstrate its positive commitment to Welsh-medium education.</i></p>
Support for establishing a dedicated Welsh medium school (3)	<p><i>Establishing Welsh medium Secondary Schools across the county therefore should be a key element of the council's strategic forward planning and an indispensable foundation stone in terms of the wider development of Welsh medium education in Powys. There can be no justification for any further delay, which would deprive another generation of Powys' pupils of the basic opportunities available to the majority of their peers in the rest of Wales.</i></p> <p><i>I am also a former pupil of Ysgol Gyfun Rhydfelen – the first Welsh language school in South Wales established in 1962 with 80 pupils on the school roll in that inaugural year. With the support of the local authority, parents, teachers and the local community, the school grew to over a thousand pupils within a decade. It sparked a renaissance in Welsh language education and remains through its alumni a testament to what can be achieved with passion and imagination. It also offers an example that a successful school offering excellent Welsh language provision could easily provide a critical mass of new learners to provide the numbers so desired by the authority. It would require a broader base of Welsh language primary schools in the area to feed the secondary school. This in turn would be in keeping with the Welsh government's education strategy regarding Welsh language.</i></p>
Use of Technology to link Welsh Streams (3)	<p><i>Using modern technology such as video conferencing, etc. would enable the continuation of a Secondary Welsh stream in both Brecon and Builth Wells High Schools, reduce student travel and embed a vibrant Welsh educational culture in all areas of South Powys. What research / modelling has been conducted by PCC Educational Officers into how new learning / teaching technologies could enable a Welsh A level stream to be retained in all South Powys High Schools?</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>Investment in technology may be able to facilitate a small core group of Welsh medium teachers to teach lessons to pupils across multiple sites, using video-conferencing facilities, online seminar software and so forth - a more attractive and viable option than shipping pupils who want a Welsh medium education to and from Builth Wells every day.</i></p> <p><i>I would much rather see a system of enhanced collaboration between existing institutions, involving imaginative use of modern technology to facilitate and enhance learning, the sharing of teaching and learning resources between existing schools, and so forth.</i></p>
Share Welsh teachers across sites (1)	<p><i>It was stated in the Builth Wells consultation evening that teams of teachers will travel between the two sites (being Builth Wells High School and Llandrindod-Wells High school) which would allow them to deliver lesson to both sites. Why can't a Welsh speaking team of teachers travel between Builth Wells High School and Brecon High School? Not only will it drastically cut travel costs, it would also ensure the security, safety and welfare of our children by keeping them off the roads and prevent anxiety and stress of pupils and their families.</i></p>

## Environmental Impacts

<sup>11.61</sup> Some respondents accused PCC of contradicting environmental policy insofar as its proposed changes would result in a greater carbon footprint. Furthermore, others questioned the relative weighting given to environmental concerns in PCC's options appraisal and whether it might be more prudent to improve the existing schools instead of a new build.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Increased travel = greater carbon footprint (28)	<p><i>How can this be environmentally sound, as Powys itself is a 'Healthy Schools' county. This appears to be an oxymoron and a classic example of not 'practising what you preach'. This also contradicts your plans as a county to encourage recycling and our fortnightly rubbish collections to become three weekly collections in order to reduce the carbon footprint that Powys as a whole is producing.</i></p> <p><i>There will be a significant impact on the environment with the additional transport costs and the associated increase of the carbon footprint. Please can the council justify why they are making a decision that goes directly against national government environmental policy?</i></p>
New build or reuse? (3)	<p><i>Continuous growth and development use resources that contribute to greenhouse gases, please consider other values, i.e. improving existing old-established good quality establishments.</i></p> <p><i>The BREEAM mission statement claims to: "Develop resilience and mitigate against climate change". Whatever happened to 'reduce, re-use, re-cycle' in order to achieve these goals?</i></p> <p><i>Powys CC should complete a Strategic Environmental Assessment for the proposals in accordance with Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.</i></p>

## Alternative Proposals

- 11.62 Several respondents called on PCC to consider a through-school model for Brecon (and a couple suggested the same for GHS) - while another suggested a similar model to John Beddoes and Newton for Gwernyfed, whereby GHS would become part of a campus school.
- 11.63 Greater partnerships and shared resources (for example through federation or combining sixth forms) were also proposed: these, it was hoped, would mitigate against the critical mass issues cited in the case for change.
- 11.64 Several people would like to see PCC adopt better and more creative uses of information technology across sites within a federation or consortium model in order to allow pupils to access a better range of subjects without having to travel long distances.

Sub-Theme	Comments
Through-school or federation model (33)	<p><i>Would combining aspects of primary and secondary school provision be more transformational? This would encourage a 'learning continuum' for pupils and keep facilities local, in line with the Donaldson Report. Were better ways of working considered, such as federation schools with shared governance, resources, facilities, staff and services, thus keeping schools in specific localities?</i></p> <p><i>Create a through school combining Mount Street Infants/Juniors and Brecon High. This will enable the debt to be wiped. Why is this the right proposal? There are serious concerns over the sustainability of Mount street Infants and Juniors. In particular the Juniors. The council could sell this land for residential development as it is surrounded by residential houses currently. This would bring similar proceeds to selling Gwernyfed. This would give through school pupil numbers of around 800+. This alongside the 120 new homes being built directly opposite Brecon High School has the potential of numbers closer to 900 pupils. Gwernyfed would be able to regain its former pupil numbers by the removal of this constant threat hanging over it. The community surrounding Gwernyfed could continue to prosper and grow.</i></p> <p><i>An All-through 4 to 18 model in Brecon and Gwernyfed, and retaining Welsh-medium provision in Brecon.</i></p> <p><i>Think outside the box! Include the sixth form at Crickhowell in the development of proposals for a dedicated sixth form at the site of one of the schools (probably Brecon) and the removal of sixth form provision at Crickhowell and Gwernyfed with the NPTCG to provide a complimentary vocational education (which is the bit they might be good at). This would create more 11-16 spaces at Gwernyfed and Crickhowell and allow the benefits of a critical mass of 6th students.</i></p>
Better use of technology (4)	<p><i>What research/modelling has been conducted by PCC Educational Officers into how new learning/teaching technologies could enable a reduction in student travel, enable interschool collaboration around subjects taught and increase numbers of A levels offered, etc.?</i></p> <p><i>Why has PCC not considered an option with enhanced use of ICT, leaving schools to remain open, more subjects to be offered, greater efficiency of staff, and increased choice for pupils?</i></p> <p><i>We can understand that taxiing (sixth form) students between campuses is not sustainable, but with modern technology of video conferencing, webinars etc. there must be scope for some innovative link ups with other education authorities.</i></p>

