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achievement for all

RESPONSE FROM THE GOVERNING BODY TO THE CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO CLOSE PENT VALLEY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Kent County Council's proposal to close Pent Valley Technology College was met with considerable disbelief, shock and dismay by the Governing Body, staff, parents/carers, students and the local community in December 2015, particularly as KCC had stated quite clearly in June 2015 (six months previously) that the School would not close. While, as a Governing Body, we understand a number of the reasons put forward to **consult** on the School's closure, we are very unhappy with the speed at which the actual closure is taking place, even before the consultation period is over!

After due consideration we have decided neither to uphold nor oppose KCC's proposal to close the School. It is evident that, although a consultation is taking place to ensure KCC follows its statutory duties, most of the work involved in closing the School is already underway – staff have left, a number of students have already transferred to other schools, redundancy notices are imminent and Year 6 parents have, understandably, voted with their feet and selected other schools for their children. **In other words it is a "done deal".**

Despite this we would like to put on record that as a Governing Body **we originally agreed unanimously to oppose the closure**, as is our legal right. However, following a number of veiled threats including that of removal as a Governing Body by KCC or that Ofsted would be "called in" if we were to oppose the closure and, as a result, some considerable soul searching and reflection, we have decided to abstain. To remove us as a Governing Body and establish an Interim Executive Board, unfamiliar with the School, would incur considerable administrative time, energy and **cost** to the **tax payer** and if Ofsted were to visit Pent Valley then further unnecessary costs would be incurred. Furthermore neither scenario would be in the best interest of staff, parents/carers, students or the local community.

As a Governing Body we recognise that our first responsibility is to the staff, parents/carers and students and it is important that we remain in situ for the duration of Pent Valley Technology College's life. We are members of the public who for a variety of commendable reasons have invested much of our own **free** time to help turn the School around over the past year. We are passionate about the School and we want to see that it provides the best possible education to the students that remain until July 2017.

However we would like to make the following observations which we hope will be given due consideration by KCC:

1. GOOD FROM OFSTED:

Pent Valley Technology College received a 'Good' from Ofsted in January 2013.

2. PRAISED FOR ITS VOCATIONAL PROVISION

Pent Valley Technology College has prided itself on its vocational provision. Indeed it has been unique in the Folkestone area in offering both vocational and work related subjects alongside the traditional academic subjects. This has enabled students to follow a variety of pathways to gain relevant qualifications before entering the world of employment, or moving on to further or higher education. However, this position and the important alternatives it offered to academic achievement was dealt a significant blow by changes to the BTEC qualifications in 2014. (Ref: The Wolfe Report).

It was heartening to hear Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools In England and Head of Ofsted, state recently (January 18, 2016) **that vocational provision should have a greater status nationwide** so that the talents of non-academic students are not wasted and he warned that the "one-size fits all" model leaves behind young people who do not succeed in exams.

To its credit Pent Valley has always felt it important to fulfil this vital need in the community and to equip its students for life and work, especially as its catchment area is one of high unemployment. Indeed, less than a year ago (March 2015) Pent Valley signed an agreement with East Kent College which was to ensure a better delivery of vocational subjects to students at both colleges. And this was supported by KCC:

Paul Carter, Leader KCC: "Kent County Council is delighted to support this ground-breaking partnership which sees East Kent College and Pent Valley joining forces. In bringing together their specialisms, high quality teaching and resources, the school and college will transform technical curriculum pathways in the Shepway area."

3. GOOD GCSE RESULTS

Up until 2014 Pent Valley Technology College students were achieving good GCSE results.

Percentage achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) including English and Maths GCSEs	2011	2012	2013
Pent Valley	40%	48%	40%

However, the School fell victim to the changes to the GCSE examination system, which were introduced at very short notice in 2014. This impacted hard on Pent Valley students (c.47% of students are on Free School Meals, 21% of students do not have English as their first language and 30% are Special Needs students) as it did on many LA supported schools across the county. (Ofsted Dashboard, Unvalidated November 2015 – Years 7-11).

4. GOOD REPUTATION FOR POST 16

Pent Valley Technology College has a good reputation in terms of its Post 16 outcomes with many of its students going on to study at university: indeed a record number of students in 2014 continued to university and higher education (around 50%).

Year	No of students continuing to university
2012	27
2013	33
2014	35
2015	32

It also has a good track record for vocational Level 2 courses and is proud to be the only secondary institution in the immediate area offering this option. Some students are able to spend three years in Pent Valley's Post 16 provision and the variety of courses on offer has enabled them to follow a range of pathways to gain relevant qualifications before successfully entering the world of employment.

