



ST ALBAN'S RC HIGH SCHOOL
The Park, Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 6XG

YSGOL UWCHRADD GATHOLIG SAIN ALBAN
Y Parc, Pontypwl, Torfaen, NP4 6XG

Ms Alison Ward,
Chief Executive,
Torfaen County Borough Council,
Civic Centre,
Pontypool,
Torfaen. NP4 6YB

14th February 2017

Re: Governors' Objection to Statutory Notices of Closure of Post-16 Provision at St Alban's

Dear Alison,

Thank you for providing a consultation report, subsequent to which the Cabinet decided to issue Statutory Notices of Closure for post-16 provision in the English-medium secondary schools across Torfaen.

Our Governing Body have considered your responses to our questions raised in the consultation process and now wish to make the following objections:

Objection 1: That in the proposed 6th Form Centre there will be a lack of Faith Provision for Students aged 16 – 18 and a lack of Chaplaincy Provision which will be detrimental to the personal and spiritual development of learners.

While we acknowledge your attempt to answer our question, namely:

'How will the new provision ensure that the support and personal / spiritual development opportunities for young people that currently exist in St Alban's will continue under the new arrangements?'

we consider your response to be unsatisfactory, and we hope that the following extract from the Archdiocese of Cardiff's recent document entitled, 'School and College Chaplaincy Provision', presents the *raison d'être* for the existence of Catholic schools and colleges:

'The central role of chaplaincy is to serve the formation of the whole person of staff and students in Catholic schools and colleges, with attention given equally to intellectual, emotional, pastoral and spiritual needs. In this context, 'pastoral needs' refers to the need for personal growth and development for people to reach their full potential, fulfilment, happiness and moral and general welfare, including coming to a deeper understanding of their own humanity and self. 'Spiritual needs' refer to the needs related to our task to grow into a full 'flowering' of the four 'ontological relations' essential to human nature: we are created towards loving God and our neighbour and towards living in full internal (body, mind and spirit) and external harmony with all creation. It is a participation in the priestly, prophetic and shepherding ministry of Jesus Christ and expresses the concern of the Church for her sons and daughters especially insofar as it shares in their formation as disciples and friends of the Lord.



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Our Secondary Schools and our Sixth Form College possess robust pastoral structures which cater for the human and intellectual needs of our young people. Likewise sound and robust chaplaincy provision demonstrates a serious commitment towards meeting the spiritual needs and the formation so essential to equip our young people as members of the Body of Christ. Evidence of a clear commitment to chaplaincy provision is a sure sign of a school's commitment to the Catholic vision of humanity and a willingness to engage in the Church's mission of evangelisation which places Christ at the centre of all we do in our institutions.'

Whilst we of course approach this matter from a Christian perspective, it is a wider faith issue. It is therefore of serious concern to our Governing Body that your reassurances of ensuring faith provision and chaplaincy in a new 6th Form Centre by the establishment of a multi-faith service under the direction of a dedicated management post-holder does not equate to the way in which 16 – 18 year old learners are nurtured pastorally and spiritually in a specifically faith-based 6th Form, and we believe that your statement that 'the challenge of providing faith support is considered achievable' (Alternative options, page 17, bullet point 1) is at best naïve.

It is also of concern to us that as there is no legal requirement for any form of chaplaincy to be provided in an educational setting, what guarantee would there be that any form of provision would be maintained in a new 6th Form Centre if for example budgetary pressures were to continue to be a serious source of challenge for the relevant authority.

What the distinctiveness of faith provision means in concrete terms for us at Saint Alban's, is that throughout the time a young person spends with us the safe development of their full potential is our priority, and it matters not whether they are going to achieve the highest grades at the end of Year 11 or Year 13 or not, but more importantly that they grow in an awareness of their unique dignity and an appreciation of the gifts that they have been given and how to make use of those gifts through availing of the opportunities that they encounter. We know that many parents choose to entrust their children to us because of the superb pastoral care which our students experience in Saint Alban's, and thereby develop a sound emotional health and well-being which will serve them well in their adult lives. This is attested to by parents and students who state that these are some of the fruits that are borne of studying in a faith environment until the time of leaving school, either at 16 or 18 years of age.

It is also interesting to note that many parents, and the Admission Authority of TCBC, recognise the unique nurture that we at Saint Alban's are able to offer to some of the most vulnerable young people in our community, and that we do not deny them the opportunity to continue their education in Years 12 and 13 even if they do not have the grades that other institutions will demand of them. We believe therefore that our 6th Form promotes the best possible outcomes for all young pupils and not just for those who are expected to be high achievers. We are therefore of the opinion that the embracing of all people, irrespective of gender, colour, creed, disability or academic ability, is a unique expression of our ethos, and further we believe that this would be something impossible to replicate in a facility in which developing a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ was not at the heart of its identity.

Objection 2: That the closure of St Alban's 6th Form will have an impact on the whole school.

