

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

20 September 2016

Report of the Strategic Director for Children's Services

**REPORT ON THE OUTCOME OF THE PRE-PUBLICATION
CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL BY GOVERNORS TO CLOSE THE
SIXTH FORM PROVISION AT NEW MILLS SCHOOL & SIXTH FORM –
(CHILDREN'S SERVICES)**

1. Purpose of the Report

To advise Cabinet of a pre-publication consultation carried out by the Governors on their proposal to close the sixth form provision at New Mills School and Sixth Form and to seek approval to publish a formal closure proposal and to carry out the statutory consultation on that proposal.

2. Information and Analysis

In March 2016, the Governors of New Mills School agreed to consult on a proposal to close the sixth form at their school. This proposal is motivated by the worsening financial position of the School. The consultation was opened on 15 April 2016 and ended on 16 May 2016.

A copy of the consultation document is included at Appendix A. The consultation was accessed on-line a total of 461 times; 202 responses were received indicating a positive or negative response. Some responses were very short (just a few words), others longer, touching on many different issues.

The consultation was shared by presentation to pupils and school staff, writing to parents/carers and other stakeholders in the wider local community, by publication of the information on the school's website, by holding Governor 'drop-ins' and by holding parent and community forum meetings.

In addition to the responses made to the school's consultation, further written submissions have been made to the Authority expressing opposition to the closure.

A petition was created on the Derbyshire County Council website on 14 June 2016 and 918 people signed this petition. In addition, a paper petition was received on 22 July 2016 which had 954 signatures. The subject of both petitions was as follows.

We request the council reject the proposal to close New Mills Sixth Form. We believe that the council needs to give the school MORE TIME and further support to enable the school to become financially secure, whilst still maintaining its sixth form provision. The children of New Mills and surrounding villages should have the right to access post 16 education within their own community.

In addition, a number of submissions were received in late July 2016. These included a document prepared by a group of a parents and supporters of New Mills Sixth Form which presented a number of arguments in favour of the sixth form. A copy of this document is included at Appendix C. Whilst these documents were received outside the consultation period, they have been considered and the issues raised are assessed below.

The responses to the consultation indicated a range of views, but with a large majority expressing a generic opposition to the closure. The issues raised are examined below. A summary of the responses to the school's consultation is attached at Annex B. The text of all the responses is held on file and can be made available on request.

The sixth form is proposed for closure by the governors in order to address the financial viability of the school

A number of responses suggested that either Derbyshire or Central Government should provide more funding. Some suggested that the school should be given more time to reduce its deficit or that other options to address the issues should be considered. A number suggested that by marketing the school better, the numbers in the sixth form could be increased.

Discussion

Officers have been supporting the school with respect to its budgetary problems which are due to falling pupil numbers and reduced funding for 16+ places. Whereas funding for 11-16 pupils is provided by the Authority, funding for 16+ is allocated by the Education Funding Agency. This funding has fallen from £4,280 per head in 2013/14 to

£3,947 in 2016/17. Two other small schools' sixth forms have closed in Derbyshire. Nationally, other closures have also taken place. Guidance from the DfE (see Legal Considerations) indicates that new sixth forms should not be approved unless they are expected to attract at least 200 students. The budget deficit at the school at 31st March 2016 was £0.512 million, an increase of £0.270 million on the previous year's figure. Without the closure of the sixth form, the deficit is projected to rise to well over £1.2 million within three years. Officers are satisfied that a formal consultation on the proposed closure of the sixth form is appropriate in the context of the financial problems faced by the school.

Concern at the effect that closure of the sixth form would have on the rest of the school.

Many respondents identified positive impacts of the sixth form on the rest of the school. These include older students providing role models for younger ones, attracting/retaining better teachers who are able/interested in teaching A-level. Some felt that the lack of a sixth form would make it harder for the school to attract students to the school at age 11.

Discussion

There is a clear view in the responses that a sixth form has wider benefits to a school. Across the county, there are 19 secondary schools without sixth forms and 26 with them. However, where pupil numbers have fallen, a sixth form can add to the financial problems of a school. This is why two smaller schools have recently taken steps to remove their sixth forms. In addition, there are many successful 11-16 schools, including some rated outstanding by Ofsted.

Closure of the sixth form would force students to travel to provision in other towns resulting in an unfair cost on students.

The cost impact on students was mentioned in 43 responses and was also referred to in the correspondence sent directly to the Authority. The environmental impact of travelling to alternative provision was also mentioned. Some respondents questioned whether transport would be available in future given that the Authority is consulting on withdrawing some public transport subsidies.