5. EXCELLENT SUPPORT FOR SEN AND VULNERABLE STUDENTS

Pent Valley offers excellent support and education to its SEN and vulnerable students (Special Educational Needs students: 12.39%, Pupil Premium students: 41.59%, Free School Meals students: 23.01%, English as an additional language students: 22.30% and Looked After students: 3%).

Indeed, this has been recognised in the very recent past:

"Safeguarding arrangements are detailed and thorough and meet statutory requirements. The SCR is presented well and is accurate and senior managers ensure that staff undergo all relevant training." Bill Stoneham, Kent LA, December 2014

Parents/carers with SEN or Vulnerable children have been highly vocal in their praise for the provision Pent Valley makes for their children. One mother (whose four SEN children have attended Pent Valley) stated at the recent Public Consultation meeting (January 18, 2016) that it was the *"perfect place for my children"*. Others have felt their children were in a safe and secure environment, were happy and in many cases achieving well.

6. 100% SUPPORT FROM THE STAFF FOR PENT VALLEY

Responses to a recent staff survey, undertaken by the Governing Body at the end of June 2015, revealed that 100% of the staff thought that the school was well led and well managed and that they were proud to be a member of staff at Pent Valley. 94% felt that behaviour was good. 88% felt that the leadership team was keen to help staff improve and appropriate provision was made for their professional development.

7. SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS AT THE SCHOOL

Since September 2014 the Governing Body has been working with the Senior Leadership of the School to improve outcomes for students, and in particular following the Warning Notice which it received in February 2015. In April 2015 a new Executive Head, Headteacher and Senior Leadership team were appointed and since then remarkable changes have taken place in the School including:

- ✓ **Attendance:** It is currently one of the top performing schools in the county with 95.7% reported by the Headteacher as at January 18, 2016.
- ✓ **Behaviour:** It has greatly improved. This was acknowledged in a Teaching and Learning Review (November 12 & 13 2015) undertaken by Kent LA.
- ✓ **Teaching:** It has improved in leaps and bounds. The most recent data reveals 58% of teaching is good and at the next review in March 2016 the Headteacher is confident that this will rise to 70%.
- ✓ **Learning:** As a result of improvements in behaviour and teaching, learning has also been improving and this was acknowledged in the Teaching and Learning Review (November 12 & 13 2015) undertaken by Kent LA.

In particular, Year 7 students are making good progress and Year 11 students are working well towards their GCSEs, with the Headteacher predicting 30% of students achieving an A*-C in English and Maths in the forthcoming exams, which is a superb turn around. (cf. 15% in 2015)

- ✓ **Attainment:** Students understand and feel proud of their achievements and this can be evidenced by the Progress Charts in the School corridor. Students think they are good and one student, when questioned, was adamant that although he was in the bottom section that he was going to work "*really hard*" to ensure he was moved up by the end of the term.

- ✓ **General atmosphere:** In the classrooms and in the playground there is a sense of calm and purpose. All are eager to improve and this has been witnessed not only by Governing Body school visits but also recognised in the Teaching and Learning Review (November 12 & 13 2015) undertaken by Kent LA: *“students say that high expectations of behaviour are more consistent throughout the school and staff say that they have more support in managing behaviour. There was significantly less off task behaviour seen during this review.”*
- ✓ **Improvement** Pent Valley has made substantial and significant progress in ALL AREAS as has been noted in In the Teaching Learning Review (November 12 & 13 2015). *“This is a much-improved school”.*

In short, the achievements by staff and students have been remarkable in a very short space of time - a mere six months. All the vital signs clearly demonstrate that Pent Valley has been moving in the right direction and at a rapid pace.

8. KCC ACTING IN HASTE

Following on from Point 7 it is clear that KCC has acted in haste by not allowing the School an adequate chance to demonstrate how it can improve and provide students with the education and options they need and deserve. It should be noted that other LA schools in the area have been given over two years to improve and are still showing a decline in their GCSE results.

9. VICTIM OF EXPANSION BY OTHER LOCAL SCHOOLS

There is little doubt that Pent Valley has been a victim of the way in which Brockhill Park and the Folkestone Academy, as well as nearby grammar schools, have been allowed to increase their Year 7 intake in a completely unfettered and unregulated manner. Indeed, some have what could be deemed an aggressive expansion strategy e.g. Folkestone Academy 6th form transfer to new buildings. Again, unregulated.

Pent Valley has also been disadvantaged by KCC’s pre-empting of the School’s closure and enabling student transfers to other local schools.

