

Caerhun Area – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Thursday 12th 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 G. O. Edwards
Cllr E. M. Thomas

1. Introduction

GT 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 62 schools is not sustainable for the future.

DP then gave a presentation on the specific school data including information on 'fit for purpose', unfilled places and catchment areas. 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.

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. If one room had 2 uses, it was only considered to have its main use as ticked on the list. It was noted that the document was correct at the time of printing and any changes since would be reflected in the draft strategy.

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

- C: Have to ensure that you get the facts correct in the first place if you're going to base decisions on them.
- A: When producing the draft strategy, the statistics will have to be reviewed.

- C: Since the document has been printed, the school capacity at Tal y Bont has been recalculated as 60 not 72. Pupil projections also have to be called into question.
- A: The calculation for projections has already been explained and over the last 12 years we have been within 1% correct. If there are large changes in the population, the projections will be reviewed. These figures are reviewed annually anyhow.
- C: Projecting 3 years into the future leaves a lot of room for change.
- A: This is just a starting point and it reviewed annually.
- Q: Are the projections based on simply what is happening in the school or are they more global than that? Cannot believe projections as know there are more children in the area than that.
- A: You have the local information that we cannot hold centrally and this can obviously affect projections. We need this local information fed into us in order to feed into the strategy.
- Q: What is a practical space?
- A: A separate area for learning through play.
- Q: Which criteria is most important with the 'Fit for Purpose' list?
- A: The building bulletins from the Welsh Assembly Government state that having these elements in place is good practice and should be included in any new school build. No criteria is more important than another.
- C: The presented statistics work against smaller schools. I think you are missing the softer aspects such as good staff and good head teachers. Having different things in one classroom can be a good thing.
- C: Don't understand why these things are important.
- A: This is why this consultation is important. Facts are there but we need the local information from you.
- C: These hard facts make parents choose against our schools as it states that they don't have as many facilities.
- C: Catchment areas work against admissions policy.
- A: Parental choice is statutory and cannot work against this as it's the law. No children are currently getting free transport from Tyn y Groes to go to Ysgol Tal y Bont.
- C: The statistics reflect poorly on small communities.
- A: Had to be consistent across the document for all schools.
- Q: Catchment areas, where are they?
- A: They are defined on a map but these maps are not available online.
- Q: Why is the catchment important to look at?
- A: It's important because it identifies your local schools. At the moment local schools are not full with local pupils. At the moment there are a significant number of children in Rowen not going to their local school.
- C: You need to look at policies and apply them differently in different areas.
- A: There will be an opportunity for you to put this forward in the workshop.
- Q: Do you have a ballpark figure for the number of schools you want for the future?
- A: Haven't got a number where we're saying that we need to reduce it to. There are 2600 unfilled places and we can't just supplant this number onto a number of schools. We need to be mindful of keeping local schools in place but could look at an Area school. Cannot give you an exact number. In terms of Areas for Review, these 3 schools are not

ringfenced together for changes and we can rethink about areas once we feedback from you.

C: I feel that a decision has already been made as there is a need to make a saving. We should be thinking about educational standards in the first instance.

A: This exercise is not an attempt to save money. The funding we receive from WAG is being reduced so we need to make the most efficient use in order to maintain the standards of our schools. There is no saving being made as our funding is reducing and we need to use the money we do get to its full potential.

GT explained workshop part of the meeting and it was requested that all sheets be discussed by the stakeholders from each school.

C: By using those headings on the sheet, it looks like we are having to justify small schools in rural areas.

A: That's not true, you can use blank sheets of flipchart paper if you would prefer.

C: Feel like we've done this before in other meetings.

3. Workshop Feedback

Ysgol Tal-Y-Bont

Children's Needs and Welfare

- Safety
- Building fit for purpose, adequate foundation phase area
- Adequate numbers of children to a class, more attention to individuals
- Wide range of resources
- Adequate resources for the number of children
- Local - no travelling

The school as part of a community

- No travelling to school
- Older people from the village come for lunch
- Heart of the community
- Christmas concerts, fairs etc.
- Family - everyone gets on together
- See use of building
- Create work for local people

- Children don't make friend in their own community if they are transported to school

Values of rural schools

- Heart of the community
- Everyone knows each other
- History - generations of one family going to the same school
- Co-operation with other organisations in the village
- Each child given an opportunity to participate in all the activities
- Each child allowed to develop at his/her own level
- Discipline not a problem
- Close communication between parents & staff
- Closing schools won't help regenerate areas

Community use of buildings

- Older people
- Computers
- Co-operation with the playing field committee to improve the environment e.g. planting bulbs, fundraising for all weather pitch
- Urdd
- Dragon Sports
- Fundraising activities e.g. Collecting clothes, washing cars, car boot sales, hog roast, children in need
- Recycling
- Christmas Concert
- Thanksgiving service
- Urdd eisteddfod committee

