

Appleton College Consultation Feedback

Thursday 16th November 2017

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)

The consultation period to consider the above proposal has now ended. Governors met on Tuesday 7th November 2017 to consider the feedback provided. Having done so, Governors have decided to move ahead with the proposal to close Appleton College to new entrants from September 2018.

Feedback came from the following sources:

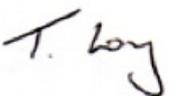
1. the on-line consultation form
2. meetings with
 - > parents
 - > pupils
 - > teachers and support teachers
3. written feedback from the Local Authority

In terms of the on-line consultation form, we received eleven responses and five parents attended the Open Evening meeting.

This has been a difficult decision for Governors and school leaders who are immensely proud of what has been achieved over the years in Appleton College. The benefits of a smaller sixth form environment came through strongly in the feedback, as did a shared sense of sadness for losing this provision. However, there was overwhelming recognition that the extremely small number of students choosing Appleton College means that this option could no longer be justified.

Moving forward Bridgewater High School remains committed to providing high quality careers advice and guidance for students as part of the transition to the next stage in their education. Also, given that an emerging theme of the consultation feedback was that some students felt attracted by a smaller sixth form where they already knew their teachers, school leaders and governors will ensure that opportunities for more personalised careers advice and guidance are also provided. The next step in the process involves passing on the consultation feedback to the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education.

Yours faithfully



Tim Long, Principal



Stephen Whatmore, Chair of Governors

Feedback- the viability of Appleton College

It was widely acknowledged that the numbers choosing Appleton College are not viable. The Local Authority commented: “The Local Authority supports the view of the Governors that continuing to maintain a sixth form for the benefit of a minority of students is not in the best interests of all students attending Bridgewater High and the College and is not a sensible or cost effective use of public funds. Further, we also agree that the funding that is currently being used to subsidise the College would be better spent on maintaining and improving the quality of the educational offer for 11-16 year olds, especially given the financial challenges facing Warrington schools as a consequence of the relatively low level of funding available currently. “A teacher who felt the loss of Appleton College would be detrimental to some students, nonetheless stated that it is impossible to challenge the economic argument” whilst a parent commented through the on-line consultation: “Reluctantly I support the proposal. The consultation document does make it quite clear that it is not financially viable to continue to offer 6th form provision. I think the decline in numbers represents the changing views and aspirations of 16 year olds and I think wherever there is choice, they are more likely to choose a large 6th form institution rather than stay on at school”

Response

Governors and school leaders are responsible for ensuring that public funds are spent appropriately. In the case of Appleton College, the low numbers of students choosing to attend means that it is regrettably no longer viable as a sixth form provision, a position outlined in the Consultation document.

Feedback- alternatives to Appleton College

Students said that they were aware that Appleton College “could not be as flexible as other colleges” and that “other colleges have better resources”. The Local Authority commented that: “intake to the college has remained low for a number of years. Experience of similar situations elsewhere in the borough suggests that this is probably to be expected, given the level of access to high quality post 16 provision both within Warrington and in neighbouring authorities. It is therefore understandable that access to alternative high quality colleges with a broad offer is given by students as the reason they decide not to select Appleton College.”

Response

Governors have always recognised the highly competitive environment in which they seek to recruit sixth form students. Both Priestley College and Sir John Deane’s, for example, have strong reputations as highly successful colleges. They are able to offer a breadth of study and level of physical resources that Appleton College struggles to replicate. However, Governors would always assert that both the quality of teaching and learning and the care and guidance at Appleton College have never been questioned when compared to other providers.

Feedback- the loss of a uniquely small and nurturing environment

Understandably, some feedback centred upon the potential loss of a highly supportive student environment. Former students in particular pointed out how they had benefited from their time at Appleton College.

One student commented, “Appleton College has consistently delivered excellent results within a close-knit community which values personal as well as academic outcomes.” Another student added: “The pastoral and academic support at Appleton College is exceptional and, judging by the experiences of my friends who have gone to other sixth forms, is unrivalled by other colleges”. A member of staff wrote that

“Students have stayed on because they want to stay somewhere familiar with teachers they know and who know them”. A parent made a similar comment, feeling that some students are “being given the best possible chance to thrive and flourish at Appleton College, under the watchful eye of their teachers and within an environment that was well known already to them but with a level of independence they could cope with at 16”.