While we acknowledge your attempt to answer our question, namely:



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It is possible that the removal of the Sixth Form at St Alban's could destabilise the whole school in terms of recruitment at Year 7 and managing a transition process, including redundancies and other costs, which may place a financial burden on the school which is impossible to meet. Could you provide assurances to St Alban's Governing Body in respect of the above points?

we believe that your response only partially assuages our concerns but dismisses other serious matters with only a superficial comment.

In a positive way, we are grateful for the reassurance that costs associated with potential redundancies will be met by the Local Authority on condition that the appropriate guidance is followed (Staffing, page 6, bullet point 1 and page 8, bullet point 1).

However, as we understand that the majority of our teachers would prefer to work in an 11 – 18 institution rather than in either an 11 – 16 one or more particularly in a 16 – 18 environment, we retain a serious concern about the possible impact on recruitment of staff to Saint Alban's if we were to become an 11 – 16 institution only. Further, we believe that the wider community would be concerned about this because of our reputation as a school which delivers outstanding teaching to our pupils which equips them to make valued contributions to society in their adult lives, and offers parents a wider choice of educational environment in which their children may study (Choice, page 11, comment 1, not answered). We therefore believe that the removal of 6th Forms from Torfaen schools could result in problems recruiting high calibre staff in the future which could ultimately lead to a weakening of 11 – 16 provision, not just in Saint Alban's, but across Torfaen. We do not therefore accept your statement that 'there is no evidence to suggest that the loss of a 6th Form will have a detrimental effect on staff' (Staffing, page 6, bullet point 2).

We are disappointed to see that the concerns which many teachers have about moving onto FE contracts are rather glibly dismissed in your report, in favour of 'what is best for students in Torfaen post – 16' (Staffing, page 7, bullet point 1).

We believe that the presence of our 6th Form students enriches the lives of all members of our school community, and that this goes way beyond 'the benefits of mentoring and buddying' (cf Pastoral Support / Ethos, page 9, bulletin point 1). Not only do many of our 6th Form students aspire to academic excellence themselves, but they inspire those lower down the school to be the best that they can be and to strive for the full flourishing of the human person, e.g. their contribution to the performing arts department through drama, music, productions affording our younger pupils the opportunity to work alongside those who are about to further develop their skills through higher studies at some of the top universities and professional colleges across the United Kingdom. They would also be an example to our younger pupils by way of their commitment to charitable works, and volunteering to assist those less fortunate than themselves, e.g. by going as young helpers with the sick and disabled on pilgrimages.

We are strongly of the opinion that 6th Form provision is not just an extra two years on top of statutory schooling but an opportunity for our 16 – 18 year old pupils to be superb role-models to our younger students, and whose absence would not only diminish our community significantly, but which would also impoverish the learning opportunities for our 11 – 16 year old pupils. This interaction works two ways and the 6th Form students benefit greatly from having the opportunity to interact as mentors and leaders with the younger students. It would be a tragedy if the removal of our 6th Form were to cause



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the future stability of faith provision beyond the age of 11 to be in jeopardy in Torfaen and Monmouthshire, and we are disappointed to see that you have completely failed to respond to this point (Choice, page 13, bullet point 1).

Finally, we note that in referring to the main driving forces behind the proposal to develop a new 6th Form Centre, you refer to the provision of a new school for Croesyceiliog but do not refer to sustaining dialogue with the Archdiocese of Cardiff about a new building to replace the current buildings at Saint Alban's, which are rapidly reaching a point of no longer being fit for purpose. In support of this statement, I draw your attention to the conclusion of the recent Property Condition and Suitability Report, commissioned by the Welsh Government, which awarded a grade of C- for condition (out of a range of A to D), recommending a spend of £1,188,289.50 to bring the buildings to a standard of Grade B, and then an annual maintenance cost of £84,960. However, Governors dispute these figures due to believing that insufficient advertence has been paid to the main school building being a Grade 2 listed building. Nevertheless, what is clear is that Governors are seriously concerned that a combination of the loss of our 6th Form at a time when our educational environment is becoming poorer could have a seriously damaging impact on our future viability, and could under certain circumstances lead to the total closure of our school. This is of particular concern to us after learning today that it appears as if the Archdiocese of Cardiff's submission to the Welsh Government concerning the future provision of faith education in Torfaen has not been progressed following the publication of the Property Condition and Suitability Report on 22nd December 2016.

The objections of the Governing Body to the proposal to remove the 6th Form at Saint Alban's are clearly set out above. However, if there was a clear plan to protect and develop Catholic education in Torfaen, at least for the statutory age groups in accordance with the vision outlined above from the Archdiocese of Cardiff document entitled 'School and College Chaplaincy Provision', then our objections could be somewhat ameliorated. However, Governors would be further reassured if new facilities for Saint Alban's were to be located as near as possible to the site of any new 6th Form Centre, so that arrangements could be more easily explored to cater for the pastoral and spiritual dimensions of the lives of post 16 students in the new facility. Such proximity would also allow for there to be some interaction between pupils in Years 7 – 11 and the post-16 students in a way that didn't totally remove the significant role that post-16 students contribute to the lives of Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils.

Yours sincerely,

Father David Hayman,
Chair of the Governing Body.