Discussion

The Authority does not pay transport costs for students aged over 16 other than in specific cases. The distance to Marple Sixth Form College is around 5 miles, Aquinas Sixth Form College and Glossopdale Community College (11-18) are around 8 miles from New Mills and

Buxton Community College is around 11 miles away. Whilst many students from New Mills currently choose post-16 provision outside the town, this proposal will mean that some students will no longer have the option to remain within the town for sixth form, and, therefore, will face a transport cost. They will, however, only be in the same position as other young people in other locations within the county who do not have a local 11-18 school – such as in Chapel-en-le-Frith. In addition, many students who live within the area of an 11-18 school face transport costs to get to their sixth form due to the wide catchment areas of many schools in the Authority. This proposal will not disadvantage students from New Mills in comparison to many others in the County.

With respect to the environmental issue, the other providers can be accessed by existing public transport so there may be no major effect. Commercial bus and rail connections are available to Marple, Stockport and Buxton where other post-16 providers are located. These services are not subject to the current Authority consultation on subsidised buses. In addition, 16-19 year olds can benefit from the B-line card which gives access to a 25% reduction on some fares.

Sufficient places available in other providers.

A number of respondents questioned whether sufficient space would be available in the other providers of post-16 education in the area. It was also stated that post-16 education in Greater Manchester is currently subject to review.

Discussion

The school has made enquiries with all neighbouring post-16 providers who have indicated that they do have some places available. This proposal does reduce choice but it is expected that overall, there are sufficient post-16 places. It is understood that the Greater Manchester review, which has been running since August last year, is aimed at identifying gaps in provision and meeting local and employer needs.

Support for the proposal

Eleven responses were received which expressed support for the proposal, accepting that the small sixth form would impact financially on the provision made for the 11-16 year olds.

Impact on students with Special Educational Needs.

Some respondents felt the provision for Special Educational Needs would not be as good in a college setting and that the transport would prove challenging.

Discussion

Colleges are inspected by Ofsted on all aspects of their provision, including that made for students with special needs. There is an

argument that a much larger college is more able to make specialist provision.

The numbers of young people in the central High Peak are sufficient to support a sixth form at New Mills

The 'Save New Mills Sixth Form' paper included a table showing that there are between 350 and 400 young people in each year group living in the central High Peak and argue that this is sufficient to support a sixth form at New Mills. The data is said to be sourced from the 2011 census and the central High Peak is taken to be the area served by Chapel-en-le-Frith High School, Hope Valley College and New Mills School and Sixth Form.

Discussion

The numbers cited above do reflect the number of children living within the area served by those schools. The assumption that improved marketing would significantly increase the numbers attending New Mills Sixth form may be questioned. The range of post 16 courses and providers is large. Hope Valley College is closer to Lady Manners School in Bakewell, which has a good sixth form, than it is to New Mills. Analysis of the destination of 16 year olds in 2015 shows that no students from the Hope Valley area chose to attend New Mills. Around 26% chose to attend Lady Manners. Others accessed schools and colleges in Sheffield, Chesterfield and Buxton. From Chapel-en-le-Frith 78% chose to attend one of the following 5 colleges: Aquinas College, Cheadle and Marple sixth form college, Stockport College, Macclesfield College and Buxton and Leek colleges. 24% of young people living within the New Mills catchment chose to attend New Mills sixth form. From the wider area, only 9% chose to attend New Mills sixth form. Even though in area and school based provision is available, these figures show a strong preference for the offer available in the FE sector and by some school based providers out of the area.

Derbyshire has a statutory duty to secure suitable, appropriate and high quality education and training opportunities.

It is stated that the Authority would be failing in its duty to secure suitable 16+ provision by relying on providers outside the authority and that this provision is not secure.

Discussion

The Local Authority has a duty to ensure there is sufficient provision but it is not under a duty to make all provision within its geographic area. In the case of New Mills and the central High Peak, a high level of provision is currently made out of the area, and outside Derbyshire. The

Education Funding Agency has confirmed that there is capacity within the FE sector colleges within Stockport to accommodate the increase in demand that would result from a closure of the sixth form at New Mills and that the sector is able to expand provision where there is demand to do so.

It is proposed that New Mills School and Sixth Form is the most successful post 16 provider in the area, and that it should not therefore be closed.

The paper states that New Mills is the most successful in the area. Please see evidence below that indicates that, when a range of objective measures are applied, this is not the case.

A level Performance 2015

School/College	Number of Students entered	APS per entry	Av Grade	APS per student	At least 1 A level A*-E	AAB* in at least 2 facilitating subjects	A LEVEL VA	No A level entries
Aquinas	900	211.9	C	729.6	99%	8%	-0.05	3137
Buxton	99	205.9	C	755.5	97%	5%	-0.11	359
Cheadle and Marple	276	194.9	D+	672.7	100%	3%	-0.21	960
Glossopdale	57	199.2	C-	640.6	98%	2%	-0.15	164
New Mills	29	201	C-	642	100%	7%	-0.06	106
Stockport College	17	181.7	D	539	100%	0%	-0.31	47

