

Abergele Area 4 – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Monday 30th November 2009

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 W. E. Jones
Cllr. R. Peacock

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.

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

Q: Is it correct that we are under initial review because there are a high proportion of pupils coming from what you say is outside the catchment?

A: Yes but there are also issues around making the school fit for purpose.

Q: The LDP proposes around 2100 houses in this area – how will this affect our schools?

A: We have taken the LDP into account and looked at housing projections but DP will provide further detail on this during his presentation.

Q: Are you working with the Conwy Rural Partnership?

A: We are working in parallel with Community Development Services and they are looking at how the Council invest in areas. In terms of the criteria for a 21st Century School, WAG have not put forward a clear criteria but have noted that increasing the community use of a school is important.

Q: Parental choice – what does this mean?

A: Parents have a free choice as to where to send their children for schooling as long as there is room for that child to attend and the governors accept them.

Q: Why is the high attendance from outside the catchment not seen as a positive thing?

A: This does reflect well on the school, we are just presenting the facts to you.

Q: How does the transport policy work?

A: A child will get free transport if they live more than 2 miles from their nearest appropriate school.

Q: Hasn't the school historically catered for children outside of the catchment?

- A: Yes it has for a number of years
- Q: Why is it only a problem now then?
- A: As we now have the chance to access a pot of capital funding, the question has to be raised whether we should invest in an area where there are only 14 children in the catchment.
- C: The school should be invested in as it's a good school.
- C: Parents are choosing to send their children to this school.
- C: Parents are choosing this school as it's a church schools and has a good ethos.
- Q: Where are the 3 children that live in the catchment going, if they are not going to St George?
- A: We know which Authority schools local children are attending, we cannot provide information for those children going to independent schools.
- C: The reputation of this school is great. It's the best school in the area.
- C: The 3 children who live in the catchment are going to Glan Morfa, the faith school in Rhyl and an independent sector school.
- C: Parents cannot get their children into this school, its very popular.

DP then gave a presentation on the specific school data including information on 'fit for purpose', unfilled places and catchment areas. It was noted that unfilled places were not an issue at the school neither was the cost per pupil. The review was timely as we now have the chance to access money to invest in the schools.

St George has received investment in the past and been extended. There are 14 pupils in the catchment and a high proportion of pupils in the school are from outside the catchment. We need to know why you are not choosing your local schools or why you are choosing this school instead. (Advised to stick post-its with this information on the ideas / worries wall).

The catchment area has existed for over 12 years and is based on ward boundaries. This can be clearly shown on a map. As the school is Voluntary Controlled, this is not a criteria for a wider catchment.

- C: I don't think the catchment area matches what it is now.
- A: School has been taking admissions outside the catchment because it has the room. We cannot just expand catchment areas as this will have an adverse affect on other schools. It could be an idea for us to look towards revising the catchment areas for the future.
- Q: What facilities do we not have at this school?
- A: No school hall on site, no dining hall. If we were going to build a new school, we would want all these facilities on site.
- C: The hall we have here is adequate.
- C: There are social issues in other schools. We are happier with less facilities but well balanced and content children.
- C: Surprised that Moelfre is not in the catchment area.
- C: The quality of learning and teaching in a school should be the focus.
- C: The educational standards in the school are great.
- A: We know that the educational standards are high. We might have better facilities in the school if we had the opportunity to invest. There would be significant unfilled places if the school simply served its local catchment.

