

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO
BRIDGNORTH ENDOWED SCHOOL

(Reduction in Published Admission Number and closure of Sixth Form)

On THURSDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2018 at 6PM

At Old Hall, Bridgnorth Endowed School

PRESENT: Mr B Worth Headteacher
 Mr M Freathy Chair of Governors

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs Jo Nicholls - Clerk to governors
 Parents of pupils at Bridgnorth Endowed School (4)
 Chair of Bridgnorth Area Schools' Trust
 (representing Oldbury Wells School, Bridgnorth)

1. ADDRESS BY HEADTEACHER

The Headteacher thanked those present for coming out to the meeting and introduced himself, the Chair of Governors and the Clerk who would be recording the meeting.

He then outlined, with the aid of a screen presentation, the considerations which had led to the Governing Board's decision to both reduce the current Published Admission Number (PAN) and withdraw sixth form provision at Bridgnorth Endowed School (BES).

The key focus points of the presentation were as follows:

- **FALLING PUPIL DEMOGRAPHIC**

Pupil numbers had gone through a sustained period of decline within Bridgnorth. There had been a 20% drop-off of pupils aged 11-18 for local secondaries to draw from over the past ten years.

An even bigger drop, of 40%, had been sustained in children following a course for 16-19-year-olds in the town. Reasons for this decline were complex, the Head said, but a clear factor was the increasing desire of pupils to go further afield to study at this stage of their education. With more children aspiring to university it

was a good interim step, offering a taste of independence and a sense of new horizons.

- SCHOOL'S FINANCIAL POSITION:

Largely as a result of the above, BES's sixth form had failed each year to achieve the Department for Education (DfE)-recommended pupil roll of 200 for over a decade now. The provision was unsustainable and was dragging on funding for the rest of the school.

The problem had been made worse in the last few years by much-publicised cuts in post-16 funding. Sixth form funding nationwide was now at its lowest point since 2010, with the result that many across the country were, like BES, having to close their doors.

- CURRENT SIXTH FORM OUTLOOK:

The current student roll in sixth form was 55 pupils. Canvassing of those approaching that stage revealed that only 5% planned to stay on at the school (as opposed to the 84% of the school's existing cohort who were needed to make the sixth form viable).

- PROPOSED REDUCTION IN PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBER (PAN):

BES currently had a PAN of 174 and Bridgnorth's other secondary Oldbury Wells School was similar. Taken together this was a significant overcapacity, bearing in mind actual child numbers in the town.

BES had failed to meet its PAN number for some years now and – in order to tailor it more realistically to the local demographic, proposed reducing admissions to 120 per year group with effect from September 2020.

In summary, the proposal to recalibrate the school's PAN was a relatively clearcut matter of demographics, but the decision to withdraw its Sixth Form was understandably a more "emotional" issue, the Head said.

When the above factors were taken into account, however, it was patently “not just difficult, but impossible” to run a viable sixth form at Bridgnorth Endowed School.

There had been long deliberation by the school’s Governing Board in the run-up to the current proposals, but in the end governors had felt that withdrawing post-16 provision, sad though it was, would enable the school to go forward in a far healthier form.

He assured parents that proper due process and consideration was being followed in the matter. All steps had been taken in full compliance with DfE guidelines. Full information for parents and stakeholders was to be found on a dedicated BES Sixth Form Closure consultation page on the school website.

The chair of the school’s Board of Governors Mr Mark Freathy echoed the Head’s sentiments, saying that the decision to consult over the closure of the sixth form was the result of “three years of soul-searching” by the governing body. They had reached “a point of no return” and it was time to work with partner institutions for the good of the pupils, he said.

NEXT STEPS:

The aim going forward was for Bridgnorth Endowed School to be:

- **A small, focused school of around 600 pupils offering an outstanding academic curriculum for 11-16-year-olds**

As far as pupils were concerned, alternative options at 16+ were very attractive in the area. The Head had already been in contact with most of the following providers, who were keen to attract BES pupils and would be taking part in weekly presentations to them over the coming months:

- ❖ Bridgnorth Sixth Form (Oldbury Wells School)
- ❖ Kidderminster College
- ❖ King Edward VI College, Stourbridge
- ❖ Ludlow College
- ❖ Shrewsbury Sixth Form
- ❖ Telford College
- ❖ Thomas Telford School
- ❖ William Brookes School, Much Wenlock

2. QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR:

Q: *Is it not possible for the school to work with Oldbury Wells to produce a joint sixth form?*

A: This had been tried before and unfortunately hadn't worked, the Head said. Although it was before his own time at the school, he suggested that issues such as quality assurance and split responsibilities between the two sites proved problematic.

Nevertheless, BES had explored the option again more recently – and indeed had students going down to OW for certain subjects. No pupils from there came up to BES however and discussions with OW's Head about further involvement had failed to arrive at any mutually-satisfactory plan.

Q: *On a practical level, how will working parents get their children to these alternative sixth forms? Will there be transport made available for those people living in more rural areas?*

A: The Head said that transport was an issue the school was actively discussing with providers. Their keenness to have students from BES led him to feel very confident that appropriate transport would be laid on, if that was a key factor in student choice. The school would be keeping parents advised of transport information as and when it was confirmed.

The Chair added that in his experience as a parent of three children all of whom had gone on from BES at sixth form stage, schools were often happy to lay on and subsidise buses for a nominal fee to parents.

Q: *Could closing the sixth form lead to the closure of the whole school?*

A: The Chair responded that the Board was confident this would not be the case. The new proposal offered a sustainable future for a successful school – it was doing nothing that posed the threat.

Q: *Can you understand that working people want schools where their children can go and stay all through without having to worry about moving schools?*

B: The Head said that he understood that viewpoint and that it was one of the factors which he, senior staff and the governors had considered. They had to balance that off however against the very real considerations outlined.

As far as the children themselves were concerned, though, he felt they had a lot to gain from the new options and were already expressing their preference in the popular choice to move on at 16.

Other parents also voiced agreement that broadening their horizons at this stage was a good thing for Bridgnorth children to do.

Q: *What guidance are you going to give to pupils?*

A: The school had an excellent careers advisor who would be discussing choices with the children. In addition to the weekly presentations in assembly, the outside sixth forms would be providing prospectuses and other information to pupils and their parents.

Q: *Will there be any “taster days” laid on for pupils?*

A: Some students were already booked to attend such days, and these would be encouraged, the Head said.

Q: *Is there ample time for children to apply elsewhere, bearing in mind application closing dates? For example, Oldbury Wells’ deadline is Monday – will there be an extension?*

A: The Head understood that parents and pupils were unsettled by the news and worried about missing deadlines but stressed that the children would be looked after, and outside providers would be flexible. Oldbury Wells had been scheduled as the first presentation (the next morning) precisely because its deadline was close, but the Head there was keen to welcome BES students and would undoubtedly be flexible on dates, given the circumstances. Other application deadlines were not till the New Year.

3. CLOSURE OF MEETING

The Head thanked all for attending, stressed that the welfare of its pupils would be the school’s absolute focus going forward and closed the meeting.

MEETING CLOSED AT 6.49PM