Vocational Performance 2015

School/College	Number of Students entered	APS per entry	Av Grade	APS per student	At least 2 substantial vocational quals	Voc VA	Nos of Voc entries
Aquinas	299	244.7	Dist+	732	38%	0.34	385
Buxton	55	234	Dist+	644.8	44%	-0.09	79
Cheadle and Marple	328	223.6	Dist	578.3	63%	0.12	382
Glossopdale	62	238.5	Dist+	661.5	68%	0.14	90
New Mills	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stockport College	348	208.8	Merit+	546.4	76%	-0.20	311

Ofsted grading

School/College	6 th form Ofsted Grading
Aquinas	Good
Buxton	Good

Cheadle and Marple	Good
Glossopdale	Good
New Mills	Requires Improvement
Stockport College	Requires Improvement

It is very difficult to compare six very different institutions. Comparing a 6th form cohort of 900 with one of 29 is clearly problematic. However, an examination of a standard range of performance measures used by the DfE show clearly that it would be inaccurate to contend that New Mills has the most successful 6th form provision in the area. If popularity is deemed to be a measure of success then, as by some margin the smallest, New Mills could not be judged to be the most successful. If outcomes are the measure to be assessed then again New Mills could not be argued to be the most successful. In the key attainment measure of APS per entry both Aquinas and Buxton perform better in relation to A level outcomes. In relation to value added, the margin of difference across all schools is small, but again Aquinas is the highest performer. It should also be noted that all the other institutions offer a significant amount of Vocational provision with strong value added performance at both Aquinas and Glossopdale. New Mills does not offer any vocational provision – therefore if breadth of curriculum offer is a measure of success then again it would not be accurate to claim that New Mills is the most successful. Finally, if Ofsted judgement of 6th form provision is regarded as a key measure of success then four of the other providers have 6th forms graded as Good whilst New Mills is currently judged to be Requires Improvement. Therefore, it is difficult to see how, other than by the application of very subjective criteria the case could be made that New Mills is the most successful 6th form in the area.

Derbyshire County Council’s vision is to be ‘responsive to children and families’, therefore the authority should accept the consultation response in favour of the sixth form.

Discussion

The Authority recognises the strength of support that has been expressed. This proposal has been suggested by the Governing Body of the school as one of a number of measures aimed at addressing an increasing financial difficulty at the school. Post 16 funding and school funding generally are increasingly determined nationally. In this context there is limited flexibility for the Authority to address the financial issues that have led to this proposal.

Equality of investment across schools in the High Peak

It is claimed that this proposal is unfair when compared to the investment that is taking place to provide a new buildings for Glossopdale Community College.

Discussion

A scheme is underway to replace the buildings of Glossopdale Community College. This scheme was approved because the condition of the schools buildings was very bad and a business case concluded that replacement was the best value for money option. Capital funds are allocated to school projects by the Authority using information from condition surveys to ensure the highest priority schemes are supported. New Mills School and Sixth Form has benefitted from substantial investments in the past.

These capital investments are not relevant to the revenue budget problems faced by the school.

How will this proposal promote the raising of aspirations and attainment of the most disadvantaged?

Discussion

An important role of all schools is the promotion of aspiration, particularly of the most disadvantaged. Funding in the form of the Pupil Premium is specifically provided so that schools can improve the achievement of disadvantaged children. Increasing aspiration is a part of that. All schools have a duty to provide independent advice and guidance to all of their students so that they can access the most appropriate 16+ courses. Whether or not a school has a sixth form is not of itself a major impact on aspiration. There are many 11-16 schools within the county that perform well in promoting aspiration.

A proposal has been made that introducing a level 3 access to HE course including a number of vocational modules at New Mills School and Sixth Form and to widen the intake of the school to include adult learners who may benefit from an access course.

Discussion

The potential demand for such courses at New Mills is not clear, particularly as these courses are already available at nearby colleges. This is specialist provision, particularly as the expertise required is different from that of delivering a post 16 curriculum to 16-19 year olds. Whilst the school may be able to identify a demand and could possibly deliver a course, this would do little to change the viability of the existing provision. It is difficult to envisage that there would be sufficient demand to fundamentally change the economic viability of the sixth form.

3. Financial Considerations

Schools in financial difficulty are supported via a Team Around the school (TATS) process. The TATS process provides a challenge to the school's senior leadership which requires them to identify proposals to bring their budget into balance over a number of years. The outcome of this process is often a Licenced Deficit, effectively a permission to overspend the budget in the short term whilst agreed savings are delivered.

New Mills is going through the TATS process and it has become increasingly clear that the school's sixth form which has only 87 students (well below the figure of 200 the DfE suggest as a minimum for a new sixth form) is adding pressure to the school's pre-16 budget.

In addition to the above, the national funding landscape for schools is becoming more challenging. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), the grant which is the main funding source supporting schools' budgets, is set to be cash flat for the duration of this Parliament and this has added further pressure onto all schools' budgets, including New Mills.