- Q: If we could make the building fit for purpose, would you then leave us alone? We have a document to pass you that shows we are making an effort to reach the standard.
- A: Thank you for this document and we will take it on board. The fit for purpose list is simply an indicator.
- C: The lack of facilities is being addressed and this is included in the report.
- C: It is a testament to this school that it is doing so well without all the facilities.
- C: We chose this school because of the quality of the education provided. We can transfer the learning we have here to other schools. There is a good ethos and fantastic staff.
- A: If the Head teacher left the school, would this have an affect on the ethos of the school?
- C: There are other teachers who maintain the ethos.
- A: Ian has worked hard to bring the school up to standard.
- C: Governors will ensure succession planning for the head teacher,
- C: I think the Education Authority has already made a decision.
- A: I can categorically tell you that a decision has not been made.
- C: The document states that smaller schools do not lead to increased educational standards but that is the whole reason we send our children here.
- C: Have to think about social affects. Smaller class sizes are important.
- A: No decision has been made.
- C: We will demonstrate to you why the school should be kept open.
- A: We are gaining a clear steer from each area and have had to come to each of the 17 areas to ask hard questions. Need to have the evidence from yourselves to support any recommendation that we put forward to the Cabinet. We have taken the LDP into account and if 2000 houses were to be built in an area, we would also ask the developer to build a brand new school.
- Q: Is there a way to further develop the school?
- A: The site itself doesn't lend itself to be developed and there are planning issues. In terms of our school organisation plan, that states that we will invest in schools that are full to their local pupils. Would we develop the school to invite further children from outside the catchment here – we would have to discuss this further.
- C: Very small investment is required here compared with large investment required in other areas.
- A: The strategy will access money for capital investment and we definitely will not receive the money to invest in all our schools.
- Q: Have your political masters made any decisions?
- A: No, the Councillors are attending these meetings to observe and hear your views. There have not been any options presented to them.
- Q: Will North Wales be treated as fairly as South Wales in terms of investment?

Darren Millar AM was in attendance and responded with the following:

'All the schools in Conwy are good schools. The Welsh Assembly Government wants to reduce the number of unfilled places and is stating that 170 schools across Wales need to close. This inevitably means that some schools in Conwy are going to have to close. Ysgol St George has a wonderful ethos and the staff are fantastic. The school is a popular school; in fact it is the most popular school in Conwy. The school does have

shortcomings in terms of facilities on site but other schools have had investment although they too do not solely serve their catchment area. We have all the facilities that we need. Having rooms double up for different uses is fine in our eyes. Being the most popular school in Conwy should not be seen as a problem. A school not being fit for purpose and having unfilled places are not issues here. If its not broken don't fix it. We want this school to continue as it is.

Q: Thinking aloud, what difference would it make if the school sought aided status and the LEA no longer had to support it. The church could then invest in the school, this is something for the Governors to think about.

A: This is something that the Governors could consider but there is a process that would have to be followed. The pot of investment monies for Aided schools is also shrinking so need to be mindful of that

3. Workshop Feedback

Community use of buildings

- The children have their music lessons in the school house with no problem at all
- Special needs lessons are always held in the school house
- The PTA hold their monthly meetings in there
- The community police officer does talks to the children from the school house
- Pre high school chat is done in the school house
- Staff laptops are taken to the school house in PPA time thus is becomes the 'staff work room'
- School council use the school house
- Governor meetings held in school house
- Church used for all school services Harvest, Easter, Advent, End of school year. Also Christmas concert held in the church which is unique
- Village hall used for school PE lessons (dance and movement / gym), Christmas fair, school parties and disco's

Educational issues

- Computer skills are utilized throughout the curriculum
- The ability to use computers independently as and when required – foundation phase and developing key skills 2

- It is vital for computers to be in the classroom setting to be utilized when necessary rather than requiring additional staff to supervise in a computer suite. Having a computer suite implies restricted use. Here our computers are used all day everyday when required for specific activities or researching
- Staff are familiar with every pupil's individual educational needs and can plan appropriately
- The school has won trophies for sport / athletics
- Our smaller school has allowed for the early identification and support of children with ALN
- Small sizes means educational needs identified
- Excellent rapport between pupils and staff
- Excellent rapport between staff and parents
- Staff have detailed knowledge of all children and are able to feedback regularly
- We disagree that small schools do not mean better attainment of educational standards because of the smaller class sizes

Values and ethos

- Friendly, happy environment
- Emotional support from staff if needed
- Contact with the church is very important to our family
- Small community, everyone knows each other, the children from nursery area known by name to the children in the years above them. They look out for each other. Peer support of each other
- Each staff member knows each child even if they are not teaching the age group, and the parents
- Community spirit is very strong, and helps the child when they go to higher education
- Children develop interpersonal skills, sharing, caring, developing others
- Having mixed aged classes provides continuity for pupils as they are with the same teachers for longer than a school year
- Staff are always available to discuss any issues with parents