Primary school on Gwernyfed site (2)	<i>Why are we not considering building a primary school on the Gwernyfed site? This would give us the opportunity to increase the numbers at the school by increasing the age-range catered for. Locally, Christ College Brecon has done exactly that in order to improve their income streams to stay viable. Surely we could do something similar in the public sector, to make Gwernyfed a more financially secure unit by boosting numbers? We have a huge site for further buildings and it is a safe and secure site for younger pupils. There seems to be so much practical sense in this option. It keeps the community cohesion by increasing the numbers of students on this site making it more financially viable and offering a continuity of education on one site.</i>
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## Consultation Process

- 11.65 There was an evident sense of distrust in the way PCC has developed its case for change. Many felt that the consultation process is at best cosmetic, whereas others alleged a pre-determined outcome and cited both bias (against GHS) and errors in the consultation document.
- 11.66 Some respondents were keen to see the decision-making process involving not only the PCC Cabinet, but all elected members. There was also criticism of: PCC's performance at the consultation meetings; the objectivity of the consultation questionnaire; and the inaccessibility of the online version of the consultation document.
- 11.67 More generally, respondents demonstrated a loss of confidence in PCC and sought reassurance that their views and the strength of opposition to the proposals would be heeded. Their responses also underlined the need for early dialogue with affected communities in developing options for schools reorganisation, especially in light of the recent primary schools process.

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
Decision has already been made (91)	<p><i>Since the proposal to close the school was first sprung in 2009, the Council has attempted to 'ram' through its agenda in ignorance of the vocal and compelling views of local people. It has purposefully timetabled key and burdensome meetings during the exam period in an attempt to dissuade staff, pupils and parents from expressing their views. At a recent Cabinet meeting, the Council changed the agenda fifteen minutes before hand to include discussion of the proposed closure and had not provided its scrutiny committee with the documents necessary for it to evaluate the merits of the proposal.</i></p> <p><i>I believe that the outcome of the reorganisation of schools is already predetermined by the council, from the beginning it has been implied that this must succeed and that the whole process has got behind on its schedule, from the way the consultation paper is skewed in favour of the proposal just goes to reinforce this...I feel not enough thought and consideration will be given to this decision (to close Welsh provision at Brecon) and it will be waved through as a small part of a 'bigger' decision (to close Gwernyfed High School).</i></p> <p><i>Powys also made a number of comments during the consultation meeting held on 20th April 2016 which strongly suggests that they had pre-determined the outcome, which is outrageous. This was brought to our attention when talking about the legal challenge last summer. Powys said they had 'fallen behind' and needed to 'catch up' showing they have no intention at all of changing their decision and are not going to listen to people's views and take them on board constructively, again showing their inadequacy.</i></p>

Sub-theme (number of comments)	Comments
	<p><i>The proposal for secondary schools, and in particular the closure of Gwernyfed is weak, ill-considered and lazy. It uses many statistics and facts that are simply wrong. It manipulates other statistics until they suit the argument. It falsifies existing research information by cherry-picking extracts from it and using them out of context, so that they appear to support the proposal but in fact no longer say what they were intended to. It fails to recognise the key factors which should inform the decision, glossing over or disregarding those which may reflect unfavourably on the proposal. The council officers responsible have come up with one, lazy idea and cannot or will not consider any other, and so they keep drumming on with a plan which simply does not stand up to intelligent scrutiny.</i></p>
Recent primary school re-configuration (82)	<p><i>The Council is not renowned for delivering on their promises. Before 2015, they closed many small primary schools in the area with the promise that we'd have a nice, new school in Hay and it would be finished by September 2015. Now it is April 2016, and not a single brick had been laid since then. This leads me, and many other people, to have no reason to believe that we are going to have the high school built either. We have been given no evidence that the Council isn't just going to close Gwernyfed and Brecon and then put the whole plan to the side and start on a new project. That is what happened to the primary schools and the Council shouldn't be starting to close anything else before they've built the new primary school in Hay.</i></p> <p><i>There have been plans for the rebuilding of 5 primary schools within the Gwernyfed catchment area and as yet, nearly 8 years later, not a brick has been laid.</i></p> <p><i>Powys have already caused problems with primary school closures in the catchment area of Gwernyfed High School, and the promised new primary schools which still, after years, - have not been started - have they even bought the land? This does not bode well for this proposal.</i></p>
Lack of trust/lost confidence in PCC (36)	<p><i>I would like to take my children out of the Powys education system. It is not fit for purpose. There is a high-handed culture of presenting plans to the people and communities of Powys with very little interest in engagement and dialogue. This causes huge amounts of stress to communities directly affected and, presumably, makes the process of carrying out any plans extremely difficult, if not impossible...</i></p> <p><i>I have absolutely zero confidence in Powys county council...In 2009, Powys proposed to close Gwernyfed, but they backed down as their process was flawed and done so illegally. Then again in the summer of 2015 the proposal to close the school was challenged successfully once more as Powys county council failed to comply with their own and Welsh Government published policies for developing school transition proposals. They then brought back to the table the same proposals with no real evidence of them having considered alternative options in any depth whatsoever. Surely this alone proves that the people behind this plan are totally inadequate...Also in this meeting they failed to address specific questions asked and concerns raised about the decision to close Gwernyfed.</i></p>

<p>Cabinet composition (24)</p>	<p><i>The Powys County Council Cabinet's members are nearly all from Montgomeryshire and this area has only one representative. In Montgomeryshire, they aren't closing any schools at all because they know that they'd get voted out. In this part of Powys we can't vote them out or do anything about it so they close our schools...It means that they can do whatever they want to us and we are powerless to stop them.</i></p> <p><i>I was appalled at the recent consultation meeting at Gwernyfed to discover that most of the members proposing these changes were not from this area of Powys...I notice that NO schools in their areas are planning to close.</i></p> <p><i>Why are the local councillors not allowed to vote on what is a monumental decision for this area. I believe the executive council of nine members, who hold all the power were chosen by the council leader Barry Thomas, none of who come from this area. This is totally undemocratic. Can you please tell me if this is a legal use of the council's power?</i></p>
<p>PCC performance at consultation meetings (20)</p>	<p><i>I attended the Public Meeting on Wednesday 20th April 2016 and was very disturbed at the lack of information given by the Councillors and what answers were given were not satisfactory. Clearly the community have lost faith in the Council and do not feel that our education is safe in their hands.</i></p> <p><i>I attended the consultation meeting in April at Gwernyfed ... Now I finally know what the phrase "pulling the wool over one's eyes" means! Thank goodness for the many members of the public who DID take the time to get their facts right and spoke so eloquently and passionately for saving Gwernyfed school. Unlike those members of the council in attendance who clearly did NOT have the means to back up their reasoning for closure, evident in the stammering and spluttering and indeed the number of NON responses!</i></p> <p><i>Powys County are unable to answer specific questions and concerns raised about the decision to close. If Powys are to go ahead with this proposals, who's to say they haven't covered all the legal work and thought of every outcome and possibility.</i></p>
<p>The Council will ignore views but instead need to listen (17)</p>	<p><i>The current proposal definitely illustrates that the learners' opinions and concerns have not even been slightly considered and therefore has left everyone feeling completely opposed and disgusted to the proposal.</i></p> <p><i>I know the Gwernyfed Governors have tried (as have many others) to make constructive suggestions to PCC cabinet for alternative proposals. This has continuously fallen on deaf ears. I urge PCC to develop a strategy that builds on the success of Gwernyfed High School to drive up the standards in both schools without the continual threat of closure hanging over them. Gwernyfed must be retained as a stand-alone school or as part of a federation arrangement which crucially also includes "A" level provision.</i></p> <p><i>Due to the level of campaigning it is evident that local interests are not being taken into account neither are they being engaged. If they had developed a dialogue with the community, they would know just how vital Gwernyfed is. The reorganisation is in no way balanced or meeting the need of the community.</i></p> <p><i>Listen to the voices of the children, if not the adults! Remember that our future is in their hands and if they don't get the very best schooling we can provide then the outlook for Powys is very bleak indeed.</i></p>