Having looked at the above local and national considerations, the school governors now propose closure of the sixth form to remove one of the pressures on the pre-16 budget. The closure of the sixth form, and removal of the subsidy by July 2018, would not of itself fully address the school's budget problems but would help to reduce the size of the anticipated deficit.

It is important to note that should the school become a sponsored academy, the accumulated deficit would almost certainly remain with the Council – it is therefore important that the size of this deficit is kept as low as possible and the school's budget brought into balance at the earliest possible time.

Closure of the 6th form is likely to result in some additional home to school transport costs to the Council in respect of post-16 pupils with SEN who would, in future, have to travel to alternative providers.

4. Legal Considerations

The procedure for closing a sixth form provision is detailed by the Department for Education in its statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers: 'Making Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools' (April 2016). The Local Authority must have regard for this guidance

when exercising functions under The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, and The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013. The guidance requires that the formal consultation begins on the publication of a statutory proposal notice and must last four weeks. The formal and informal consultations must take place during term time.

5. Other Considerations

In preparing this report, the relevance of the following factors has been considered: - prevention of crime & disorder, equality of opportunity, and environmental, health, human rights, human resources, property and transport considerations.

6. Background Papers

File in Development

7. Key Decision

Yes

8. Call-in

Is it required that the call-in period be waived in respect of the decisions being proposed within this report? No

Officer's Recommendation

That Cabinet approves a statutory consultation, lasting four weeks from 22 September to 21 October 2016, to be carried out on the publication notice to close the Sixth Form and sixth form provision at New Mills School, and the results of which will be presented to Cabinet in a further report for consideration

Jane Parfrement
Strategic Director for Children's Services

Appendix A

Consultation on the Proposed Closure of New Mills Sixth Form

This document is intended to set out the reasons why the Governing Body of New Mills School & Sixth Form intends to propose to the Local Authority (Derbyshire Country Council) to close the Sixth Form. This is known as the pre-publication consultation period. If the Governing Body were to decide to propose to the LEA to close the sixth form, it would be required to publish a formal notice and consult prior to a formal decision being made.

It includes:

- Details of the rationale behind the Governing Body's proposal;
- The dates and times of information sessions where you can find out more;
- A link to the online consultation form (paper copies are also available).

Introduction and Background

The Governing Body of New Mills School & Sixth Form, following much discussion, has decided to consult on the proposal not to recruit new sixth form students from September 2017. If agreed, the proposal would mean that the sixth form at New Mills School would close at the end of August 2018. **It would only affect the sixth form, and not mean any changes to the rest of the school.**

The future of school sixth forms has been highlighted in the media for some time, particularly in light of recent changes in the way post-16 students are funded in schools and colleges. The funding has gradually declined over the last two years, and this has had particular impact on small sixth forms.

The average sixth form college has around 1,700 students, while the average school sixth form has a little over 200. Economies of scale apply, so it is more expensive per student for schools to provide a sixth form, meaning that they may have to subsidise sixth form students from other funding streams, such as that for 11 to 16-year-old students. The Department for Education recognises that sixth forms with fewer than 200 students are at risk of not being viable financially. New Mills Sixth Form currently has a total of 87 students in the sixth form (Year 12 and 13 combined).

Given these numbers, we have regretfully come to the conclusion that we are unable to provide the breadth of courses, including a wide range of vocational and A-level subjects, that sixth form students need. The current numbers are too small to produce courses that are viable educationally and economically at New Mills School; over the last few years, the majority of our students in Year 11 have chosen to go elsewhere for post-16 provision. In reaching the decision to consult on the future of the sixth form, governors want the best options and learning experiences for our students, and have therefore concluded that closure is the right option.

Changing the age range from 11-18 to 11-16 will allow resources to be focused on improving the learning experiences and outcomes for years 7 to 11. Our aim is to become an outstanding 11-16 school, and to do so, we believe that we must concentrate our energies and expertise on that age range.

This consultation will run from 15th April 2016 to 16th May 2016, during which you are invited to respond to the Governing Body's proposal. In order for you to ask any questions you need to inform your understanding of the Governing Body's decision, we are holding various open information sessions. You may wish to attend one of these sessions before responding to the consultation. They will take place at the school as follows:

- **Parent Forums:** Open Q&A with the Head Teacher (two repeat sessions)
 - Thursday 28th April, 7– 8pm.
 - Tuesday 10th May, 7 – 8pm.
- **Governor drop-in session:** informal one-to-one Q&A with the Chair and other Governors (two repeat sessions)
 - Monday 18th April, 3:30 – 5pm.
 - Thursday 5th May, 3:30 – 5pm.

Your views are important to us, so please either complete the consultation online at <http://www.newmillsschool.co.uk/school-information/news/latest-news/>, or alternatively you may request a paper copy from the school reception. **All consultations must be completed/ returned by noon on Monday 16th May 2016. All responses will be considered by the Governing Body before deciding whether to request that Derbyshire County Council consider the closure of the sixth form.**

Maggie Cole
Chair of Governors

Debbie McGloin
Headteacher

New Mills School

Consultation on possible closure of Sixth Form: some facts and figures

How large is a viable sixth form?

