



A public consultation regarding the closure of Axe Valley Academy's Sixth Form provision took place between 26<sup>th</sup> September and 19<sup>th</sup> December 2017 which included a public meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017 and an invitation to send comments and questions to a dedicated consultation e-mail address at the Academy.

Letters outlining the consultation process were sent to parents, head teachers of our feeder schools, head teachers or principals of local secondary schools or colleges which currently offer sixth form provision and all town and parish councils in which we have feeder schools. The consultation was also publicised to the wider community in the View From Axminster on 27<sup>th</sup> September [www.viewnews.co.uk/sixth-form-closure-shock-axminster/](http://www.viewnews.co.uk/sixth-form-closure-shock-axminster/).

A consultation paper was made available on the Axe Valley Academy website giving background to the proposed closure and information regarding the process. <http://axevalley.devon.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Sixth-Form-Closure-Consultation-Document.pdf>

## Reason for the proposal

There are insufficient funds and pupil numbers to sustain a viable sixth form offer for the foreseeable future.

## Response to the consultation

Vector Learning Trust would like to thank the 90 individuals who took the time to attend the public meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017 and the 11 individuals who sent questions and/or comments to the consultation e-mail at the Academy. The majority of these respondents were parents of pupils at Axe Valley Academy. Three responses were also received from town/parish councils.

The majority of responses to the consultation expressed concern at the proposed closure of the sixth form. Our responses to specific questions and comments are given below.

## Decision of the Trustees

The Trustees have considered all the questions and comments raised by this public consultation together with the financial position of Axe Valley Academy and the demographics of the Axe Valley communities. They have explored a number of avenues since first proposing this change and have voted to **suspend recruitment** into the sixth form for the foreseeable future rather than apply to the Regional Schools Commissioner to re-designate the school as an 11-16 provider. This will mean that the Academy could relaunch the sixth form in the future if student



numbers and funding allow, without having to apply to have the re-designation decision reversed. The Trustees will re-consider the viability of 16-19 provision at Axe Valley Academy at regular points. However, taking into account current projections, it is very unlikely that the Academy will be in a position to consider recruitment into the sixth form within the next three years.

**As a result of the consultation process many of the same questions were raised. These, together with our responses, are given below.**

## General

### *What is the point of consultation? Will it change anything?*

It is a legal requirement to consult widely regarding any major changes to a school, such as closure of the sixth form. The minimum consultation period is four weeks. This period of consultation allows all stakeholders and the wider community to express their opinions and present alternative suggestions to the proposal. Vector Learning Trust welcomes any suggestions that may have a bearing on the future of the sixth form at Axe Valley Academy but the underlying issues of lack of funding and too few pupils taking up places in Post-16 at the school are paramount.

### *Who makes the final decision? When is the deadline for the decision?*

The final decision on closure remains with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) who will be advised by the local Head Teacher Board (HTB). The HTB will next sit in mid-February. However, a decision to suspend recruitment to the sixth form can be made by the Trustees without further referral to the RSC's office.

### *How long has there been a Sixth Form?*

The sixth form at Axe Valley opened in September 2001.

### *Why haven't you given it more time? Why have you done it now? Has the sixth form ever been viable?*

The viability of post-16 at Axe Valley has been monitored by governors for at least the last five years during which time the sixth form has been subsidised to an increasing degree by the 11-16 budget as government funding has decreased. The strategic decision to enter into partnership with Holyrood Academy was partly based on the best option of retaining sixth form provision at the school. Post-16 funding and pupil numbers recruited to the sixth form are at an all-time low. We have gone to consultation now to give current Year 11 students the maximum amount of time to seek other post-16 options.

### *No one seems to be fighting to save it?*

Both Axe Valley Academy Governors and Vector Learning Trustees reviewed all the options available and only after many discussions was it agreed to take this measure.



## ***If Axe Valley was not part of the Trust and was independent would you still be looking at doing this?***

Had Axe Valley not joined with Holyrood Academy and not entered into a multi-academy trust we would have been consulting on the closure of the sixth form even earlier than we have. In September 2016 we had a Year 12 intake of only 29 pupils. This is only 22% of the possible 131 Year 11 pupils that year choosing to remain at Axe Valley for their post-16 education adding further pressure to an already unsustainable position.