- The school has a traditional but also forward thinking ethos which is valued tremendously by those people sending their children to the school
- Importance of family, friends and community
- Church values (Christian)
- Every child is involved irrelevant of ability etc. e.g. remembrance day
- School sports and other activities

Social Issues

- Children's safety
- Sense of community within the children and the children and staff
- Every child has an individual role within the school and its activities
- The smaller environment allows every child to prosper
- Children with additional learning and school needs are easily identified
- Weekly interaction with church and continuous support of church to school and vice versa
- Buddying – Each pupil looks out for each other
- One of first schools to commence 'PATHS'
- We welcome the special ethos that St George provides for the social and emotional wellbeing of our children
- We disagree that the social side of children's development is not catered for. In fact children have come to St George as their social wellbeing was not catered for in other schools
- St George give parents the choice of a Church of England school
- Those children with confidence issues can thrive and excel in this school – where they might not be catered for in a 'large' school
- Those pupils not attending school, choose to send their children elsewhere for religious, language reasons for private education
- It's a good school, don't close it
- School locally to family carers
- It makes me laugh how you call this a school modernization programme, but after listening to several of your officers tonight it is just one big cost cutting exercise, where really the children's welfare

isn't really being considered. How much has it cost to run this programme? Put it back in the pot.

- Church school and ethos
- One of the main reasons we bought our house was so our children would go to St George school. We do live in the catchment area
- Measures that are frequently difficult to quantify are often ignored
- Could governors consider 'Voluntary guided' schools?
- Outstanding quality of education
- We believe in educating our children in a school who supports a Christian ethos
- Social and emotional wellbeing is important and it is more easily catered for in a smaller school
- This school is one of few schools in a community. We must stop the destruction of these communities
- The standard of teaching is excellent and the social and emotional wellbeing of the children is far more important at St George
- Our community Moelfre is 2½ miles from St George, how far do you want us to travel to our local school?
- My daughter did not go to local school due to the following: poor reputation, not confident of school report, little confidence in staff, high pupil: teacher ratio
- I am out of the catchment area but chose to send my children to St George because of its wonderful reputation and fantastic standards. There was a waiting list to get into the school showing the demand
- Let us be, St George is the school for me
- St George is the best because my son says so
- Freedom of choice! Best school for my children
- St George has the X Factor
- Why is Moelfre and Terfyn now not in your new catchment area?
- I choose to send my children to this school because of the friendly community feel along with its Christian church ethos
- Consideration of our children's views should be taken into account, chat with them about what they like about school
- We want our children to go to a church school which has a great ethos

- School's not broken so don't try and fix it
- St George has no traffic problems, taxi rank system work perfectly
- The interest from outside the catchment area only serves to emphasize how popular the school is, in no way does the lack of facilities or hall impact on the effectiveness of the school
- The man said that we would give our right arm for a hall, we would give our right arm for the school to stay open
- High standard of behaviour
- In our opinion a smaller school means better education for our children
- For generations my family has attended this school, I hope it continues
- My wife and I moved to the area from Portsmouth, and had no pre-conceptions about any of the schools in the region, when we had children we asked around which was the best school, and without a doubt St George was highly recommended by most
- The sense of community at St George school is unique and the lack of hall does not in my opinion affect my children's education
- How much is this analysis going to cost, the information gained over two years will then be "history"
- Great headmaster, great teachers, fantastic reputation, to close the school would be madness
- You appear to take the negative points as buildings etc as important, not the quality of the education and wellbeing of our children
- For all this 21st education you require, where is this 'new' money coming from?
- We chose St George school as it's a small school which has excellent educational standards and excellent teaching standards. I don't want my children to go to a larger school which may have a hall but the teachers don't even know the children's names.
- We have no issues with St George being separate infant and juniors, we are 1 school!
- The authority speak of the 21st century, does this mean better education or cheaper education?
- Attached to the school is a wonderful church which gives amazing support and values to the children

- Ethos of the school is excellent. Small community school – small classes – great attention for our children, it gives them a real sense of community

