

11. September 1972.

To The Welsh Education Office,
31, Cathedral Road, Cardiff.

Sir,

I am writing with reference to the recently re-submitted scheme of the Glamorgan County Education Authority for the reorganisation of secondary education in the Cowbridge area and as affecting Cowbridge Grammar School, viz., the proposal to start, in 1973, a process of merging and converting this School and the Cowbridge High School for Girls so as eventually to form one local-area comprehensive school; and I wish my letter, with your permission, to be treated as an objection in due form to the said scheme.

I refer firstly to the decision which, if press reports were correct, was taken earlier this year, to the effect that if and when a new South Glamorgan Education Authority came into being the policy of the said new Authority might well be, to preserve this School in its present form or something similar; and therefore the right course for the present Authority to take was to defer any reorganisation schemes for the time being. The new Authority could then take the relevant decisions without having its hands tied by any irreversible action done in the mean time. I would urge in the first instance that this attitude was, and is, the right and proper one for the Glamorgan Authority to adopt; and that at the very least the Minister be advised to postpone implementation of the present scheme until such time as the new Authority is in control.

Even to devotees of the comprehensive principle it may well seem that this scheme has obvious faults in the present situation. Granted, it is the same scheme as has been submitted before: but at that time there was no county boundary running through the middle of the projected catchment area. There are schools which draw pupils from both sides of a county boundary, for various reasons of administrative or social convenience: these reasons do not, or need not, exist here and I regard it as undesirable to create an inter-county catchment area when it is possible to avoid doing so.

Most advocates of the comprehensive type of education with whom I have spoken are emphatic that a purpose-built, single-campus school is highly desirable; and that a school theoretically one but in fact split into two parts half a mile separate, is very much the reverse. The latter is what is proposed here, at least for the first and vitally formative years.

One derives an impression that a priority is being set on rushing a scheme through so as irrevocably to commit the succeeding Authority. The argument may perhaps be advanced as against this, that the district has already in some sense opted for comprehensive education, and that the wish is to ensure that the people are given what they have asked for. I suggest, with all respect but also with conviction, that such a summary of local opinion is far from accurate.

It is true that, two years ago, a well-supported petition asked for a local-area comprehensive school at Cowbridge to replace the two present schools. This must, however, be seen in the perspective of the time. The Glamorgan Authority were then proposing to close the two schools and instal a Welsh-language comprehensive school here - a scheme which, whatever the merits of the Welsh language (merits of which I am myself fully seized), was regarded with consternation by the majority of Cowbridge people. There was, and there still is, a very strong body of local opinion, not confined to those directly connected with the School, that the Boys' Grammar School should be allowed to continue in its present form. But those organising the petition were advised that under the Glamorgan Authority such a wish was vain; and they petitioned for the next-best thing, as there seemed to be a chance of getting the latter. I concede that no specific protest has come in from the public since the original petition was acceded to. But I also know all too well that people become both bemused and apathetic after a long run of proposals and counter-proposals. At the same time, a great many persons have volunteered to me over a long period, that for this School to go, were a crying shame; while I have heard no single voice in the district raised specifically for the closure of the Grammar School.

(to Sheet Two)

This exemplifies what I take to be a simple fact, namely that (all educational arguments apart) an ancient foundation like Cowbridge Grammar School, the sole establishment of prestige and importance that the old Borough of Cowbridge has ever contained, has some claim to be considered, and to be spared, as an institution and as an entity in its own right. Such an argument was strongly developed to the Glamorgan County Council with reference to this School in 1918, and prevailed; so that they went out of their way at that time to save the School from an imminent threat of closure. I take the liberty of referring you, on this point, to pp. 263 seq. of my history of the School ("A Certain Schools," D. Brown & Sons, Cowbridge, Ltd., 1966). Although 1972 is not 1918, I think that the principle still stands, or ought to do so.

Sentiment apart, the most cogent argument for allowing this School to survive is based, as at this time, on the desirability, of which a greater awareness is last becoming generally evident, of implementing in a more positive way than hitherto the well-known Section 76 of the 1944 Education Act, a section which would safeguard the relevance of the wishes of parents in the provision of educational facilities: in the sense in particular in which this Section can, and I think should, be taken, to allow or even to advise the provision of different types of school existing side by side.