## ***Have you considered the Colfox/Beaminster model?***

The combined sixth form model that these schools have is what we have created for Axe Valley and Holyrood Academies. The uptake for this provision was not strong enough to avert the need to consult on closure.

## ***Why not re-designate both schools and open a separate Sixth Form?***

Opening a separate sixth form college requires a significant financial investment and permission from the Secretary of State which would not be guaranteed.

## ***What about the fact that Axminster is growing and has new houses?***

Axminster and Seaton are both growing but projected figures from Devon County Council for school places do not show a need for an increase in secondary places for the next three years. It will take a further five years for this increase to filter through to post-16 places (eight years in total).

## ***Numbers are down for the rest of the school for 2 years, can you confirm the school's viability?***

There is still a need for secondary school places at Axe Valley Academy although the intake for the next few years may be less than the published admission number. With growth in the catchment area set to rise over the next decade the number of pupils entering the school will also rise.

## ***What are the numbers in Holyrood's Sixth form?***

The number of sixth form students has been increasing at Holyrood over the last few years; in 2015/16 there were 155, in 2016/17 that increased to 193 with a further increase in 2017/18 to 197. Projected numbers for 2018/19 are 210 students, not including any applicants from Axe Valley Academy. This puts Holyrood Academy in the group of viable sixth form providers according to the government's measure of 200 students. A large student base such as this is not only financially sustainable but allows for a broad offer of courses which better suits the needs of the young people.

## ***Will the closure strengthen the position of Holyrood's sixth form?***

Holyrood Academy already has a viable sixth form based on the recommended numbers from the Department for Education. Axe Valley students may choose to continue their education at Holyrood and this would of course further strengthen student numbers there.



## ***Why can we not share the timetable more?***

Every effort has been made to combine classes at both schools in subjects such as Modern Foreign Languages. In 2016/17 A-level German was taught jointly across the academies with a total of 6 students. Subjects that are currently running across both schools are BTEC Business, WJEC Diploma in Food and Cambridge Tech Performing Arts. There are two Axe Valley students who travel to Holyrood to receive tuition in either Further Maths or Physics.

## ***Will the sixth form provision at Holyrood be improved?***

Sixth form provision at Holyrood Academy is already very good with the best ever A-level and vocational post-16 results being achieved last year and a high number of students going on to study at university. The performance of the sixth form is continually monitored by senior leaders, governors and trustees and any improvements are made accordingly.

## ***As a parent, why should I consider sending my child to Axe Valley Academy when I could send them to a school with a sixth form and not have to move them at 16+?***

Axe Valley Academy is committed to providing high quality education for all pupils. North Devon does not have any schools that offer post-16 provision and, furthermore, the top performing non-selective school in Devon is an 11-16 provider. Axe Valley Academy is committed to providing high quality education for every pupil and will continue to do so regardless of designation. Over the past five years less than half of the Year 11 pupils have chosen to stay at Axe Valley to study post-16. Our largest competitor is Exeter College which offers vocational courses that require specialist facilities and a busy city environment that many of our young people feel is more suited to them.

## ***What happens in 2 years? When the sixth form finishes what will happen with the building?***

There have been no decisions made as yet regarding the future of the building.

## ***What are you doing to ensure that Axe Valley is getting a positive press and being talked about all the time? Why is there a seeming lack of accessible news sent to local press?***

We regularly send 'good news' stories to the press. However, it is up to the editors of local newspapers to decide what constitutes news and therefore what they publish. The press is often invited to our bigger events such as the annual art exhibition and school performances. Our students' many achievements are published each half term in the academy newsletter which is available on the school website. The academy also uses social media to promote the fantastic range of opportunities available to young people.

## ***Who is going to see the MP?***

Mr Brook (Vector Learning Trust CEO), Mr Green (Axe Valley Academy Headteacher), Mr Walden (Chair of Governors), Will House (former Head Boy) and Hannah White (Head Girl) went to see Neil Parish MP



## ***Without a sixth form, what are your plans for raising aspirations and fostering care/kindness from the older students?***

It is already the case that our year 11 students in their capacity as prefects act as role models for our younger students. This fact, combined with our focus on an assembly and PSHE programme that are rooted in our core values, means that the academy is still well placed to provide a full package of support for every student. In addition, the academy is in the process of attempting to recruit a Raising Aspirations Coordinator for this very purpose.