A school or college sixth form has to be large enough to be viable and sustainable in order to be able to provide a wide enough range of high-quality courses. It has been recognised that sixth forms with fewer than 200 students are unviable, particularly in the light of the more recent funding changes where sixth form provision is now funded per student, instead of per qualification. The implications of these reforms over the last two years have meant that some providers have been forced to cut courses, whilst others have been forced to close.

How many students choose New Mills Sixth Form?

Sixth Form numbers (based on January census)			
	Year 12	Year 13	Total
2016	47	40	87
2015	53	33	86
2014	32	55	87
2013	59	51	110
2012	63	42	105
2011	62	49	111

For a number of years, the majority of our Year 11 students have chosen to pursue post-16 education at a school or college other than New Mills. The school is unable to offer the breadth of subjects or levels that students would like to follow. This means that students

must either go elsewhere or pick from a limited range offered, rather than choose what they would either like to do, or would be more suited to, in preparation for Higher Education or employment.

What would this mean for the current Sixth Form students?

The School is committed to keeping the Sixth Form experience for current students exactly as it is, until the end of their studies.

What would this mean for Year 11 students?

Students who are planning to start Year 12 in September 2016 will be able to do so, exactly as planned. The governors have decided to 'phase' the closure of the Sixth Form, meaning anyone who starts in September 2016 will be able to complete their A-levels and finish in Summer 2018. Sixth Form provision during that time will remain unchanged.

What is the range of courses on offer from some of the other providers in an acceptable 'travel to learn' radius?

Young people in New Mills already have a wide range of choices, due to our geographical location within Derbyshire, but on the edge of Greater Manchester. Many of our students go to Aquinas College in Stockport, or Marple Sixth Form College (formerly Cheadle and Marple College), both of which offer a huge range of quality provision, including A-level and vocational courses. Stockport College and Buxton and Leek College also offer a wide range of vocational courses. All have good public transport links from New Mills, and the School will work with these and all other providers to ensure students have the information, advice and guidance they need to choose a course that is right for them.

The Governing Body's proposal

The proposal that the Governing Body intends to put to Derbyshire County Council is:

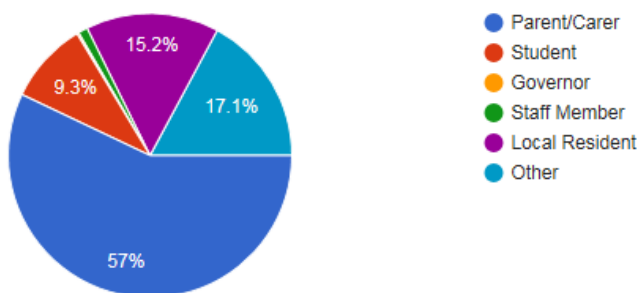
Following detailed analysis of New Mills School's financial position at DCC Team Around The School meetings, the Governing Body proposes that there be a phased reduction in Sixth Form provision towards closure in July 2018.

Summary of responses to the consultation document on the proposed closure of New Mills Sixth Form

Prepared for the meeting of the Full Governing Body on Tuesday 24 May 2016 by Felicity Wicks and Maggie Cole

This section asks you for some information that will help us analyse the results of the responses and to see who has taken part. Your response is anonymous, and you will not be identified by any of the information you provide. I am a:

(461 responses)



The survey asked for just one response to the question:

Based on what you have learned from the Briefing Document, Parent Forum and / or Governor Drop-In Sessions, please use the space below to let us know your views on the proposed closure of New Mills Sixth Form.

We did not ask for a simple yes/no response to support the proposed closure of the Sixth Form.

The consultation survey was accessed a total of 461 times; 202 responses were received indicating a positive or negative response to the consultation proposal. Some responses were very short (just a few words), others longer, touching on many different issues. We have categorised them as follows:

Generic comments against the proposed closure (e.g. "The Sixth Form should not close")	104
Transport - concern about the viability of transport, on grounds of cost / time	43
Funding - various comments on the funding situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why can central government / local authority not provide more funding? - Suggestion that governing body have been financially incompetent to allow the deficit to grow. - What else has the governing body considered to remove the deficit, other than closing the Sixth Form? - Is post-16 funding funded differently to the lower school? 	27

