

**Abergele Area 1 – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes**  
**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

\*Please note that only the Councillors from the Pentre Mawr and Abergele / Pensarn ward were invited to the meeting\*

**Present:** Geraint James (GJ) (Statutory Head of Education Services)  
Dilwyn Price (DP) (Head of School Improvement Services)  
Emma Bayliss (EB) (Project Manager)  
Gareth Thomas (GT) (TJB)  
David Batten (DB) (TJB)  
Cynan Jones (CJ) (TJB)

**Observers:** Cllr S. Rowlands

**1. Introduction**

DB provided an introduction to the meeting and explained what would be involved including the workshop element.

**2. Presentations**

GJ gave a presentation on the progress of the project so far and the development of the Areas for Review document. Noted that both schools had received outstanding inspection results and congratulated them for this. Explained that page 10 of the Areas for Review Document was not a criticism of separate infant and junior and it did not mean that the separate infant and junior schools were not offering these benefits now.

**Question and Answer Session (Q = question, A = Answer, C= Comment)**

- Q: You say that decisions have not been made – why are there 17 areas for initial review then?
- A: When we reviewed all the schools we reviewed them in the context of the project drivers and therefore looked at unfilled places, cost per pupil and buildings being fit for purpose. We also decided to look at how many separate infant and junior schools we had in certain communities. We then grouped the schools into areas and there were certain areas that had problems with high unfilled places and some had very old buildings that were not up to standard. We decided that these areas should be consulted first because of the issues associated with them. The only reason we are consulting with this area is that we are asking all areas with infant and junior schools whether there is the need to have 2 separate schools in the community and we have come to Abergele today to continue with this consistency.
- C: Have a petition here from 370 people saying that this area does not want to go ahead with amalgamation.
- C: Population within Abergele will increase with the local development plan stating that affordable housing will be built here and this will increase the school population.
- A: We have looked at housing projections when considering pupil projections but at the moment these figures are not included in the document. We cannot use the local development plan to provide

definitive projections as we don't know how many houses will be built or whether families of an appropriate age will move into them. We do however take this into consideration.

- Q: How much money do you have to save in efficiencies for next year's budget?
- A: We have to save 2% which equates to £1.4 million.
- C: This process is about saving money not improving standards.
- A: The process is about improving standards within the budgetary confines we find ourselves in.
- C: Amalgamation of the infant and junior schools in this area would not save that much money.
- A: An amalgamation would create some efficiencies but they would not be large as you say.
- C: If the school were amalgamated it would make it more impersonal. The head of each school knows all children in the school at the moment.
- A: Understand this but an amalgamation can also offer teachers more time to provide a focus on education.
- Q: These two schools are doing well in terms of all 4 project drivers, why are we under initial review?
- A: As previously said it is for the simple reason that we are discussing infant and junior amalgamation in all areas with these types of school across the County. Its for consistency.
- C: Both schools are already receiving less money per pupil than the Wales average. You can't use these schools to save any more money.
- A: This process is not a money-saving exercise, we need to find ways of sharing out an ever decreasing budget between the schools. Some areas are welcoming the idea of an infant and junior amalgamation but if you are not, that's fine.
- C: We could keep the two schools then?
- A: Yes this is a possible.
- Q: Why is the budget getting smaller?
- A: The Welsh Assembly Government will provide us with funding based on the population demographics. As the pupil population is decreasing, the amount of funding allocated also gets reduced. If you don't want to change in this area, we will take that on board. The strategy will however prioritise those areas that do want to change for any investment in the first instance.
- Q: Is each area taken on their own merit or is what is decided in one area will happen in another area?
- A: Not the case – each area is taken on its own merit.
- C: There are other schools where cost per pupil is so high, these should be considered initially.
- C: Also think that because of our outstanding inspection results our projected unfilled places will decrease.
- A: Pupil projections are reviewed annually so any changes will be taken into account.
- C: An amalgamated school would be too large.