The school as part of the community

- It is the heart of community
- Intrinsic link to church
- Fundraising by friends of St George
- Village facilities utilized by school
- We feel that the school is a huge part of the community and has close links with the church which is hugely important

Children's needs and welfare

- The school prides itself on catering for all the children's needs and is a diverse learning environment.
- The pupils are known by name by all the teachers as opposed to being a 'number'
- Because of the issues highlighted the children actually get more physical exercise outside than other school were facilities are 'in house'.
- The children regularly walk to school concerts / services in the church
- Quality / outstanding education
- Safe and secure environment
- Respect
- Discipline
- Learning needs for individuals
- Family environment
- Teacher's understanding of each individual
- St George has won awards for healthy eating
- Staff monitor pupils whilst eating at dinner time. This ensures pupils eat a healthy lunch and are focused throughout the day. In a large dining hall this would not be monitored as well.

Buildings & Resources

- The school has all of the facilities highlighted as 'missing' in the report and all of the parents recognize that there are some shortcomings but choose to send their children there anyway
- Re Traffic Problems – the school has an excellent one way system in place to pick up and drop off children which is far safer than seen in other schools
- The buildings are not owned by Conwy Council. As such there would not be an immediate cost saving if the school were to close
- See attached documents in minutes where at a small cost the church house can be fit for purpose
- The church hall is fine for the weekly gym / PE lessons
- Problems that have been identified are not really problems to the school – our children have all the facilities they require in other areas e.g. village hall
- All children have a 'high visibility' jacket to be worn when walking up the hill. These were purchased by the school PTA, along with new benches, mats etc for PE
- School kitchens provide excellent meals
- Two new classrooms built for purpose 7 yrs ago including large playground
- Outdoor classroom recently erected for foundation phase
- Garden area has been developed to include vegetable patch, herb garden etc
- New CCTV and security installed
- Excellent outdoor PE facilities, lines, marks etc

GT noted that he would collate all the information and feedback via the Head teachers. Notes that ideas and opinions could still be put forward after this meeting in the form of an e-mail to TJB or Education Services and this would be provided via the Head teachers.

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

- C: The cost per pupil at St George is £623 below the average for Conwy. The school building is owned by Kinmel Estates so there would be no financial benefit to Conwy of selling it.
- Q: By making these changes and modernising, aren't you going to increase the cost of school transport?
- A: Any option that was put forward for an area would have to include the cost of travel and the impact that would have.

- C: You also need to look at improving secondary schools rather than just primary schools.
- Q: If St George school survives this modernisation, will it look the same when it comes out of the other side?
- A: Investment within the strategy would have to be prioritised in area where changes were definitely going to occur. St George would therefore come lower down the priority list for investment.
- Q: Is it just super brand new schools that will get investment?
- A: No there are many different options to consider – Area schools, federalisation, clustering.
- Q: Why would you not invest in this schools when it has such high educational standards?
- A: There is a limited pot for investment and that means that we cannot invest in each individual school – this would cost around £60 million and WAG will not fund this. Need to prioritise some areas rather than others.
- Q: Are you going to be reviewing the higher management of the Authority?
- A: Yes as part of ongoing efficiencies that have to be made we are also looking at Secondary Schools, Post-16 education, Special Schools and the staff structure of the LEA. We are reviewing at every level and this includes collaborating with other Counties.
- C: Larger schools could lead to a reduced standard of education.
- A: We have to make efficiencies within the budgetary confines we find ourselves in and we're trying to make changes in order to retain the high standards.
- C: The head teacher and Governors have presented a report to you tonight that details the importance of the school. People feel very strongly about the school and its place in the community. Bricks and mortar does not make a school and you have to understand the depth of feeling surrounding it. I thank everyone for their attendance.

DB thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the meeting as a lot of important information was gained.

Idea/Worry Wall

- Will local development plan influence decisions e.g. more houses built
- Is not 84% of people from outside area choosing the school a positive fact?
- School has a very good reputation – waiting list, and children are happy
- Excellent education provided
- All staff contribute to the ethos of the school
- School use community facilities