

Objection by the governing body of St. Joseph's School and Sixth Form

– 5 May 2016

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's response

Summary of points of objection

- The local authority has deliberately marginalised St Josephs and other voluntary aided schools in the documentation on its schools admissions policy.

In determining its Admission Policy for community schools the Council has adhered to the Welsh Government's School Admissions Code, 2013 and relevant legislation.

The Council's admission's policy is specific to community schools. It sets out the procedures for admission to its community schools. Procedures for admission to voluntary aided schools (Faith) are contained within their individual admissions policies.

The admission policies for all maintained schools within NPT, i.e. community and voluntary aided (Faith) as set out in the information for parents' handbook published annually (http://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/SCH_Parents_Handbook_16_17.pdf).

In addition, the Council's Admission Policy for community schools clearly states on its first page, *'For voluntary aided (i.e. Faith) schools, it is each school's governing body that determines the admission arrangements, details of which can be obtained from the respective governing body.'*

To make a statement that the local authority has deliberately marginalised voluntary aided schools is untrue and shows a significant lack of understanding of Welsh Government's School Admissions Code and process.

- The local authority wishes to play down the St Joseph's sixth form although it accepts a significant number of students from other local schools. It instead promotes the tertiary college.

The Council's Admission Policy for its community schools clearly states that, *there are two sixth forms within the County Borough - a community school Welsh-medium sixth form at YG Ystalyfera for which the Council is the admission authority and a voluntary aided school sixth form at St Joseph's RC School & 6th Form Centre for which the school's governing body is the admission authority.*

The Admission Policy does not refer once to any 'tertiary college' provision. This again, is a totally inaccurate statement.

- The term feeder school has been dropped and "partner school" has been inserted with no consultation or explanation. Voluntary aided schools are not included in the table of these even though they are maintained schools.

The report scrutinised and agreed by elected members included an appendix B that provided a summary of responses to consultation. The appendix also states:

The responses received are summarised as follows:

A clear definition of designated partner / feeder school is requested and an explanation as to why the term 'feeder school' had been replaced by 'partner school' is requested.

Furthermore, an officer response is provided as follows,

For the purpose of the admission of a pupil to a community school, the term partner school is used in connection with a primary school and a secondary school. It is defined as a school that has a catchment area in common with another school of the same category, e.g. an English-medium community primary school and an English-medium community secondary school. In this regard it does not necessarily follow that nearest schools are partner schools.

This definition has been included in the proposed admission arrangements for community schools, 2017/2018.

The terms 'feeder' school and 'partner' school are interchangeable in relation to admission arrangements. 'Partner' school has been used more widely latterly in recognition of the partnership between schools rather than the hierarchy implied by the term 'feeder'. For consistency, the term 'partner' will be used throughout the Council's proposed admission arrangements 2017/18.

(see also attached documents)

This provides a clear explanation for the change in use of terms. The change was as a result of the local authority's consultation on its Admissions Policy for community schools.

Once again, we must emphasise that the local authority's Admissions Policy relates only to community schools in accordance with Welsh Government's Admissions Code.

- We have had no sight of catchment maps despite requests for these.

We are not aware of any request from the Governing Body of St. Joseph's School and Sixth Form to view catchment area maps. Maps are available.

- There is still no reference whatsoever as to what is to count as the "designate" or "nearest suitable" school in the NPT admission policy for 2017/18.

The nearest suitable school is not an Admission Policy consideration. The Council uses catchment areas to define the geographical areas its community schools are intended to serve. The Admissions Policy is aimed at providing the means by which pupils are admitted to the school of their choice.

- By refusing to talk about any matters relating to admissions to VA schools, the local authority precludes any possibility of a consideration of the defining characteristics “designated” and “nearest suitable” being applied to VA schools.

All VA schools were included in the consultation. The local authority has never ‘refused to talk about any matters relating to admissions to VA schools. Indeed, applications for admission to Year 7 in St. Joseph's School and Sixth Form are initially processed by the Council. As admission authorities, VA schools are required to consult the Council on their proposed admission arrangements. The Council is open to discussion in order to ensure admission procedures and practices are clear and coherent to parents.

- The local authority seeks to devalue the contribution that voluntary aided schools make to our society and to manipulate school admission arrangements to support a disputed school transport policy.

This is a contentious view that cannot be supported by evidence. Although interrelated, the admissions policy and HTST policy are separate policy provisions.

The HTST policy was democratically approved by elected members in March 2013.

- NPTCBC officers are so determined to maintain the school transport policy that they have allowed this policy to affect their understanding of school admissions and their understanding of how the local authority should work in partnership with all maintained schools in its area.

Officers are clear on the strategic and operational distinction between the two.

NPTCBC is committed to reviewing the HTST policy in Autumn 2016. However, it is to be noted that although interrelated, the admissions policy and HTST policy are separate policy provisions.

Again we completely refute the claim that officers' views have been skewed in any way regarding their understanding of school admissions.

- There is still no reference whatsoever as to how a child who attends a faith school in this county borough gets to school in the 2017/18 Admissions Policy.

See bullet point 1.

Also, 'The Council publishes annually its Information for Parents Handbook which sets out the arrangements for admission to schools within the County Borough. This is circulated to all prospective parents and is available on the Council's website. Furthermore, the Admissions Policy notes that, *'Although a separate policy provision, the Council recognises the inter-relationship between admission and home to school transport and advises parents to refer to the Council's Home to School Travel policy when applying for a place at a school for their child. The policy is available at www.npt.gov.uk*'