DP then gave a presentation on the specific school data including information on 'fit for purpose', unfilled places and catchment areas. By coming to Abegele today, it did not mean that both the schools were definitely going to amalgamate. All areas with an infant and junior school were being discussed in the same manner. There were some areas who were interested in amalgamation. Referred to page 10 of the Areas for Review document and

stated that both schools are achieving these benefits. Page 10 is not a criticism of schools and how they are operating now. The way it is written on page 10 could look like infant and junior amalgamations are a strategy but this is not the case and apologies for this. The benefits listed came from Torfaen and were approved by the Welsh Minister as a list of possible benefits. DP then gave list of possible benefits for separate infant and junior schools:

- Infant and junior schools focus solely upon one key stage.
- Staff in these schools focus their teaching and learning specifically for the age range of pupils.
- Staff specialise upon one key stage and access specific key stage related opportunities for continuous professional development.
- Staff career pathways are more specific.
- Infant aged pupils are given increased opportunities to accept responsibilities.
- Separate infant and junior playgrounds allow for age related focussed play and development opportunities.

It was explained that school capacity was calculated by using a formula provided by WAG based upon the floor capacity of the school. If there was a Nursery class, this floor space was not included. In terms of unfilled places, only full time pupils were considered in this calculation.

Reference was made to pupil projections and how this was calculated – the intake for the last three years was looked at and then an average was used to project pupil numbers. Over the last 12 years, the pupil projections for each school had been within 1% correct. Pupil projections were also reviewed annually. Housing projections were noted and it was reported that if there was a significant build in an area of around 2000 – 5000 houses, we would ask the builder to provide a new school.

The list for 'Fit for Purpose' had been produced via review of Building Bulletins and the suggestions received at the initial road shows. The list was not a list of essentials but if a new school was built, it would include all these aspects. It was noted that the document was correct at the time of printing and any changes since would be reflected in the draft strategy.

With regard to catchment and children going outside the catchment for schooling, it was noted that a high number would go to Glan Morfa for the Welsh so this did have an affect on the percentages.

#### **Question and Answer Session (Q = question, A = Answer, C= Comment)**

- Q: There will be a significant build in Abergele as WAG want more houses included in the LDP. What happens then?
- A: Have already stated that a new school would be built if there were 2000 houses plus but we would also have to take into consideration the affect of a smaller build on the schools that are currently in place.
- Q: If you recommend to the Council that we should not merge, can the Cabinet go against your recommendation?
- A: The outcome of this process is not a one size fits all and we won't be presenting it in this way to the Cabinet. The Cabinet can, however, go against any of our recommendations.

- C: You should have included the disadvantages of amalgamation on page 10 as well.
- Q: How can we be sure that what we are saying today – that we don't want to amalgamate – will be presented to the Cabinet.
- A: Notes of this meeting will feed directly into the development of the Strategy. The Cabinet will also be able to see the notes of this meeting and note the strength of feeling about not wanting to amalgamate.
- Q: Do you have any evidence of the results of an amalgamated school.
- A: Amalgamated an infant and junior school into a large school in Rhos on Sea and the results were good.
- C: We need to ensure that the final decision makers make the right decision.
- A: Please don't think that just because we are asking all infant and junior schools about amalgamation that we are going to amalgamate all of them. It is not a policy for us and understand from your feedback that you do not want it to happen in this area.
- C: Should have listed disadvantages of amalgamations as just presenting the benefits puts ideas in people's minds.
- Q: Will there be further consultation?
- A: Yes there will be.

GT explained workshop part of the meeting. Want to know 'What is working well at the moment?' and 'What could we improve?' All that is written on the flipchart paper will be taken down as well as the notes here tonight and placed on the internet. You can also continue to feedback on the consultation up until 30<sup>th</sup> November via TJB or Education Services.

### **3. Workshop Feedback**

#### What works well now??

- Everything!
- 2 separate schools
- \*Estyn Inspection results speak for themselves
- Approachable staff
- Ethos of school
- Finances - cost effective
- Learning standards have improved
- Proactive heads
- Visionary heads
- Responsive Heads
- Staff morale is good