Questionnaire (8)	<p><i>On page 2 of the questionnaire, I am asked to comment on whether I believe the council is right to make changes and that there is a case for change in Powys education. Is this not potentially misleading - as responses may indicate that a change is needed but not the one suggested in the proposal? I am concerned as to how the cabinet will present this data.</i></p> <p><i>While the questionnaire states the case for change, it does not provide any reasons why the proposal should NOT be considered. Is this not potentially creating a bias in responses and is a consultation document allowed to be one-sided?</i></p> <p><i>I was disappointed that the documents published by Powys County Council (PCC) for consultee responses were poorly designed. Some of the questions were leading and it was not possible to provide full and open answers. For example you may strongly agree that Brecon needs a new High School building but strongly disagree that Gwernyfed should close or merge with Brecon.</i></p>
Public consultation meetings (7)	<p><i>I applied for a ticket for the public consultation meeting in Gwernyfed but was told that it had 'sold out'. I was added to a 'reserve list' but heard no more. I feel that if people were refused entry that another meeting needs to be added. It cannot be regarded as a public consultation if some are excluded from the process.</i></p> <p><i>The ORS representative who chaired the meeting at Llandrindod told us in that meeting that his aim was ""to ensure that you all get ample opportunity to ask questions"". Was that laudable aim achieved at Gwernyfed? You know very well that many of those who wanted to speak at Gwernyfed were unable to speak because the meeting ended before everyone had a chance to do so. Is it acceptable to allocate the same insufficient amount of time for questions at a meeting at the failing school in Builth Wells, which is to be improved and expanded under the cabinet's plans, as for the meeting at the successful school at Gwernyfed, which faces closure? If the answers to those two questions is no, as it has to be, is not the entire consultation process a sham?</i></p> <p><i>The council has a legal requirement to hold consultation meetings but this particular meeting amounted to nothing more than a superficial attempt to tick a box. Concern with time, no answers to any questions asked and the controlling over who was able to speak does not demonstrate the Council's legal following of the School closure procedure.</i></p>
Access to consultation document (1)	<p><i>I can't find a link to a pdf printable paper version online, only to the electronic one. To have the consultation resources only easily available online discriminates against the very young and the very old and anyone without computer skills or access to a computer.</i></p>
Reporting (1)	<p><i>Will Powys County Council produce a review of the consultation process, showing responses of all the groups included in the list of consultees? And if not, why not?</i></p>



# 12. Petitions

## Overview of Petitions

- 12.1 Two petitions were organised against the proposal and this chapter reviews those of which ORS and Powys County Council is aware. We apologise if there have been other petitions of which we have no knowledge. Petitions reviewed below are all of those known by ORS and Powys County Council.
- 12.2 The total number of signatures across all petitions is 4,162. It has not been possible to determine how many signatures on online petitions were gathered during the consultation period. Figures for online petitions are correct as of 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

## Summary of Petitions

### Overturn decision to close Gwernyfed High School

- 12.3 A paper and an online version of a petition entitled 'Overturn decision to close Gwernyfed High School' exist against the proposal. 1,817 signatures were gathered on paper, while 1,787 signatures plus several hundred comments were gathered online.
- 12.4 The online version of this petition found at Change.org includes the following preamble:

*We do not want to see Brecon High School close. We want to see it reach a stage when its educational standards and financial management reflect those at Gwernyfed and where its students and staff have a decent building in which to work together. This must not be achieved by sacrificing the quality of education received by students at Gwernyfed High School. It has taken many years to achieve those high standards and any new school will take time and hard work to provide the education, in its broadest sense, to which all our young people are entitled.*

### Save our Schools

- 12.5 An online petition entitled 'Save our Schools' exists with 558 signatures.
- 12.6 The petition is found at kirstywilliams.org.uk and includes the following preamble:
- We the undersigned support Kirsty Williams AM petition calling for the Independent led Powys County Council to keep our local Schools open.*
- 12.7 It is important to note that the petition is not specifically targeted towards this proposal, but instead makes mention of perceived impacts of *both* consultations involving Brecon, Gwernyfed, Llandrindod and Builth Wells High Schools.

# 13. Social Media

## Main issues and themes from social media

- 13.1 This chapter is in two parts: the first provides an overview of the social media pages found and the method by which they were analysed; and the second offers a review of the arguments, discussions and themes arising from online discussions.

### Introduction

- 13.2 Five social media pages were found to contain updates, comments or tweets referring to PCC's proposal and/or its perceived impacts. A summary of these pages can be found in Figure 1 below.

Name of page/group	Link	Likes/ followers
Powys County Council	<a href="https://facebook.com/powyscc/">facebook.com/powyscc/</a>	3,395
Save Powys Schools	<a href="https://facebook.com/Save-Powys-Schools-1552306661705453/">facebook.com/Save-Powys-Schools-1552306661705453/</a>	2,091
Save Gwernyfed High School	<a href="https://facebook.com/SaveGwernyfedHighSchool/">facebook.com/SaveGwernyfedHighSchool/</a>	1,161
Brecon High School	<a href="https://facebook.com/BreconHighSchool/">facebook.com/BreconHighSchool/</a>	293
Save Gwernyfed High School	<a href="https://twitter.com/SaveGwernyfedHS">twitter.com/SaveGwernyfedHS</a>	186

- 13.3 Each of the pages has been collated and analysed via a code frame which was designed to capture each unique argument or theme discussed. To ensure consistency between social media users and all other respondents, only content posted during the consultation period has been considered.
- 13.4 It is also worth noting that in addition to the above, a private Facebook group named 'Save Gwernyfed Sixth Form' exists. This group has 382 members and intends 'to aid with the coordination of preventative action to save Gwernyfed Sixth Form'. This group is open to Gwernyfed Sixth Form Alumni only, and as such cannot be analysed by ORS.