## ***As a parent, how can you reassure me that standards at Axe Valley will continue to improve?***

Best practice is now being shared regularly within each school and across the Trust as a whole. Expectations and aspirations are increasing for both pupils and staff. Senior leaders are supporting and developing staff in order to translate these increased expectations into better outcomes for our young people.

## ***Why do some of the parents from the 12 feeder schools decide to access Colyton Grammar or Woodroffe schools instead of Axe Valley?***

It is government policy that parents and pupils should have the choice as to where they are educated. Axe Valley has a huge amount to offer the local community but it is a parent's prerogative to apply to whichever school they feel meets their child's individual needs.

## ***Have all the head teachers from the feeder schools been informed personally?***

Yes. This has happened as part of the consultation process.

## ***Can we open up A-level and BTEC courses to member of the community who only have free time during the day or employees of local businesses who need to pass an A-level for their employment?***

Given the nature of our site, from a safeguarding perspective, it would not be appropriate to open up A-level or BTEC courses to adults.

## **Financial**

### ***What about economies of scale and why can't we redirect other expenditure, for example, from the Aspire programme?***

Vector Learning Trust has made savings by using shared services such as Human Resources, Finance and IT. The Trust and its constituent schools work on the principle of 'Best Value for Money'. The Aspire programme receives no specific funding and therefore has had to be pared down from what it was five years ago. However, the Academy believes it is important to provide extension and enrichment activities for all pupils regardless of their prior attainment. The academies in the Trust are always looking for opportunities which can be shared between them to make savings but at the same time provide high quality education and experiences for our young people.



## ***Why is Trust money not being used to support it?***

The Trust has already heavily supported Axe Valley Academy both financially and in providing capacity of staff. It does not have sufficient funds to support a sixth form on the scale required.

## ***What level of sixth form funding do you have in comparison to past years and what impact will this have on current sixth form students?***

The method of funding has changed over the last few years so it is not easy to draw comparisons. We were funded per qualification but this changed to per pupil with full time students now funded at approximately £4000, reduced from £4816 (View From Axminster, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017). This represents a 17% reduction in funding. Our funding is adjusted not on success but on retention which means that we do not receive full funding for students who do not complete a course. The main impact on funding, however, is the fall in the number of students staying in the sixth form. This can be seen in the following table:

Academic Year	Total	Year 12	Year 13	Previous Year 11	% of Possible Year 11	% of Total on roll
2013/14	108	54	54	168	32.00%	14.00%
2014/15	106	67	39	146	46.00%	14.00%
2015/16	128	70	58	156	45.00%	16.00%
2016/17	82	26	56	134	19.00%	11.00%
2017/18	68	45	23	135	33.00%	10.00%

Current sixth form students will continue to be supported through to the completion of their courses.

## ***Why did you build the Art Block?***

The art block was built by Devon County Council with capital funding specifically for that project. It was built to replace several temporary buildings that had been condemned for demolition and were no longer fit for purpose.

## ***Have you gone to the private sector to try and get funding?***

We have tried on several occasions in recent years to go to the Private Sector for funding with no success. The money we would need is in the region of £2.5m over five years to make the Sixth Form sustainable.



## ***Have you looked at Crowd Funding potential?***

We had not considered crowd funding potential until this was suggested at the consultation evening. Having since looked into it, crowd funding is unlikely to offer the sustained funding level needed to ensure the sixth form stays open for the next five years.

## ***It is expensive to travel to these other places, what if you can't afford it?***

Vector Learning Trust has committed to providing a bus service from Axe Valley Academy to Holyrood Academy for the next year at least and will review this provision on an annual basis depending on demand. Devon County Council has withdrawn school transport for post-16 students unless they can show that it would be their only means of reaching their place of education. As such, there is an expectation that students would make their own way to school or college at their own expense. In some cases schools and colleges offer bursaries to students who cannot afford the cost of transport. It is recommended that individuals in this position should seek more information from any institution which they may be considering applying to.