- Children are inspired
- Provision for additional needs works well
- Transition between the two schools judged as being outstanding
- 7 x 1s from inspection
- Separate schools
- Two head teachers
- Each school are specialist in their fields i.e. foundation phase, KS1  
KS2
- Individuality of each school
- Communication between parents and teachers
- Equality £ per pupil - 15th & 16th most cost effective schools in Conwy
- Resources geared towards single phase - This impacts on standards as Estyn reports!!
- WHY CHANGE LEAVE WELL ALONE!
- 15 after school clubs in G. G. popular with many + requests from neighbouring schools to attend
- GG are proactive in providing opportunities to take responsibility to develop their self confidence + self evaluation within their learning: 2 distinct curriculum N/C skills (skills F/work curric 2008) + F/Phase. No plans in future for these to change
- YGG - Estyn said "keep doing what you are doing!"
- CBC to make decisions based on merit not on policy
- Stakeholder opinion should affect policy not inform policy
- Beacon school status
- Outstanding schools x 2 how can we improve?
- \*Show us an amalgamated school with our results!

#### What could be improved?

- Size of classrooms (not in Glan Gele generally)
- Playground resources (in St Elfod in particular)

- funding per head of pupils to be fairer compared to smaller schools - Pupil/teacher ratio
- Parking - Yes!
- Improved links with local councillors to enable them to make informed decisions
- After school facilities for additional earning needs i.e. support workers

**4. Final Question and Answer Session (Q = question, A = Answer, C= Comment)**

- Q: The Local Members and the Assembly Member have made a comment that they are for the amalgamation. Why are they not here tonight.
- A: The Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning has made apologies due to flooding near his home. The 3 local ward members were invited tonight and the Statutory Head of Education Services has spoken directly with the Assembly Member.
- C: The Assembly Member has already expressed his opinion prior to this meeting, we need to ensure the Cabinet Members know that we do not want an amalgamation to go ahead.
- A: These notes will be shared with the decision makers.
- Q: Will the draft strategy be presented to the Welsh Assembly Government? What are the criteria to access the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools funding.
- A: Cannot give a definite answer on the criteria to access the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools funding as WAG has not finalised this as yet. The final strategy will be used to access the funding but the draft strategy will not be presented to WAG. The final strategy will demonstrate options as well as the preferred option and there are many consultation stages to come.
- Q: When will the final strategy be published?
- A: Autumn 2010 and an implementation date for the strategy will be decided by WAG but will probably be around 5 -15 years from now for all changes to be completed. The strategy will prioritise the implementation of any changes and some communities wanting a change to happen so they will be prioritised.
- Q: How many areas want change?
- A: Around 5 at the moment and these will be placed first in the strategy as enthusiastic about obtaining the change.
- C: The Assembly Member should have attended this meeting.
- A: We have met with the Assembly Member but he wasn't directly invited to this meeting. 3 Local Ward Members were invited also.
- C: The Assembly Member has not heard our side of the argument.
- A: The notes of this meeting will be placed on the internet for all to see. It will take about a month for them to appear as they have to be translated and collated together. The notes of the meeting will be passed to the headteachers of the schools asap.
- C: No benefits of an amalgamation have been presented here tonight.

DB thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the meeting as a lot of important information was gained. GJ congratulated both schools again on the outstanding results achieved via the Estyn inspections.

### Idea/Worry Wall

- Affordable houses in Abergele = more families = more children
- "Personalised education" will be lost in a large school
- Parents from "out of area" will want to come into these schools because of standards
- Historical trends may not be relevant
- Petition of at least 300 names opposed to amalgamation
- Larger schools have less funding per head of pupil! We are already getting less than average
- Larger schools have higher pupil : teacher ratio!
- Is this fair for the pupils?
- Cabinet members involved in decision making should make themselves known to the school. They are welcome to visit
- The point I need to make is about investment - it's not about the investment of money it's the time! The children are already receiving this
- The amalgamation would pose logistics problems with fencing & access load separating the buildings
- Data B incorrect - it is only 12% of the local pop. that don't attend Elfod not 33% as stated in the document. Document B rather misleading
- Glan Gele has an ITC room!
- One head - 2 separate buildings; 2 separate staff rooms; 2 different teaching styles; 2 receptions etc. It will always be seen as two schools
- Concerned that CCBC will ignore this consultation process and push changes through via a political decision
- That one member of the local council has constantly been messing with his mobile phone
- Concerned that the local AM is for amalgamation before consultation is complete
- If schools are amalgamated will the Estyn results still be outstanding!! when we are due to be inspected in 6 years time