## Main Themes Raised on Social Media

### Quality of Education

- 13.5 Social media users frequently commented on the quality and 'well-rounded' education provided at GHS, as well as the excellent pastoral care offered there:

*I see no logical reason to close a successful school in one of the largest catchment areas, producing good results year on year. Closing Gwernyfed would be a total travesty (Save Powys Schools)*

*It provides a well-rounded education resulting in happy, confident, successful young adults. Bigger is not necessarily better (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*The best educational standards for miles around (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

[Gwernyfed] *does what a school should do and does it well* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

*It is well documented that Gwernyfed is a successful school academically and deserves to remain open.* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

## Buildings and Estates

- 13.6 Social media users commented on the poor condition of the school buildings at Brecon, and argued that the town needs a brand new school regardless of the outcome of the consultation – and in addition to the retention of GHS:

*Brecon needs a new school. Gwernyfed needs to stay where it is* (Brecon High School)

*Brecon need a new school no matter what the consultation comes with. At the moment there is a 'do nothing' option in the proposal* (Brecon High School)

*Hopefully they take this opportunity to rethink plans to close Gwernyfed High School and take forward the logical proposal to build a new school in Brecon without closing Gwernyfed! #SaveGwernyfed* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

- 13.7 In contrast, the GHS school buildings, facilities and surroundings were viewed very positively: people considered it a 'travesty' that they should be lost, although some suspected plans to convert the site into a 'super primary school' for the area:

*How many children outside of private education get to go to school in a building like this? I remember a grand staircase, wooden panelling, ghost stories, beautiful grounds and slogging my way up that road in cross country lessons! It's an absolute travesty* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

*Gwernyfed is a great school in a spectacular setting. It has some new facilities as well as the splendid Manor House* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

*Some of the best schools in Britain are in old buildings* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

*Keeping the sports facilities was the hint that this site will be recycled and no new primaries will be built, meaning this site will be the new Gwernyfed cluster super primary school* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

*Jeremy Patterson eluded to exactly what [I've] thought for [years]. @GwernyfedHS will become the super school for cluster primaries.* (Save Gwernyfed High School)

- 13.8 Social media users also discussed the proposed new school in the context of: its size and capacity; and future-proofing to cater for new housing developments and population growth:

*New school and college set to be less than half the size of current buildings. [The] school will have just eight spare places when it opens...* (Brecon High School)

*Powys unable to address concerns over capacity at new school which will only have a projected 8 spare places when it opens* (Brecon High School)

*1092 pupils due combined school by 2020/2021, capacity 1100 - just 8 spare places* (Brecon High School)

*National Parks housing data reveals 137 houses could be built opposite High School by 2020. Total build for Brecon by 2020 could be 273. 152 houses also possible in Talgarth, as well as 80 in Hay. All in catchment area of proposed new school ... 1100 places in [the proposed] school. Pupil numbers*

*across both schools 1092 by 2021. Current capacity across both schools 1680, including sixth form (Brecon High School)*

*We must future proof, class sizes in juniors are increasing (Brecon High School)*

*No planning for the future. (Brecon High School)*

## Finances and Funding

<sup>13.9</sup> Some social media users questioned the motives behind PCC's proposals, suggesting that they are primarily financial insofar as Brecon High School's debts will be eradicated if a new school is established. In this context, GHS was thus seen as something of a 'sacrificial lamb':

*This means for Brecon that their debt will be wiped out (Save Powys Schools)*

*[The] finance person stated [in the Gwernyfed public meeting] that by going ahead the £1.4m debt Brecon have built up would be written off – how can they say it's not financial? (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*We're paying for the mismanagement of Brecon High School by Powys (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*Powys sums do not add up. The only thing they care about is the £1.5million deficit they have mismanaged. They are wrecking the education of pupils in Brecon and Gwernyfed to cover it up. (Brecon High School)*

## Pupil Impacts

<sup>13.10</sup> Concerns were expressed around transportation, particularly in relation to: the implications of longer journeys to and from school for GHS pupils in terms of tiredness, time for homework and revision, the ability to undertake extra-curricular activities and the potential for bullying on school buses; additional expense for families and PCC; and the potential environmental impacts of increased travel. Some typical comments can be seen below:

*My kids already travel for 2 hours a day to go to Gwernyfed and if they close they'll have another 20-30 mins more to get to Brecon. We only live 7 miles from Builth but aren't in the catchment so have to pay for transport if we don't want them going to Brecon (Save Powys Schools)*

*Opening a new school in Brecon would mean long travelling times for some pupils (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*Children shouldn't have to spend hours on buses when a great education is available locally. (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*How can anyone say that travelling is better? When are these poor kids going to be able to do homework and revision? Tired children do not do well. Powys County Council are really not thinking at all (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*It'll have a negative impact on families' interaction with attending school events and quality time for the children and young adults (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*PCC's proposal will give us the choice of either ridiculous travel times meaning our kids spend hours on a bus instead of time which could be spent being active in sports clubs, [Young Farmers Club], out on the farm etc. OR the extra burden of travel expense to a new school as well as the more*

*important emotional upheaval of uprooting the children from their friends and community. Some choice (Save Powys Schools)*

*Vodden Report - Bullying on School bus is an interesting read. Adding safeguarding element into my letter to Powys to help @SaveGwernyfedHS (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*The long term bus costs and environmental impact is bonkers. (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

- 13.11 For these reasons, many social media users suggested that GHS parents may choose not to send their children to a new high school in Brecon, instead preferring other Powys schools, out-of-county schools or schools in England. Either of the latter two options, it was said, would result in a detrimental loss of revenue for PCC:

*Parents won't have to send their children to Brecon. Crickhowell, Builth, Lady Hawkins and Fairfield are alternative choices (Save Powys Schools)*

*I think that a lot of parents will send their children over the border to be educated so that revenue will be lost to Powys forever (Save Powys Schools)*

*I consider it completely unfair and detrimental to their health and education that they waste 2 hours of each day [travelling]. So do I send them across the border to Kington? Drive them myself? Giving up my job to do so? Move? (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*Fears of primary and secondary school pupil exodus to England if proposal goes ahead. (Brecon High School)*

## Staff Impacts

- 13.12 Comments were made on staff uncertainty and redundancies (and the cost the latter would entail) at both Brecon and Gwernyfed:

*Have they even budgeted for all the redundancy pay outs they will need to make when these new schools open on one site? (Save Powys Schools)*

*Powys will have struck a deal to ensure that it is NPTC staff teaching A-levels there whilst its own dedicated and talented A-level teachers could well be unemployed! (Brecon High School)*

Furthermore, there was concern about the ability of the proposed new school to attract quality teaching staff without a sixth form:

*Parents [have] expressed concern at Brecon's ability to recruit teachers without a sixth form. (Brecon High School)*