- Why can't the local authority give the school more time to remove the deficit?	
Standard of teaching - concern that good teachers will leave without the attraction of A-level teaching	20
Role models - concern about the lack of role models for students lower down the School, if Sixth Form were to close	16
Demographics – suggestion that the school will grow in time with the potential building of new housing in New Mills	13
Positive (noting the Sixth Form should close, for various reasons)	11
Marketing – suggestion that the sixth form could grow its numbers with relative ease if 'better marketing' were done	11
Other providers – uncertainty about other post-16 providers' ability to absorb extra numbers from NMS, and uncertainty about their admissions processes (particularly faith-based criteria in the case of Aquinas).	11
Governing body - belief that the governing body have 'deceived' parents and the wider community by withholding information on the proposed closure	6
Fundraising - suggestion that fundraising could solve the situation	6
Collaboration – suggestion that the Sixth Form would be viable if delivered in partnership with other providers	4
Grades – comments that perceived changes in minimum entry criteria to NMS Sixth Form has led to a fall in numbers	2

Additional comments:

- Questioning the environmental sustainability of expecting all 16-19 year olds to travel out of New Mills daily to attend what is now compulsory education or training.
- The benefits to SEN and other vulnerable students of the small Sixth Form and smoother transition to the pattern of further education.

Appendix C

Save New Mills School Sixth Form – Paper

Parents and supporters of New Mills School recommend that Derbyshire County Council reject the proposal to close the sixth form at New Mills School.

Instead we recommend a short period of investment, building on the existing provision, to make the 6th form the first choice for post 16 education for students in the central High Peak.

We have identified some ideas of how investment could be secured and, in the space of four weeks, collected the signatures of 1872 people in our petition showing that there is support for a sixth form at New Mills School.

Who is this report from?

We are a group of parents, teachers, pupils, ex-pupils and supporters of New Mills School who came together after the school proposed the closure of the 6th form on financial grounds. We have sought to confirm our belief that there is local support for a 6th form and a sound financial basis for its ongoing operation. We believe that the area of the central High Peak needs its own local 6th form to raise aspirations of local people and to help tackle the areas of social deprivation that exist locally.

We hope that you will appreciate that we have sought to carry out our campaign in a professional manner, through lobbying and the presentation of facts.

What is good about New Mills School Sixth Form?

The 6th form has been providing education for 16 to 18-year-old students in the central High Peak for over 100 years. It has many strengths including:

- In OfSTED's latest inspection, they said 'Achievement, teaching and behaviour are good in A-and AS-level courses in the sixth form. In 2014, students achieved particularly well in drama and media. They achieved well in fine art at A level, and in music at AS level.' These are particularly inspirational to younger students who see and hear this work.
- It achieved the best set of A-level results compared to other local sixth forms in the High Peak and Stockport.
- It provides a broad range of academic subjects.
- Students appreciate having tutors and teachers on hand to help where necessary.
- Progression from the 11-16 school ensures continuity and helps students to choose the right pathways towards their future goals.
- It is a community 6th form and involves itself with charity work locally.

Why is the school in its current position?

The school has seen a drop in numbers as its reputation fell and, eventually, was placed in 'Special Measures' by OfSTED. Since that point the school has been supported by Derbyshire County Council to improve and is now at the stage of 'Requires Improvement'. The latest assessments point to the school being in a position to be judged 'Good' when this summer's exam results are published.

This improvement has coincided with increased numbers entering the school –

Year of Entry	Approximate Intake
2014	80
2015	100
2016	120

Improving the school has meant a greater spend (which has been supported by Derbyshire County Council) but this, combined with a lower funding per head and more cost being imposed on the school budget (moved from other council budgets - e.g. the leisure centre fees) means a projected deficit in the school's year on year budget going forward. With little notice, the council has demanded that this be reduced.

Over time the school has failed to make an attractive 6th form offer to its students and those in the wider central High Peak area. It has not marketed itself well. This has meant a steady decline in numbers entering the 6th form over a number of years. The 6th form therefore now has a deficit in its part of the budget.

The school has decided to propose removing the 6th form to reduce the school's overall deficit. This will not reduce the school deficit to zero and assertions made that the lower school is supporting the sixth form are false.

The school has carried out a consultation. This was poorly advertised meaning that only 202 replies were received. A further 259 'blank' responses were received indicating how difficult it was to respond and how poorly constructed the consultation web page was.

Despite the vast majority of respondents to the consultation opposing the closure and despite the suggestions to make the sixth form financially viable, the governors decided to proceed with their recommendation.

What will be the impact if the 6th form is closed?

It is likely that a lot of students will find 6th forms elsewhere, for example in Stockport or Marple. However, the current review of 6th form provision Greater Manchester means that this may not be an option in the future. Derbyshire County Council would be unwise to rely on colleges in Stockport to provide this education. Derbyshire students will be at the bottom of the priority list when it comes to places.

