

Appleton College Consultation Document

October 5th to November 2nd, 2017



Bridgewater
High School

Proposal:

- to consult on closing Appleton College and
- to work on collaborative transition from KS4 to KS5 with Priestley College as part of The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT)

Consultation period Thursday 5th October to Thursday 2nd November

The proposal is that Appleton College, Bridgewater High School's sixth form provision, will no longer recruit students from September 2018. Students currently enrolling this September for Y12 or Y13 will continue to receive the same high standards of teaching and care that have always characterised Appleton College.

Bridgewater High school will now work collaboratively with Priestley College to provide the highest quality transition between KS4-5 for those students wishing to attend Priestley College. Students choosing different pathways or institutions will also benefit from high quality transition arrangements.

There are essentially two reasons for the proposal:

1. The significantly low and declining number of students choosing Appleton College as a Post 16 option means that the College is no longer financially viable. The only alternative is to reduce the course offer for students, which will result in the College becoming educationally unviable.
2. Being a founder member of The Challenge Academy Trust, Bridgewater High School has the opportunity to forge a collaborative transition structure with Priestley College which will benefit our students.

Context:

Appleton College has always been a priority for Bridgewater High School. However, for more than a decade we have wrestled with relatively low numbers. To combat this the school and the Governors have taken a number of steps to increase recruitment including:

- An unremitting focus upon raising the academic profile of Appleton College, something we have succeeded in doing
- Focusing on a personalised curriculum
- The introduction of innovative pathways such as the NHS Cadet Scheme and the Arts Pathway
- The successful drive to increase the number of students attending Russell group universities including Oxford and Cambridge
- Providing over 20 A level options
- Substantial investment in and refurbishment of the sixth form area exceeding £100,000
- Significantly increasing the leadership and management capacity within the sixth form including the appointment of a dedicated Assistant Headteacher
- An extensive transition and induction programme with events starting from Y7
- A number of staff and governor working parties that have looked extensively into ways of increasing recruitment
- Prioritising the teaching of A levels on the school timetable
- Taking feedback from students and acting on it

Notwithstanding these efforts, numbers have remained stubbornly low and over recent years have declined. The reason students give us is the wide choice of post sixteen institutions available to them in the Warrington area, institutions that are typically both strong, and of quality.

School Leaders and Governors have therefore reluctantly reached the conclusion that recruitment is simply too low. We need to be realistic about the fact that Appleton College is no longer financially nor educationally sustainable. Furthermore, given our responsibility to ensure that public funds are appropriately spent we need to be confident that we are not subsidising a small sixth form at the expense of the rest of the school.

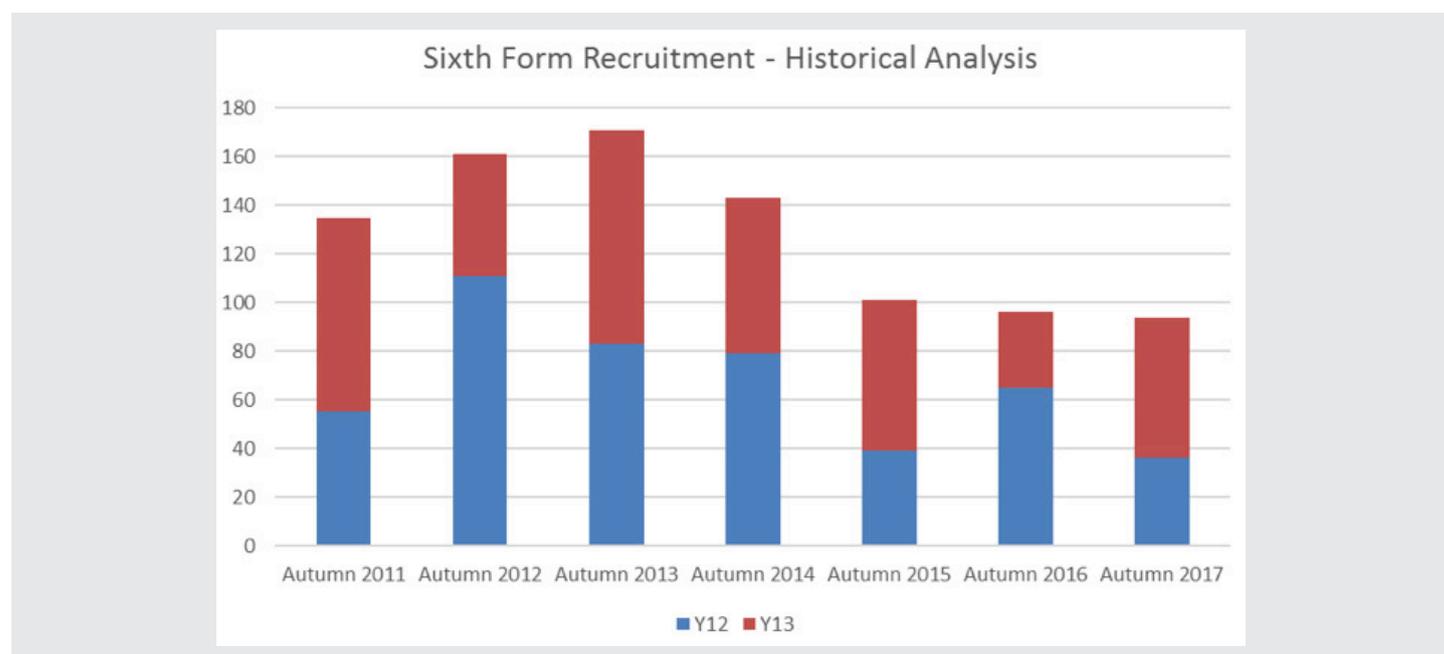
In the document “Making significant changes to an open academy, March 2016” the Department for Education state:

Applications for the addition of a sixth-form will be assessed against the following quality criteria; these will be used as guidelines when being considered by the RSC:

- Size, an expectation of around 200 students or more, either in the institution or through partnership;
- Breadth, an expectation that a student should be able to choose from around 15 A levels across a range of subjects, either in the institution or through partnership;

In terms of the breadth of the offer, Appleton College has regularly provided over 15 A level courses and currently offers over 20 A levels. However, notwithstanding the fact that the advice referred to in the document “Making significant changes to an open academy, March 2016” relates to new sixth forms, our recruitment has fallen significantly below this benchmark figure of 200 students over a number of years, as this table illustrates:

Sixth Form Numbers - Historical Analysis				
	Y12	Y13	Total	Adrift from 200
Autumn 2011	55	80	135	-65
Autumn 2012	111	50	161	-39
Autumn 2013	83	88	171	-29
Autumn 2014	79	64	143	-57
Autumn 2015	39	62	101	-99
Autumn 2016	65	31	96	-104
Autumn 2017	36	58	94	-106



The low numbers have been a constant matter of analysis, especially within the Scrutiny and Finance Committee. In the summer of 2015, recruitment was particularly difficult. Therefore, it was agreed that we would explore its future sustainability. An option considered in 2015 was to close the sixth form to new recruits from 2016. There was a strong financial argument for this. However, whilst finance was and remains the overwhelming argument, there were other factors to consider. These included where the school was in terms of its preparation for new A levels, the expectations that had been given to students and the potential of moving into TCAT and the financial reserves we had. Therefore, it was decided in August 2016 to continue but review numbers again in 2017 to evaluate the financial viability of Appleton College. This summer's recruitment marks the final tipping point with exceptionally low numbers triggering this proposal to close Appleton College to current Y11 students.

The numbers argument is stark for the viability of the sixth form. We recognise that the Department for Education's advice referred to earlier represents only a potential benchmark figure for opening new sixth forms. However, we believe it broadly equates to the viability of running our current sixth form, particularly given the wider funding issues we face locally. As the following table illustrates a roll of 200 would, subject to Bridgewater's current funding formula¹, bring in an income of:

	Income per Student £	No of students	Total Income £
With numbers of 200	3,956	200	791,200
Actual numbers 2017/8	3,956	96	379,737
Deficit			411,463

¹ The Sixth funding is drawn from the ESFA's funding formula. This based on the flat rate of £4,000 per full-time student which is then modified by the ESFA for characteristics specific to Appleton College including a retention factor of 0.995, programme cost weighting of 1.0 and disadvantage funding relating to economic deprivation funding (based on area factors and Appleton College's student profile). This results in the base rate figure of £4,000 per student being reduced to an average of £3,956 per student.

Meanwhile this table represents the sliding scale of costs and subsidy when set against a benchmark 200 students.