## Community Impacts

- 13.13 Many social media users described Gwernyfed High School (henceforth GHS) as an essential part of the community, and suggested that its removal would be to the detriment of the local area and its residents. Some of the many typical comments were:

*Gwernyfed supporters are not just fighting for a school. They are fighting to keep their communities (Save Powys Schools)*

*Gwernyfed is the best asset our community and our children have; taking it away will make us all poorer (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*Closing the school would perpetuate the idea that we need to go further afield to live, work, educate and engage in community. It needs to remain open to retain and instil a sense of community (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*To close Gwernyfed would be the termination of a large community. (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

## Post-16 Education

- <sup>13.14</sup> Social media users frequently discussed the potential quality and sustainability of the education proposed to be provided by the Neath Port Talbot Group of Colleges (henceforth NPTC) in Brecon:

*Still no reassurances about the quality of sixth form provision (Brecon High School)*

*In studies sixth formers do their worst at FE colleges like the one proposed for Brecon (Brecon High School)*

*Brecon Head Girl - 'No support at NPTC' ... Just 5 vocational courses planned by NPTC. (Brecon High School)*

*Hereford Sixth Form College has just won best sixth form in UK. Surveys show if local school sixth forms close over 90% will go to Hereford not NPTC. It will not be financially viable for them to maintain A levels there. In a year or two at most Powys kids will have no sixth form provision as NPTC move the A levels back to Newport. (Brecon High School)*

- <sup>13.15</sup> NPTC's ability to provide the requisite number of staff to deliver a full range of A-levels was also called into question - as was the ability of its teachers to develop relationships with pupils in the same way those at Brecon and Gwernyfed High Schools have been able to do:

*NPTC seem incapable of providing assurances that they can find the staff to deliver the number of A levels they are promising, despite the fact that these teachers are ready and willing in post to teach A levels at the high school[s]. Not to mention the fact that those teachers will have spent 5 years nurturing and caring for their year groups/ forms / sets and will know best how to motivate and prepare them for the A levels that they choose (Brecon High School)*

*Why on earth can't...money be directed back at the schools where highly qualified and experienced teachers are ready, willing and enthusiastic to teach a plethora of A level subjects?! Am I missing a trick here? (Brecon High School)*

*Parents may want the same teachers for A levels - who know the pupils. (Brecon High School)*

- <sup>13.16</sup> Other concerns were around governance, accountability and finances. With specific regard to the latter, several participants questioned the proposed £24 million spend on a new building to house the NPTC sixth form provision:

*NPTC 'governance and accountability' questioned (Brecon High School)*

*Powys will have no influence on sixth form if NPTC take over (Brecon High School)*

*Could I ask where exactly is PCC getting 24 million pounds to build a new Sixth Form for Neath Port Talbot? Am I missing something here? (Brecon High School)*

*In relation to a new build for NPTC the £24 million spend is not disclosed in the report. Instead it just says the proposal 'may also include new facilities for NPTC Group of Colleges' (Brecon High School)*

*But why more money going into the college than to provide for the 11-16s? The NPTC campus already exists - how will it take £24m to bring it up to scratch?! (Brecon High School)*

*Last night's governors meeting with Powys revealed there will be a new build for NPTC but as yet no timetable for it or costing from Powys (Brecon High School)*

*I'm confused; Powys County Council are spending £24m to fund provision for NPTC to run A level provision in Brecon? For Powys youngsters to attend but for NPTC to staff and educate? Why?! What role will county therefore have in the running of the campus in which it has invested so generously? (Brecon High School)*

- 13.17 One respondent, however, expressed support for the proposal to outsource post-16 education – on the condition that provision is good quality, well-resourced and comprehensive:

*Does it really matter who operates the A level provision at this location, as long as the learners have access to good quality, well resourced, relevant choice of A levels? I don't think a school's survival strategy should be based on providing A levels. It should be about getting as many 11 - 16 year olds the best GCSE results it can, so that the learner can make a well informed choice to follow an academic or vocational post 16 career path. If NPTC can provide both of these and the school drive up GCSE attainment then is that not a really good outcome for our learners in Southern Powys? (Brecon High School)*

## Welsh Medium Education

- 13.18 Brecon's social media users were especially concerned about PCC's proposed changes to Welsh medium education, particularly in relation to travel distances, arrangements and costs:

*If the Welsh stream goes to Builth, [pupils] may have to travel further (Brecon High School)*

*Powys propose to send Welsh Medium pupils to Builth ... Extra travel costs of £225,000 (Brecon High School)*

*Parent on proposed move of Welsh Medium to Builth and distance for children to travel for after school sports clubs. "Pupils will have to choose between sports and Welsh." (Brecon High School)*

- 13.19 The possible impact of the proposals on Ysgol y Bannau was also noted:

*[The] Chair of Governors at Ysgol Y Bannau ... said the closure of Brecon's Welsh stream could lead to the closure of Ysgol y Bannau (Brecon High School)*

## Alternative Suggestions

- 13.20 Some social media users had ideas or proposals of their own, for example: reintroducing an agricultural college for long-term sustainability; the development of a new three to 18 'through school'; and retaining a dedicated sixth form within the proposed new building and renting a portion of it to NPTC for vocational provision:

*They should bring back [the] agricultural college for best long term use (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*Last consultation a through school for 3 to 18 year olds was on the table (Brecon High School)*

*Why not retain the dedicated 6<sup>th</sup> form within that building and rent a bit to NPTC? (Brecon High School)*



## The Consultation Process

13.21 Many social media users commented on the consultation process, describing it as something of a 'done deal'. Some typical comments were:

*I think it's no matter what people and communities think. They will do what they want... (Brecon High School)*

*Consultation is not a chance to do a tick box exercise so they can do what they like to our schools and our communities (Save Powys Schools)*

*It sounds like a decision has already been made?! (Save Powys Schools)*

*It seems to me that they just aren't listening. (Save Powys Schools)*

13.22 The fact that the ultimate decision as to whether the proposals are approved or rejected will be taken by the PCC Cabinet (as opposed to the whole Council) was also referenced several times: several social media considered this to be undemocratic:

*Decisions regarding our schools [will] be made by just nine individuals (most of who have nothing to do with Brecon anyway!) (Brecon High School)*

*I don't see how cabinet can be challenged in policy at all now ... they'll do what they intend to anyway (Save Powys Schools)*

*So this is what passes for local democracy. PCC pays our money to yet another consultancy firm ... then a small cabinet of people will make the final decision with no recourse to the whole council. And if we object to the decision it will go back to the same cabinet for another decision. (Save Powys Schools)*

13.23 In terms of the public meetings, the Brecon event was considered a success by social media users:

*An excellent meeting tonight, thank you to parents, students and other supportive stakeholders. Surely they have to listen to everyone who spoke so eloquently in favour of retaining Welsh medium and our sixth form. (Brecon High School)*