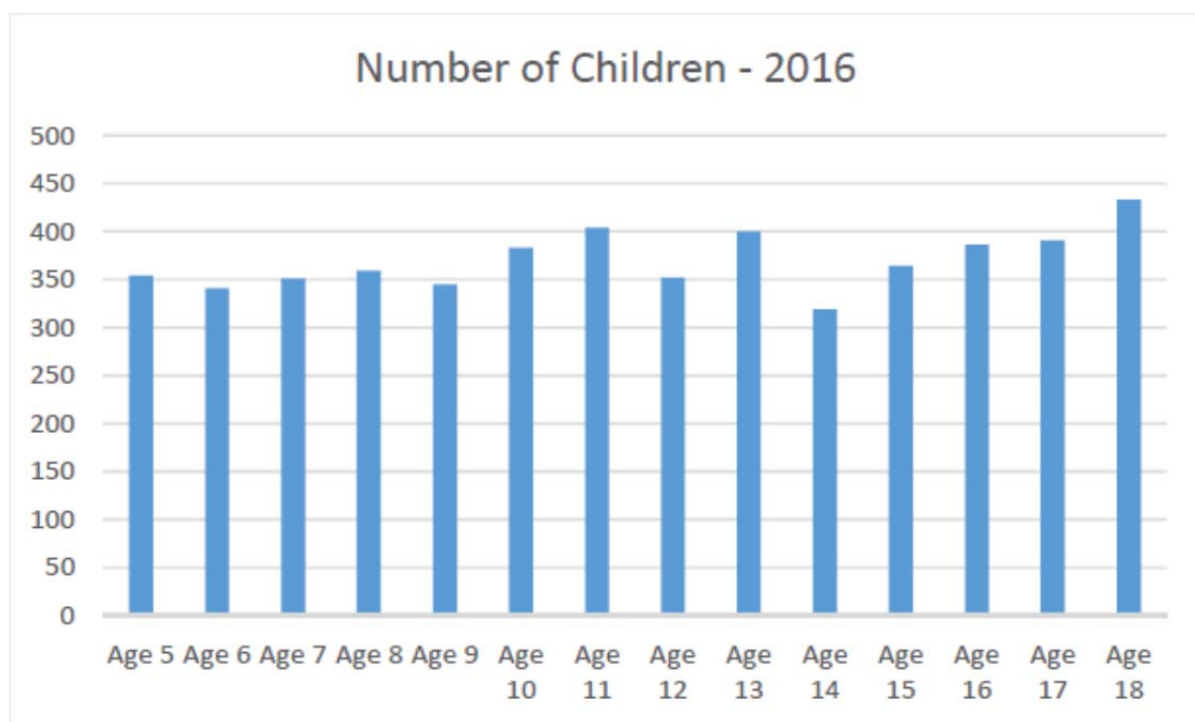
The school has already seen an impact from the proposal with families leaving the school in search of one with continuous provision. For many students, the sixth form is a vital link in their education. New Mills East ward is one of the most deprived wards in the High Peak and indeed in Derbyshire.

It is vital to acknowledge that due to the broad social and economic mix of families in the area, many find it tough to support their children. These students will find it difficult, if not impossible, to travel to colleges further afield. There is evidence of the link between the high number of 'NEET' students in rural locations and the large distances to places of education.

If we are to break this social cycle, education needs to be offered locally. There is little benefit in spending thousands of pounds on a child through Pupil Premium and other funding streams in school if the final, vital link between education and work is cut at 16.

Are there enough students to support a 6th form?

The following graph shows the number of children aged 5 to 18 resident in the central High Peak (taken from ONS data from the 2011 census). By central High Peak, we include the towns of New Mills, Whaley Bridge, Chapel-en-le-Frith, Chinley, Hayfield, their surrounding areas and the Hope Valley. We have not included any children who live in or around Buxton nor Glossop. It should be noted that the numbers of potential students in the central High Peak area will only increase with the house building work proposed under the High Peak Local Plan.



This shows that in any two adjoining years there are well over 600 students living in the central High Peak who could choose New Mills School 6th Form.

The current age 11s will predominantly go to high schools in New Mills, the Hope Valley and Chapel-en-le-Frith.

The current age 16s have chosen where to study post 16. Approximately only 40 of the 350+ students have chosen to study at New Mills 6th Form.

The question is why? Historically students did choose New Mills 6th Form. However, the opportunities the school is offering now do not match the students' needs so they are forced to look elsewhere. Over a number of years, the offer has reduced, the 6th form has been run down and more students have looked to another place to provide their education or training.

For example:

- There is no vocational offer at New Mills 6th Form.
- Traditional subject combinations are often not available.
- New Mills 6th Form was not even represented at the school's own careers fair.
- OfSTED commented that 'the leader is not given enough time to oversee provision'.

What is the solution?

There are clearly the number of students needed, living locally, to support a vibrant and successful 6th form – current Government guidance on having at least 200 students 'available' to open a sixth would be easily met in this instance.

New Mills would be the location of choice for a 6th form if a new one was to be built. It has one-journey transport links to all areas in the central High Peak, including Whaley Bridge, Chapel-en-le-Frith, Hayfield, the Hope Valley, Buxton and Glossop.

It is where the greatest area of social deprivation is, allowing those students the support that is essential to their ongoing learning.

What is needed is the vision to make an offer that is attractive to all students.