Response

Whilst sensing the disappointment of some people regarding this proposal, Governors have not lost sight of the many success stories associated with Appleton College. Over the years, many people have worked tirelessly to offer the highest quality of education for students choosing Appleton College. Sadly, however, not enough students in the school or local area feel that these are necessarily defining attributes when it comes to choosing a sixth form.

What is important going forward is that Bridgewater provides the very best transition and support that is possible. We have already committed to a programme of high quality transition for students less confident about A level choices but equally it should be said, we have no reason to believe that larger local institutions do not provide appropriate pastoral care and guidance to all their students.

Feedback- concerns regarding the community

A parent commented, “I find it a thoroughly depressing conclusion if the community of South Warrington cannot sustain A level provision within the community for the thousands of families who are either resident or indeed aspire to live here.”

Response

Governors also would like more members of the community to choose Appleton College. However, despite significant efforts to improve recruitment, the low and declining numbers choosing Appleton College leave Governors with little option but to conclude the following: there are not enough members of the community choosing Appleton College to make it viable.

Feedback- the impact of losing A level teaching

A point posed by a parent was: “My experience is that teaching at A level is an enabler to driving standards in earlier school years so I would want to know how excellent teaching and student experience will be retained lower down the school in the absence of teachers who are active practitioners at a higher level.” In meetings with some staff a similar issue was raised, whilst in a letter a teacher commented that teaching A level “has been the very best part of my job”.

Response

Governors want to acknowledge the efforts and commitment shown by teachers to deliver high quality sixth form education at Appleton College. The proposal to close Appleton College was never based upon any concerns over its quality. Governors also wish to reiterate what was said in the Consultation document about this that: “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.”

Feedback - replacing A level teaching at Bridgewater

In discussions with staff in particular, there was a desire to know how Bridgewater might reposition itself if it no longer has a sixth form and how it would replace “the challenge and stimulus” some felt A level teaching provided.

Response

Governors and school leaders share a sense of sadness at the proposal to close Appleton College. But having made this decision, it is imperative that we look to the future. Becoming a Teaching School, for example, provides significant opportunities for staff to help train the next generation of teachers. Equally, the emphasis upon Teaching Schools providing high quality CPD (Continuous Professional Development) for staff will provide exciting avenues for teachers to develop professionally. Bridgewater is also committed to strengthening transition, something the Local Authority’s feedback supports where they say: “The Local Authority is also particularly interested in the way in which capacity created through the proposals could be utilised to build on the work undertaken on Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 transition, including greater focus on curriculum continuity and pastoral support. Any opportunity to undertake activity in order to replicate the high performance at Key Stage 2 across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 will have the backing of the Local Authority and impact of this will be closely monitored in order to promote as good practice if successful.”

Governors and school leaders also believe that having two Key Stages to focus upon rather than three will provide opportunities to drive up standards even further.

Feedback - the implications for people’s jobs

The loss of the sixth form will potentially affect levels of staffing. However, we have nearly two years to manage this process and this will allow us to mitigate some of the impact. Moreover, 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.

Feedback- the role of TCAT play in making this decision

A parent wondered whether the proposal “is a decision somewhat enabled by TCAT”, whilst a colleague said, “It seemed obvious when Bridgewater joined with Priestley College in TCAT that this would become our sixth form option”.

Response

The decision to close Appleton College has only ever been the decision of Bridgewater Governors and school leaders. However, it is supported by TCAT Trustees.

Feedback- the marketing of Appleton College

Some students wondered whether more could have been done to market Appleton College. One stated “I would disagree that the claim that the college has gone to great lengths to make the college more attractive to prospective students” whilst another said “as a student at the college and having witnessed last year’s recruitment efforts, I do not believe that Bridgewater have been trying as hard as they could have to recruit students.”

Response

Governors feel strongly that significant efforts have been made over the last decade to boost recruitment. However, Governors are respectful that there may be a difference of opinion on this matter. Nevertheless, where Governors are clear, is that there comes a point when difficult decisions have to be made and that is what Bridgewater now faces. Therefore, there is a sense of genuine sadness regarding the proposed closure of Appleton College but there is equally optimism about the future opportunities for Bridgewater High School.