However, some users were unhappy with the conduct of the Gwernyfed consultation event held on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016, particularly with respect to the answers (or perceived lack thereof) provided to questions from the floor:

*Startling to see the PCC officers speechless at so many of the questions (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*They certainly didn't have any answers! (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*No answers but I think they listened (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*Hard to see how anyone could have any faith in those councillors after the [Gwernyfed High School Consultation Event]. They were like rabbits caught in headlights (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*[ORS] had definitely been briefed not to let the councillors speak or answer if at all possible... (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

13.24 Indeed, a general lack of faith and confidence in PCC was evident in some of the comments made on social media:

*So many people in Powys...have so little faith in what PCC are up to on so many levels ... a vote of no confidence in them should be levied... (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

*I have no faith in Powys doing the right thing for the children or the communities involved. (Save Gwernyfed High School)*

## Other Comments

13.25 Other less commonly raised sub-themes and comments made on social media are listed in the table below:

Figure 22: Other comments from Social Media

Sub-Theme	Comments
Other alternative solutions	<i>I can see the economic argument for merging schools but to me it would make more sense to centre these on the old counties - Newtown to cover Montgomery, Llandrindod to cover Radnor and Brecon to cover Breconshire. This would ensure no student having to travel ridiculously long journeys. (Save Powys Schools)</i>
Longer-term plans?	<i>Is it feasible to request a 3 or 5 year plan from the county? Similar to the SDPs expected from schools? Maybe then county could shed some light on the thinking (or lack thereof) behind these projections, at least if they share their 5 year vision it might make more sense?! I mean, surely such a document must exist as these are huge changes with massive implications for literally thousands of people from various communities. I don't think that's unreasonable? (Brecon High School)</i>
Effect of proposals on pupils with Special Educational Needs	<i>If there is a special need they may not do well in the sixth form. Or a bigger school. (Brecon High School)</i> <i>Page 44 of the consultation document reports ... Learners with statement of special needs/additional learning needs may be affected emotionally due to the transition to a much larger school. (Brecon High School)</i>
Learning support	<i>Will there still be learning support? (Brecon High School)</i>
Impact of longer journeys on young carers	<i>What about a young carer who would be significantly affected. There are several pupils who care for their parents for whom this will have really serious implications. (Save Powys Schools)</i>
School ethos at Brecon High School	<i>Recently I had the pleasure and privilege of travelling...to attend a performance of 'Seven Brides for Seven Sisters' by Brecon High School students. It was so enjoyable, slick, energetic and very professional and the dedication of the performers was evident. I am told the students gave up their lunch breaks, weekends and other free time to rehearse for months, as well as doing their school work, prep and studying for exams. This shows loyalty and allegiance to their school, which in my humble opinion seems excellent. Why would the Powys County Council...want to change this wonderful school ethos?... By all means provide new buildings and equipment, but please allow the school to retain its own identity...(Brecon High School)</i>

Proposals are dividing communities	<i>[The proposal] is creating a rivalry between communities. (Brecon High School)</i>
Proposals are affecting the area's culture	<i>They are taking away our culture. (Brecon High School)</i>
No new leisure centre as part of proposals	<i>In 2013 it was all set to cost £75 million, just last summer £55 million. The £75m included [a] new leisure centre. (Brecon High School)</i>
Cost of consultation	<i>The company conducting the consultation is being paid £50,000. This is on top of the £105,000 PwC are said to have been paid to do the first consultation. (Brecon High School)</i>

# Appendix 1

## Formal Submission by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales

Estyn response to the proposal by Powys County Council to close Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School and open a new English-medium 11- 16 school from September 2017

This report has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer and other additional information such as data from Welsh Government and the views of the Regional Consortia which deliver school improvement services to the schools within the proposal.

### Introduction

This is a consultation proposal from Powys County Council. The proposal is to:

- Close Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School and establish a new English-medium 11-16 secondary school that will operate across the current sites of the two schools from September 2017;
- Transfer post-16 provision currently provided by both schools to the NPTC group of colleges in Brecon from September 2017;
- Transfer Welsh-medium education currently delivered at Brecon to the Builth Wells site of the proposed new secondary school in mid-Powys from September 2017; and
- Close the school sites at Gwernyfed and Brecon, once new school accommodation has been built in Brecon in 2019/2020.

### Summary/ Conclusion

The proposer has provided a clear rationale for the proposal to close both schools and establish a new English-medium 11-16 school, initially operating across the existing two sites at Brecon and Gwernyfed. It sets out clearly the proposals relating to the transfer of post-16 education to the NPTC group of colleges, and the transfer of Welsh-medium education to the Builth Wells site of the proposed new school in mid-Powys.

Overall, many aspects of the proposal receive appropriate consideration. However, the proposal does not sufficiently consider standards currently achieved at both schools or demonstrate how the changes will lead to improved standards in relation to pupils' outcomes or the leadership and management of the new school. It does not consider sufficiently the risks involved in the proposal, particularly given the short timescales of its proposals.

As a result, it is Estyn's opinion that the proposal is unlikely to improve the present standard of education provision in the area.

### Description and benefits

The proposer has provided a clear rationale for the proposal. The proposer appears to base its case for change primarily on the need to address the decline in pupil numbers at both schools, particularly when set in the context of the projected pupil numbers to 2021. It considers appropriately the impact of low pupil numbers on provision and access to the full curriculum at both schools, and sets out its view that increased pupil numbers would help address this. The proposer identifies appropriately the need to raise standards at both schools and to improve the condition of school buildings at both schools. The proposer also identifies how the proposal would produce annual revenue savings, as well as potential capital receipts from the sale of the existing school sites.

The proposer sets out clearly the expected benefits and disadvantages of the proposal when compared with the current situation. The proposer sees the main benefits of the proposal accruing from the increased numbers of pupils in the new schools allowing greater pupil choice and access to the curriculum, and cost-effectiveness. The proposer acknowledges the disadvantages of the proposal in terms of loss of community links and increased travel times for pupils affected.

However, overall, it considers that the benefits of the proposal outweigh the disadvantages it has identified.

The proposer appropriately includes these disadvantages in its analysis of risks associated with the proposal, together with the measures it intends to employ to manage them. Overall, its identification of risks appears to be fair and balanced. However, in a few instances, the proposer does not discuss these or its risk management measures in sufficient detail. For example, although the proposer identifies the risk that some parents may arrange for their children to attend schools other than the new school, it does not identify sufficiently well how it will engage positively with parents to reduce this risk.

Similarly, the proposer acknowledges the issues associated with the additional travel times faced by pupils currently at Gwernyfed High School travelling to the proposed new school at Brecon, as well as for Welsh-medium learners currently at Brecon High School travelling to the proposed new school at Builth Wells. However, although the proposer acknowledges that these could have a negative impact on pupil wellbeing and attainment, the proposer is not able to offer any risk management measures beyond stating that travel time would not normally be more than an hour. It does not explain what provision it would make for those pupils for whom journey times would be longer than an hour. While the proposer acknowledges that the increased travel time is likely to restrict pupils' access to after-school activities at the new school, it does not discuss the risk that this might also impact negatively on their ability to access after-school activities in their home area.