- A range of academic and vocational subjects, allowing a mix of both to be taken up (this will help tackle some of the 'NEETs' in the area and reduce the pressure on adult education).
- Traditional subject combinations and their career pathways identified and offered.

In the short term, funds will need to be found to support this growth. There are a number of options that could be used, for example:

- Direct investment from Derbyshire County Council.
- A proper strategic review of education provision in the central High Peak (as has been done in Glossopdale) which could lead to funds becoming available by for example:
 - Formally consolidating all adult education in New Mills onto the school site (there are already informal arrangements for adults to take GCSE and A- Levels alongside students at the school).
 - Better working together from local primary schools.
- The employment by the school of a Fundraising Manager to investigate and source other means of funding.

- Possible raising of capital through asset sales or leases (e.g. the Pavilion land).
- The creation of an alumni body who may be able to help support and finance the school in the future.

In the long term, with higher numbers studying at New Mills 6th Form, it will be self-sufficient financially and will be able to start supporting the lower school. Also, the investment in teaching staff and facilities will benefit the younger children and their aspirations will increase as the older students becoming increasingly successful.

Conclusion

New Mills School and 6th Form has provided a quality education to children and students locally for over 100 years. By accident (or design) the school has become less attractive to the (growing) local population. Desire and vision is needed to turn this decline around. This has already started in the 11-16 school. The 6th form now needs to be given the same time and energy to turn itself around for the benefit of its community.

Proceeding now to a full consultation will do little more than waste more time and money.

In the four weeks since we launched our petition, over 1800 people have signed to support keeping the 6th form at New Mills School open. We have spoken to many people at community events and the overwhelming number support our campaign. To be fair and balanced, we have heard opinion that it would be better closed but the number of people expressing this (both to the school's consultation and through our own work) is minimal and insignificant.

We have demonstrated that there is the local population to support a 6th form and a number of possible solutions to fund the expansion of the post 16 provision until it becomes economically self-supporting. The school has no desire to become an academy in the short to medium term (and the pressure will reduce as it achieves a 'good' grade) so this gives plenty of time for the deficit to be eliminated reducing financial risk to the council.

Further consultation will teach us nothing more and make keeping the 6th form open even more costly as the 2017 student intake will need to choose a provider before a decision is taken.

Further consultation will show that Derbyshire County Council is committed to closing the 6th form despite the facts that this is not necessary and will be detrimental to the people of Derbyshire.

We implore you to show that you care about the people of the central High Peak, and in particular those who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised, by not allowing the closure of the 6th form at New Mills School. Please stop the proposal now and work with us to ensure the future success of our community.

Some Questions to Consider

On Derbyshire County Council's Statutory Duties

Derbyshire County Council has a duty to secure suitable, appropriate and high quality education and training opportunities for young people in their area (source – DCC website, Funding and Guidance page). How could you claim to be securing these opportunities when the suggestion is that students go to colleges in other council areas and you have no control over nor agreement with these councils to provide these services? How could these be described as 'secure'?

On the Quality of Education Provision Local to New Mills

Using the www.gov.uk performance tables, New Mills School has a better “% of A level students achieving: at least 3 A-levels at A*-E; at least 2 A-levels at A*-E and at least 1 A- level at A*-E” than Aquinas College, Buxton Community School, Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College and Glossopdale Community College. How can it be sensible to close the institution that is the most successful in the area?

On Derbyshire County Council's Response to the Public's Views

The Derbyshire County Council Children's Services Service Plan 2016-2017 shares the council's vision to become outstanding by being e.g. “Responsive to children and families' needs and feedback”. The critical word here is 'responsive'; this is not just about getting feedback but listening to it as well. Given that the feedback you have received has clearly shown how important the sixth form is to the people of New Mills and around, how could you demonstrate meeting this measure if you decide to close it?

On Equality of Opportunity for Young People in Derbyshire

Glossopdale College's provision was recently reviewed. The 2014 Report of the Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults stated that “Cabinet has previously approved £5.5m from the CAYA Capital Programme towards the strategic development of the school” and that “there is a potential funding shortfall of £8m on the new build option”. Given that the north of the High Peak has had a carefully considered review of 11 to 18 education (and significant funds found to facilitate providing “an outstanding learning centre at the heart of the community”), how can it be tenable to not afford this level of care for the central High Peak area?

On Raising the Aspirations and Attainment of the most Disadvantaged

The Derbyshire County Council Children's Services Service Plan 2016-2017 also defines 'outstanding' as “Achieving sustained outcomes for children that close the gap in educational and learning achievements and support all children in realising their potential”. New Mills East ward is one of the most deprived wards in the High Peak. According to the Higher Education Funding Council for England POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) data it is also in the lowest quintile in the UK for the proportion of the population that participates in further education. How will you be able to support students from this area accessing 6th form education when local transport is being reduced and their parents find it difficult to support them? How

will you demonstrate that you are achieving sustained outcomes for these children and 'closing the gap'?