Buildings & Resources

- Practical area
- IT/technology area
- Wet area
- Library
- Outdoor education area
- SEN room or small group room
- Playing field and all weather pitch and tennis court
- Hard play area
- Enclosed nursery play area
- Bouldering wall
- Staff room
- Staff work room
- Head's office
- Canteen
- Site suitable to adapt

Education in a Rural Area

- 75% go to university
- Smaller classes - children get more attention
- Resources
- Opportunities sooner
- Everyone gets a chance
- Plenty of room for foundation phase and opportunity to use playing field and nature pool

Social Issues

- Loss of work for local people
- Loss of community
- Language

- Discipline
- Respect in the community
- Co-operation between school, the community and older people
- Nursery group within the school

Ysgol Dolgarrog

The school as part of a community

- Local people contribute to children's education
- Focal point for community events for all age groups living in local area
- Inter generational support for school and at school events
- Extra curricular clubs enhance children's wider learning e.g. Cooking club, urdd, football, IT club, gymnastic club, gardening club
- Close links with local business

Social Issues

- Closure of Aluminium works – development of site includes proposals for provision of affordable, family housing
- Children having friends / peers close to where they live
- Community events in school
- Strong support for 'Friends of the school'

Community use of building

- Y Pentan – use building for putting the paper together
- Cor meibion use facility
- Only extra-curricular provision in village
- Clwb Garrog after school club
- Dawns i bawb – Dragon sports
- Venue for sporting matches e.g. football, for schools in Conwy Valley
- Welsh language unit
- Ti a Fi, Ysgol Feithrin

Education in a Rural Area

- Small class sizes
- Children able to walk to school – supports aims for healthy living and environmental awareness
- Develops and fosters sense of community
- 1 to 1 provision is excellent
- All children have access to all activities. Everyone is given the chance to explore different areas e.g. school play, sports teams
- Staff are able to be aware of local issues and respond sensitively to them
- Fits in with foundation phase ethos
- Easy access to learning outside of the classroom environment

Values of rural schools

- Smaller rural schools pull community together – less behavioural issues
- Fosters community identity
- Encourages respect for local area
- Reacts to community needs eg provision of breakfast and after school clubs to support working parents
- Environmentally friendly – low transport needs
- Parental involvement

Buildings and Resources

- Potential space to develop and invest in site
- Adapted facilities for disabled
- Existing Welsh language unit
- High standard of integrated ICT facilities in classrooms
- Athrawon Bro office on site
- Outdoor classroom / nature area facilities on site

Children's needs and welfare

- Due to closure of aluminium works, shop and post office, many children have experienced socio-economic difficulties within their families – there is a need for stability and the school plays an important part of maintaining this
- Small classes – greater provision of individualised support. Recognition of SEN and other needs at an earlier stage
- Staff know their children and families
- Space to play and ability to walk to school – this links in to emphasis placed on being 'fit for life' and health and well being strategies

Ysgol Rowen

The school as part of the community

- The community as part of the school – this is vital!
- Losing the school would decimate our community: no Christmas concert for pensioners, no meithrin, no chance or re-starting youth club, no young families, no social housing, drastic effect on carnival and shop and Ysgol Sul, loss of Welsh language, loss of local employer
- Volunteers coming into school – people want to be involved
- Economic contribution needs to be properly evaluated
- Friends made as young children tend to last, holding the community together in later years

Children's needs and welfare

- Very strong sense of village community
- Keeps very young children out of school bus
- 3 year olds are much less intimidated by small schools
- Strong links between meithrin and school are possible with a village school
- Family atmosphere consistent with dynamic of rural life (everyone knows everyone etc)
- Important that the school yard language is Welsh - small school ensures this

- Other parents from other valley schools often don't believe me when I say the language in the yard in Rowen is Welsh even though only 2 families are 1st language. My boys are completely happy to play in Welsh even though we speak English at home. Rowen is excellent in this respect

Education in a rural area

- Essential if the rural economy is not going to decline further
- No school leads to: No young incomers, no social housing, aging population, dying community
- Will cost more – need to get WAG to fund education according to location NOT one formula for all schools
- Need for WAG funding – Capital / real estate driven, no consideration of educational standards, smaller schools have higher standards of attainment: tailor teaching to individuals
- Aims: Need to add – All Conwy child to leave primary school able to read and write and do math
- Small schools often viewed as an 'easy target' for closure – better result would be to amalgamate school closer geographically in urban areas