In a few cases, the proposer fails to identify significant aspects of the proposal as a risk. For example, it does not include as a risk the challenges associated with the proposed timescales for implementation. In

particular, the proposer does not acknowledge the challenges for the successful establishment of the new school when the new leadership team and staffing structure will not be in place until May 2017. The proposer does not consider the challenges associated with the transfer of the first cohort of Y12 pupils from the existing school to the NPTC group of colleges in Brecon by September 2017. In terms of Welsh-medium provision, the proposer does not consider the risk that its proposal for a new dual-stream school in mid- Powys might not be approved. Most significantly, however, it does not consider the possibility that the proposed new school will fail to improve standards, or identify any measures to address this.

The proposer has considered in some detail the impact of the changes on learners' travel arrangements. It correctly identifies that there will be no additional travel for pupils aged 11-16 who live in the Brecon catchment area and who wish to access English-medium provision at the new school. In addition, it considers that the proposed increase to post-16 courses on the Brecon site will reduce the requirements for inter-school transport for post-16 pupils.

The proposer acknowledges the increase in travel arrangements for pupils aged 11- 16 who live in the Brecon catchment and who wish to attend Welsh-medium provision and for those pupils currently at Gwernyfed if they were to transfer to the proposed new school building in Brecon. The proposer's analysis of the impact of the proposal on travel arrangements for this latter group of pupils demonstrates an increase in travel time that would normally add no more than 20 minutes to the journey, leading to a total journey time of normally no more than an hour. The proposer states that it views the proposed travel arrangements as suitable and in line with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. However, as identified above, the proposer does not explain how it would make provision for those pupils for whom journey times would be longer than an hour.

The proposer refers appropriately to the current numbers of surplus places at both schools. Surplus places at Brecon High School currently stand at 36% and at Gwernyfed High School at 20%. However, the proposer does not provide a proposed capacity figure for the new school, or provide any information on projected pupil numbers at the new school.

The proposer considers in suitable detail the impact of the proposal on Welsh- medium provision within mid- and south Powys. The proposer has carried out a separate Welsh Language Impact Assessment, which clearly assesses the impact of the proposal on provision for pupils at both schools and within this area of the local authority. Given the declining and very low numbers of pupils currently accessing Welsh-medium education at Brecon High School, the proposer's view that the proposal provides benefits for the provision of Welsh-medium education and progression appears reasonable.

### Educational aspects of the proposal

Overall, the proposer has not sufficiently considered the impact of the proposal on the quality of outcomes, provision and leadership and management. The proposer makes appropriate reference to the outcomes of both schools' most recent Estyn inspections. It identifies correctly that Brecon High School remains in special measures and that Gwernyfed High School was removed from Estyn monitoring in February 2016. The proposer also refers briefly to the schools' categorisation within the National School Categorisation System. However, it provides no explanation of the context or detail for these judgements. The proposer acknowledges that there might be a negative impact on the wellbeing of pupils due to the transition to the new school building in Brecon and the additional travel time.

Significantly, the proposer provides no analysis of the standards achieved by pupils at either school in terms of attainment at either key stage 3 or key stage 4.

In terms of Welsh-medium provision at key stage 3 and key stage 4, the proposer suggests that the increased number of Welsh-medium pupils at the Builth Wells site of the proposed new dual-stream school in Mid-Powys would enable the school to set pupils according to ability for some subjects. The proposer argues that this could have a positive impact in terms of outcomes for Welsh-medium pupils. However, it does not provide evidence for its view that setting improves standards.

The proposer refers to the standards achieved by both schools in relation to A levels, and compares these appropriately with results for Powys, Wales and for the NPTC group of colleges. Although the proposer argues that it does not anticipate that there would be a negative impact on outcomes for post-16 pupils, it does not outline sufficiently how the transfer of post-16 provision from both schools would have a positive effect on the standards achieved by pupils at this stage. Overall, the proposer does not demonstrate how the reorganisation would have a positive impact on the standards achieved by pupils at any key stage.

In terms of provision, the proposer argues reasonably that the increased pupil numbers within the new school, and of Welsh-medium pupils at the Builth Wells site of the proposed dual-stream school, will allow greater choice and access to the curriculum, particularly at key stage 3 and key stage 4. Similarly, the proposer's view that the proposal for post-16 education could lead to increased access for post-16 pupils to both academic and vocational subjects seems sound. The proposer asserts that a new school building would improve the learning environment and facilities for pupils in line with the principles of the Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools programme. However, overall, the proposer does not consider any of these aspects in detail. In particular, the proposer does not demonstrate how the proposed reorganisation would lead to improved standards of teaching, or how these potential benefits would link to improved outcomes for pupils.

The proposer appropriately identifies the potential for the more efficient deployment of resources that would accrue from the proposal. It makes suitable reference to the significant budget deficit forecast by Brecon High School for the next three years, as well as to the backlog of maintenance costs for both sites. It identifies appropriately that the transition to the new school will provide substantial additional workload for the shadowing governing body and appointed leadership team, and how the council aims to support this process. However, the proposer is less clear about how the proposal will result in improvements in the quality of leadership and management once the new school is established.

The proposer refers appropriately to the potential positive impact of the proposal on the delivery of the full curriculum at each key stage, at least in the medium and longer term. It identifies the likely positive effect of increased pupil numbers in the single site school on the ability to provide a broader curriculum with increased choice at key stage 3 and key stage 4. With regard to the new school in mid-Powys, the proposer acknowledges that the sudden increase in Welsh-medium pupils in individual year groups may cause initial difficulties for the new school, as it may require them to introduce a second Welsh-medium class in some year groups.

However, it considers reasonably that as larger numbers of pupils move through the school, this will improve the school's ability to offer a more comprehensive curriculum to Welsh-medium pupils, particularly at key stage 4 and post-16.

With regard to post-16 provision, the proposer's view that an increase in the numbers of English-medium post-16 pupils on a single site would enable the provision of a broader range of subjects and



qualifications seems reasonable. Similarly, the proposer asserts that the increased number of Welsh-medium pupils on the Builth Wells site of the new school in mid-Powys would lead in time to an increase in the number of available subjects at the school post-16. However, there remain questions about equality of opportunities for post-16 pupils choosing to study through the medium of Welsh in terms of the range of courses available to them.