Benchmark income for 200 students @ £3,956	Actual numbers	Income	Annual Deficit
£791,200	200	£791,200	£0
£791,200	175	£692,300	-£98,900
£791,200	150	£593,400	-£197,800
£791,200	125	£494,500	-£296,700
£791,200	100	£395,600	-£395,600
£791,200	75	£296,700	-£494,500
£791,200	50	£197,800	-£593,400

Both tables illustrate the potential difficulty any school would have in supporting a sixth form with numbers lower than 200. It might be that schools with higher numbers but still less than 200 students can make their sixth form viable. This was our position in the past. However, the recent trend of such low and declining numbers means that we can no longer do so.

Our students have consistently praised the quality of both the care and guidance and the teaching and learning provided by Appleton College. However, understandably and rightly students have a wide range of subject interests. One of the challenges we have faced over the years therefore has been to make the option choices attractive to students, especially when compared with the rich offer of local sixth form providers.

We have extensively sought the views of students in terms of the courses that could act as an incentive to stay at Appleton College. In recent years, this has seen the addition of courses such as Economics and Government and Politics directly because of student feedback. However, the dilemma we face is that by offering the breadth of choice that our students say makes the sixth form attractive we then further increase the curriculum costs associated with running the sixth form. Clearly, this is not always offset by sufficiently high numbers of new entrants.

Other steps we have taken to mitigate costs whilst not compromising the quality of the educational offer include reducing the numbers of hours that very small groups receive, or in some cases teaching mixed age group classes in the Arts. Such steps might make a difference when a school has, for example, over 150 students. However, when the role is in-line with our three year average of just below 100, such steps have minimal impact on the overall costs of running the sixth form.

In conclusion, therefore, Bridgewater High School's governors feel that it would not represent the best use of public funding if we were keep Appleton College open.

Next Steps and Possible Questions and Answers:

Q: What impact will this have on students currently enrolled at Appleton College?

A: There should be no direct impact. Students will continue to receive the high quality care and guidance that have characterised Appleton College over the years. Current Y12 moving into Y13 will clearly be part of a smaller sixth form. However, if this proposal goes ahead, we are adamant that there should be no detriment to the quality of education they receive. We have a depth of high quality A level teachers to draw upon in terms of ensuring curriculum continuity. Furthermore, the high level of pastoral support and care will continue whilst being appropriate to a relatively small cohort of students.

Finally, perhaps even more so than ever, we will want to ensure that if they are the last year group through Appleton College, they become fittingly representative of the high standards of achievement that have characterised previous Appleton year groups.

Q: If this proposal goes ahead, does it mean that Appleton College will close to current Y11 and all subsequent year groups?

A: Yes

Q: How can current students find out about alternative sixth form options?

A: Within school, Assistant Headteacher Mr Lambrianides, who has had significant experience in taking students through A level will provide a range of information and guidance, including Apprenticeship options at KS4. This will be developed as part of an already extensive programme of Careers Information and Guidance across the whole school. We are also already involved in a network of local schools and colleges

to further improve transition arrangements. The school will also continue to provide impartial Careers and Guidance to students.

Q: Will Priestley be able to accommodate Bridgewater students who may previously have chosen Appleton College?

A: Yes.

Q: Some students prefer the small nature of Appleton College. What support will be provided if they move into a larger college?

A: To begin with, we have no reason to believe that larger local institutions do not provide appropriate pastoral care and guidance to all their students. However, where students feel more daunted by moving into a larger environment we will, through our transition programme seek, to support them as best we can. It should be noted that we have experience of this at other transition points in the school. For example, many of our Y7 students come from single entry primary schools and join a cohort of 300 students. Because of how we work with our primaries, we believe we are successful in providing a smooth transition into a larger environment and we feel confident we could do the same between KS4-5.

Q: Could the closure of Appleton College be detrimental to the quality of education provided by Bridgewater High School?

A: No. We see no reason why this should be the case. Whilst it has been a privilege teaching across three Key Stages, refocusing upon just Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 3 will, we believe, provide opportunities for even greater student success. Furthermore, we believe that because some of

the resources that have been directed towards the sixth form can now be channelled towards KS3 and KS4, students will only benefit more widely.

Q: Could this impact upon the quality of teachers that Bridgewater can recruit and retain?