By closing Pent Valley parental choice (a requirement of the Department of Education) is being limited even further than it is already in the locality.

10. WHY THE £1.5 MILLION REFURBISHMENT?

We fail to understand why KCC sanctioned a £1.5 million refurbishment over the summer period if it intended to close the School. However, we do concede that the money has been well spent and added to the positive atmosphere in the School.

11. WHY THE HURRY TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL?

What has changed in the last few months since the summer of 2015 that has altered KCC's mind? In June 2015, we recall KCC stating categorically, at a Parent Meeting, that the School would not be closed.

If the Pent Valley brand is, as KCC says, "irrevocably broken" why did Swale Academies Trust agree to step in to support the School last March 2015 at very short notice and invest it with excellent staff, considerable management time and commitment? They knew they could turn it around given sufficient time and have proved it already in just 6 months.

12. FINANCIAL VIABILITY – FIGURES DON'T ADD UP WHEN ONE CONSIDERS IT IS GOING TO COST APPROXIMATELY £5.9 MILLION TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL

The argument that the School is no longer financially viable is a strong one, and while we recognise that the School has a £2.14 million deficit (which includes a £1.5 million loan from KCC for the refurbishment), when one considers the costs involved in closing the School - including staff redundancy costs, new uniforms for students, transport costs for students, moth balling the building, and the costs to keep the School open until August 2017 - the figures don't seem to add up.

KCC estimates that it is going to cost c. £5.9 million to close the School as against the costs of keeping it open until the next uplift in Year 7 intake comes. Meanwhile it is happy to hand over c. £1 million to two local schools so they can accept Pent Valley students!

KCC appears to be playing two cards. On the one hand we are told that schools cannot have a deficit budget and that Pent Valley is not viable financially, based on the projected 2016 Year 7 intake. In addition, the cost of running Pent Valley for a number of years at a deficit will disadvantage every other Kent LA maintained School. But on the other hand KCC is happy to write off almost £6 million with the closure of the School!

13. WHY CLOSE A SCHOOL WHEN DEMAND FOR PLACES IS GOING TO EXPLODE?

The increase in demand for secondary school places is going to explode in the very near future in the Folkestone area. New primary schools are being built, and those that exist are full. More houses are being built which will result in more secondary school places being required. What is the rationale for closing a school which is currently in existence and improving and which would be in a position to accept students when required?

14. UTMOST CONCERN REGARDING PROVISION FOR SEN AND VULNERABLE STUDENTS

Sadly, KCC has not provided the Governing Body or parents with any robust assurances that our SEN and Vulnerable students will be catered for adequately at any of the proposed transfer schools, nor have they outlined how these students will be supported or how the transition will take place. This is of utmost concern for us, staff and parents/carers and was raised numerous times at the Public Meeting on January 18, 2016.

15. SIGNIFICANT CONCERN REGARDING POST 16 SUPPORT

Much emphasis has been put on GCSE attainment and how Year 11 will be managed in 2016/17 for those students who remain. However, little, if anything – until January 27 - appeared to be put in place for our 6th form students, a number of whom are hoping to sit exams in subjects which are not provided for at any other local school.

We are pleased by the reassurances from KCC that provision is now to be made for Year 13 at Pent Valley as this ensures that our 6th form students will be able to continue their learning on site and to pursue the subjects of their choice.

However, this process has created untold stress and upset for students and parents, and unnecessarily.

We sincerely hope KCC will take our observations on board and robustly adhere to the promises it has made to staff, parents/carers, and students in the past months including:

- ✓ Free travel to new schools for the duration of the students' schooling
- ✓ The school playing fields at Coolinge Lane will not be sold
- ✓ The existing school premises and land will be retained for educational purposes and not sold for redevelopment
- ✓ Year 13 students will be supported
- ✓ Folkestone Academy and Brockhill Park will be commissioned to have the right support for all SEN students who transfer from Pent Valley and that KCC will track their progress

We as a Governing Body are supporting the staff and students who have worked so hard over the past six months to prove that they can achieve great things and that:

THE PENT VALLEY SPIRIT IS FAR FROM BROKEN.

**SIGNED FOR AND BEHALF OF THE FOLLOWING GOVERNORS OF PENT VALLEY BY
PENELOPE JAMES, VICE-CHAIR**

Michael Chisnall, Chair
Penelope James, Vice-Chair
Keith Jones
Bernie Mayall
Daniel Stapley
Laurence Wells

Penelope James, Vice-Chair

Date: February 2, 2016