"Parental choice", the perhaps over-simplified phrase which is commonly used in the context of the above paragraph, operates under a fully-comprehensive system (if it operates at all) in strict relation to the income of the said parents and the area they can afford to live in: which is not, I take it, quite what the Act intended. On the other hand, a system where every child in an area is bound to attend the local comprehensive, and no other, school, has a totalitarian aspect. There should be a possibility of choice as between comprehensive and selective schools. The advocates of the former are surely far too pessimistic when they imply that the existence of such a choice can seriously impair the viability of the comprehensives. Of course, the very word "selection" has been by the Glamorgan Authority declared anathema - though strangely enough they do not seem to apply this antipathy in the case of the Atlantic College, one of the most selective of all schools, which they actively support.

Briefly, Sir, I urge that the right and proper treatment for this ancient School is that it be kept in being as a boys' grammar school for pupils drawn from the area of the new South Glamorgan Authority.

Further, I urge that if this were to be done, the new Authority might be encouraged (I am aware that they cannot be compelled) by the Department, to restore the provision of boarding facilities at the School. By 1974 we shall have had two years without an eleven-plus boarders' intake, and the Boarding House (capacity 50 boys) will be half-empty (it is scheduled to close in 1976). It would not be too late to revive the recruitment, in 1974. I have never ceased to hammer my objections to the end of boarding, so that Glamorgan regard me as something of a nuisance on the subject. But the Boarding House of this School has been in a real sense my life's work and I remain strongly convinced that Section 8. 2(d) of the 1944 Act, which refers to boarding, should continue to be honoured here. On this separate issue of boarding I shall be glad to state a case if and when required, at some further time.

I beg, as stated, that the foregoing be accepted as an objection in due form; and I have the honour to remain, Sir,

your obedient servant,

Iolo Davies
(Iolo Davies, M.A. Oxon.,
Headmaster).

Cowbridge head was 'converted'

THE CHAIRMAN OF the governors of Cowbridge Grammar School today claimed that the headmaster supported comprehensive education when he was reappointed last year.

Ald. Percy Smith, who was also vice-chairman of the Glamorgan education committee, said that when the headmaster, Mr. Iolo Davies, supported a campaign by Old Boys to stop county plans for the school this

was a "complete shock" for him.

Ald. Smith said: "Until 1968 Mr. Davies had opposed comprehensive education and in his history of the school he made this clear and said that he would like to see the Grammar School continue as before, with a boarding section."

But according to Ald.

Smith the headmaster experienced a "conversion" in the summer of 1968 when he went on a school cruise, organised by the county council, and including children from all walks of life and educational systems.

"After the cruise he wrote to me telling me of his change of heart, which he said came as a result of all he had seen on the cruise in the ship S.S. Nevasa," said Ald. Smith.

In the letter Mr. Davies wrote: "I wonder if you will allow me to add while I am writing to you, that I have come to regret to a considerable extent the somewhat reactionary line I adopted in the final pages of my book on the school."

"The Glamorgan County Council cruise in the S.S. Nevasa opened my eyes to the potentialities of comprehensive education in a very rewarding manner."

Ald. Smith also claimed the headmaster had expressed himself willing to teach as part of a comprehensive scheme, and that he would regard the opportunity to do so as a privilege.

The headmaster, he said, had not given any indication of changing his mind on this issue until he suddenly swung behind the campaign by Old Boys to save the grammar school.

Reappointment

"He has continued in the same vein as his letter ever since he wrote it, and certainly gave us to understand this was his position when he came for re-appointment in 1971," Ald. Smith went on.

Ald. Smith said he had been told that the official Old Boys' Association had said the campaigners had nothing to do with them.

Another blow for the campaigners, who last week handed in an 11,000-name petition to the Secretary of State for Wales, came from Cowbridge Borough Council.

Originally the council supported the Glamorgan plans which involve the eventual closure of the grammar school.

Then the campaigners claimed that more than half the council members had signed the petition and so the council policy was, in effect, null and void.

But last week a full meeting of the council reaffirmed their support of the comprehensive scheme.

Ald. Ken George, the council's spokesman on education, said the authority had felt that original county plans for a bilingual school in Cowbridge would deprive children of a local secondary school. But as the comprehensive plan would fill this need they supported it in the interests of the children.

There was no reply from the grammar school today when attempts were made to ask Mr. Davies for his comments.