A: Bridgewater is an attractive place to work whether a teacher's passion is for KS3, KS4, KS5 or indeed any combination of these. Our staff regularly comment that it is a privilege to work with such hardworking students. However, it is true that for some teachers, the prospect of teaching at A level is a defining attraction when applying for jobs. Equally, for other teachers, being able to teach in an 11-16 environment such as Bridgewater is an incentive in its own right. Therefore, we feel confident that we will continue to recruit high quality teachers. Furthermore, with our recent designation as a Teaching School along with the opportunities that we believe TCAT will provide in terms of the professional development we are confident that we will be able to provide a teaching environment that will continue to attract both highly qualified and excellent classroom practitioners.

Q: Does this potential change present any opportunities for Bridgewater High School?

A: It's important that if this proposal goes ahead we seek to find opportunities to continue to develop Bridgewater High School. For example, we would look to develop our work between KS2-KS3. In particular, we would focus on curriculum continuity and pastoral transition with our local primaries. Similarly, we would look to develop a more comprehensive transition programme with Priestley College. Appleton College has accrued significant experience and capability in delivering A levels at KS5 over a number of years. Because Bridgewater High School is a founder member of TCAT, the first multi academy trust nationally to include a sixth form college, we are uniquely placed to share this expertise within the collaborative structure that defines TCAT. As a result, we believe we will build a stronger, more

sustainable post 16 provision for our students within a rigorous framework of accountability.

We also think that the closure of the Appleton College would provide capacity for us to develop our newly acquired National Teaching School status.

Q: Who decided on this proposal, Bridgewater High School or TCAT?

A: This proposal was put forward by the Governors of Bridgewater High School and is supported by the TCAT Trustees.

Q: Is it possible that Priestley will also come under financial pressure and have to reduce its offer to students?

A: Currently all post 16 providers continue to be under financial pressures due to government funding restrictions. However, Priestley has an outstanding financial health rating and remains fully committed to offering a broad and inclusive curriculum and this means protecting minority A Levels such as modern foreign languages and music. A number of courses have recently been withdrawn as they have been across the country due to national policy changes, for example A Level Archaeology and ICT. As a large post 16 provider the students who currently attend Bridgewater can be assured that there are no plans to reduce the offer at Priestley, if anything there is likely to be more choice in the future as new Technical Qualifications are introduced for those interested in vocational qualifications.

Q: What attitude might the Department for Education or the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) have regarding this proposal?

A: The Department for Education alongside the RSC conducted a number of Area Wide reviews last year into a range of things but included a focus upon the delivery of post-16 education. We believe that the steps we are taking and the reasons why we are taking them would be regarded as prudent. The opportunities to collaborate more fully with Priestley College

would also complement their interest in more strategic sixth form delivery. However, at no point have either organisation directly approached Bridgewater High School regarding the viability of Appleton College.

Q: What steps will the school take to mitigate the financial impact if this proposal goes ahead?

A: There will inevitably be a need to make changes. However, if the proposal goes ahead we will have up to two years to deliver as smooth a transition as we can. Furthermore, any opportunities that arise at Priestley College will be advertised first within TCAT with all eligible staff being at least guaranteed an interview. Finally, with our designation as a National Teaching School we think there will be opportunities for growth as well.

Q: Who should I contact with any queries regarding the consultation if I cannot find an answer in the Possible Questions and Answers section or I want to record my views?

A: You can either:

send an email to appletonproposal@bridgewaterhigh.com or post a letter to: Appleton College Consultation, Broomfields Road, Appleton WA4 3AE.

You can also attend the Consultation Event to be held at the Upper School at 6.30pm on Thursday 19th October where governors and senior staff will be able to respond to any queries. If you would like to attend, please contact Mrs J Hodgson at the Upper School or email: J.Hodgson@bridgewaterhigh.com.

Finally, there will be an on-line consultation link on the school's website which will allow you to raise issues and express your response to the following statement:

"I accept the arguments regarding the proposal to close Appleton College and to work on collaborative transition from KS4 to KS5 with Priestley College as part of The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT)"

Q: What happens after the consultation period closes?

A: Following the consultation a report summarising the details of the responses to the consultation will be published and circulated. A business case including all the feedback from the consultation will be sent to the Secretary of State for approval.

Q: Who makes the final decision about this proposal?

A: A: The Local Governing Body at Bridgewater High will make a decision that is then recommended to the TCAT trustees which will then be passed onto the Secretary of State.

Q: When will the outcome be announced?

A: The consultation period must run for 4 weeks from Thursday 5th October to Thursday 2nd November. Governors will then meet to review the consultation feedback. We expect the outcome to be available w/c 13th November.