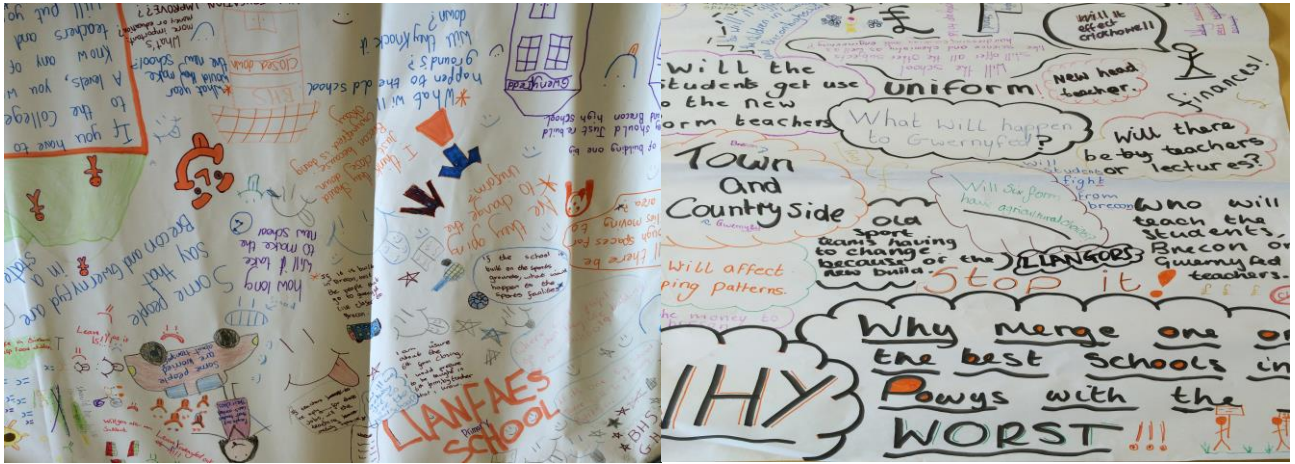
The proposer has considered the likely impact of the proposal on a range of groups, including pupils with Special Educational Needs, pupils from low-income families and Welsh-medium pupils. The proposer has undertaken draft equality impact assessments for pupils from both Brecon High School and Gwernyfed High School. They identify clearly how pupils at both schools might be affected by the proposal but do not at this stage identify any measures to mitigate this. The proposer has also carried out a draft Community Impact Assessment which suitably acknowledges the significant issues faced by the communities within the Gwernyfed catchment area should the proposal be successful. However, it does not identify measures it would take to address these.

The proposer identifies arrangements for the transfer of pupils to the new school in its discussion of implications for admissions as well as arrangements for transport provision. However, overall, there is insufficient reference in the proposal on how any disruption to learners would be minimised should the proposal be successful.

# Appendix 2

## Posters by pupils involved in the primary school workshops

### Brecon High School Catchment Schools Workshop



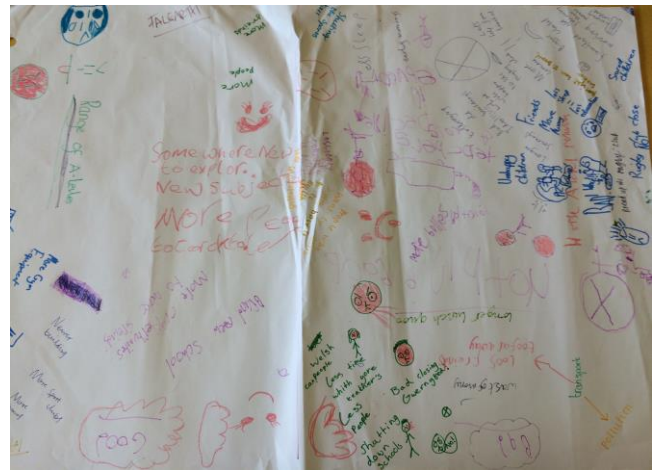
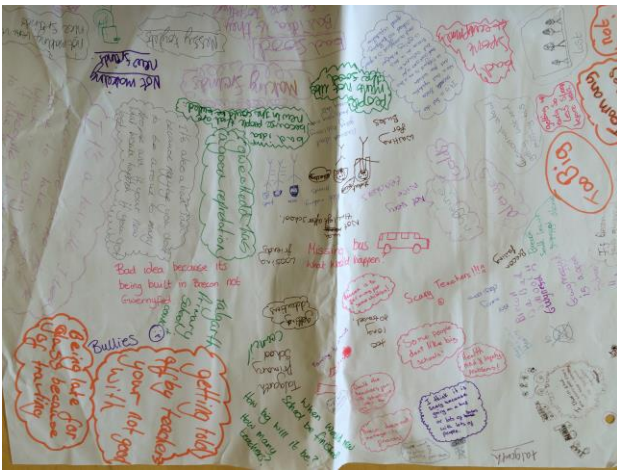
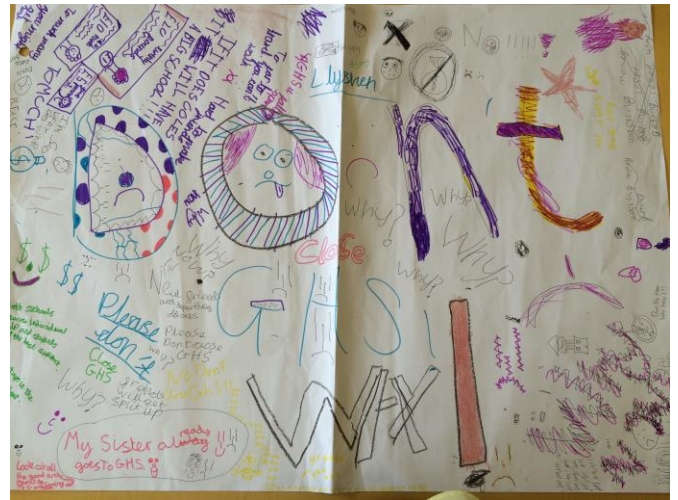
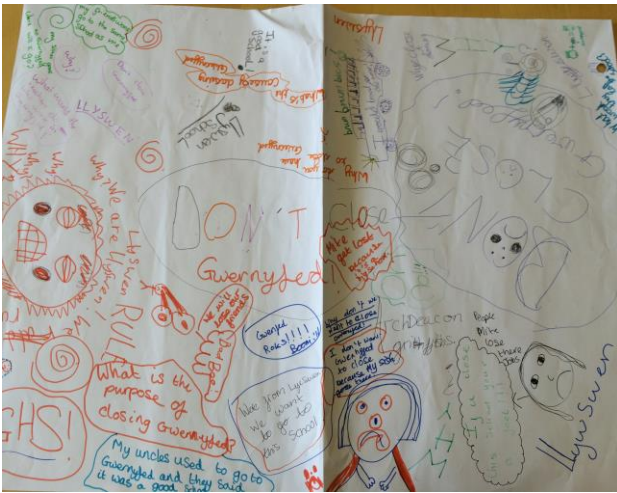












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