## **Student futures and options**

### ***If Sixth Form closes what are students meant to do? How do we know they will get into other providers? Has any approach been made to Colyton?***

There are a number of other providers, both locally and farther afield. Holyrood Academy offers a broad range of subjects and a bus service will be provided from Axe Valley to Holyrood on a daily basis for students who wish to study there. Colyton Grammar School will be opening their sixth form to external applicants from September 2018. The Woodroffe School affords a good local offer to pupils who do not wish to travel too far. Vocational courses as well as A-levels and Level 3 BTECs are offered at Exeter College. Kingston Maurward College offers land-based courses. These providers can collectively accommodate all Year 11 pupils. They all took up our invitation to attend a Futures Evening for parents and pupils at Axe Valley Academy on 15<sup>th</sup> January so that Year 11 students could determine which post-16 option is best for them.

### ***What support are you going to give Year 11?***

In addition to the Futures Evening where pupils and parents met with post-16 providers, each individual student is having a Futures meeting with a senior member of staff to help them decide what is best for them. Academy staff are on hand to assist students with making applications and preparing for interviews and students are encouraged to attend events such as the Apprenticeships Show and a variety of open events and taster days.

### ***Can you provide a list of things that have been done already?***

Year 11 students are being provided with all the information they need to make the transition from KS4 into KS5 or vocational training and apprenticeships.

### ***Concern about current year 12 – how sure can we be that it will continue?***

Vector Learning Trust is committed to complete all sixth form courses already initiated. Year 12 and 13 students can be assured of our full support for the duration of their time at Axe Valley Academy.



## ***How can we be sure of the quality of education that current Axe Valley A-level students will receive?***

Our teachers are committed to obtaining the best outcomes for their pupils at all points in the school. The uncertain future of the sixth form will not prevent staff from providing the best possible teaching and support to their sixth form groups.

## **Staff**

### ***How will you retain staff?***

We will try to retain staff by making the Academy a fantastic place to come to work. Our mission is to provide an outstanding 11-16 school where people will want to stay.

### ***What guarantee can you give current teachers?***

We can guarantee teachers that if they work hard and help their students to achieve outstanding results then their future will be bright with us and that there are likely to be Trust-wide opportunities for our best staff.

### ***Are there likely to be staff redundancies?***

It is likely that there will be a reduction in staffing. This is not only as a result of the closure of the Sixth Form but also because of a drop in the number of students available for recruitment in to Year 7. Wherever possible we will be and already have been dealing with this reduction by looking for opportunities not to replace staff who choose to leave the Academy for any reason.

## **Option of Suspension**

The extended consultation period has enabled Trustees to consider the option of suspension.

### ***What's the difference between the option to suspend or close the Sixth Form?***

Closing the Sixth Form will re-designate the school as an educational establishment for 11-16 year olds and is very difficult to reverse, even if circumstances change. Suspension will have the same effect on the viability of the school, but allows the Trust the option to provide education for over 16s if it were ever to become viable in the future to do so.

### ***Why have you chosen to suspend and not close the Sixth Form?***

There is no difference between these options from the Trust's perspective for the foreseeable future. Both options have the same economic and educational impact in the short term and will end the subsidisation of the 16+ education from the 11-16 budget. However, closing the Sixth Form will designate the school as an educational establishment for 11-16 year olds and is very difficult to reverse, even if circumstances change. Suspension will have the same effect on the viability of the school, but allows the Trust the option to provide education for over 16s in the future if it were ever to become viable to do so. Choosing to suspend the Sixth Form therefore offers a potential benefit to the school and Trust at no cost, and so the Trust feels compelled that this is the most appropriate choice of action.



***If it is suspended, does that mean it will re-open?***

There are no plans to re-open the Sixth Form for the foreseeable future. The choice to suspend rather than close has been made to maintain the option of re-introducing the provision of education to the over 16s should the situation ever arise when it was desirable to do so. But the primary goal remains to end the subsidisation of an unviable Sixth Form by the 11-16 budget in order to give our 11-16 pupils the educational resources they deserve.