Community use of buildings

- Welsh conversation
- Meithrin *Nursery*
- Pensioner concert and party
- After school club
- Spanish and French lessons
- Hosts craft fair
- Part of open gardens
- Breakfast club
- Offered use of forest / woodland area to other schools (not considered in stats presented) latest good practice
- Village hall is used by school

Social issues

- A very good way for incomers to Wales / the village to learn Welsh and become part of the community
- If no school, would not need to learn Welsh – as would go to English medium school
- Welsh language – no school means no families and trend towards older people (mostly English speaking) and holiday homes continues...Anglicising rural Welsh community
- Strong links across age groups which can help when moving to secondary school
- Children socialise at link with other school events, rugby club etc
- Children are safer in an environment where they are known as individuals
- Our pupils stay in touch. Friends made are long standing and continue to contribute to village life (see Facebook group of ex-Rowen pupils)

Buildings and Resources

- Buildings and resources are not same – Parents happy with building
- Building:
- Education not an industrial process
- If adequate for needs ok, not based on formula
- A small extension at back of school would address many of the problems raised
- Resources:
- Advantage of small school community (parents) provide many resources
- Adequate for the present set-up, 'fit for purpose' report is misleading
- We have excellent foundation phase resources: wood, gardens, outdoor classroom

Values of Rural School

- Rowen might be better grouped with Llangelynin
- If it ain't broken, don't fix it

- Catchment areas meaningless – which is nearest by road? Different policy in urban areas where all school closer together
- Statistics flawed in small samples
- ‘Consistent’ approach flawed in rural v town
- Economics of scale research shows amalgamation doesn’t save £ - must build any capital cost into equation
- Changes to large schools will have bigger impact on overall figures. Impact on rural, small schools and villages will be disproportionately worse. It’s not a level playing field, one size does not fit all
- Happy to work closer together on curriculum etc
- Human capital related to school, networks much greater in rural schools
- 2 3rd sector orgs at risk if school set up is changed
- Marginal savings / impact on stats for maximum negative impact if Rowen under threat – would stall opportunity to draw down funds – suggest go where there is opportunity and will to change (not Rowen)
- Rural economy needs high value business and e.g. several business located in Rowen. Would future business owners choose Rowen if no school? No!
- Teaches children Welsh in a community setting so that it becomes their community language
- Rural school – small – treat children as individuals
- Promotes citizenship, children are custodians of countryside for everyone in the future, they need to understand their local environment

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: In terms of educational outcomes of our schools, we would like to be able to compare ours with other schools. This would demonstrate the high standards in small schools. Small schools create a family atmosphere and might encourage parents to send their children from coastal areas to our schools.
- A: Standards is the key to this process. We are very proud of the high standards achieved in our schools. We need to have a strategy in

place to access capital funding to improve the fabric of the school buildings and need to know from you how we can invest in this area.

- C: We haven't been asked any questions about possibilities for the future, no options presented to us.
- C: We are happy with the status quo.
- A: Investment in buildings will therefore be prioritised in other areas where communities are interested in options for change.
- C: You can't ask us to think outside the box if you don't present us with any options in the first place. Don't think you have been honest with us.
- C: You haven't presented it in a clear manner. You haven't suggested that there could be school closures in this area.
- A: Have noted that 62 schools are not sustainable but apologies for not making things clearer.
- Q: If buildings are so important, it doesn't have to involve closure. There are ways of working together without closing buildings.
- A: Its not just about buildings. We are facing schools with declining numbers. Federalisation could be an idea for this area but did not want to come here presenting one option. Cannot compare educational standards in the document as it is not fair due to the numbers of children in each school.
- C: Since December 2005, there have been discussions about closing the school in Rowen. This is affecting the number of parents choosing to send their children to Rowen.
- A: There is a continual review of all schools but this time changes will happen through prioritisation.
- C: It's still about closing small schools.
- A: It's not just about small schools, there are other areas with large schools that are under initial review.
- C: The impact of making a change in a rural area is larger than on the coast. The schools on the coast do not have the same sense of community as those in the rural area.
- A: All schools no matter where they are have a sense of community.
- C: Very few services already in the rural area and the schools are the one service we would like to remain in place.
- C: I think you are assuming a lot. If you build an area school, it doesn't mean that we will send our children there.
- A: We have experienced both sides of the coin on this issue. Sometimes build a new school and children don't go there, sometimes a new school attracts many more new pupils.
- C: Allowing parental choice does affect numbers.
- A: Parental choice is statutory law.
- Q: Have you done research into why parents not choosing local schools?
- A: Haven't done so as yet as respecting parents right to choose, could do in future though to add to the strategy.
- Q: Why could we not discuss the options available to us in this meeting? This meeting has not provided us with anymore insight into what might happen to our schools in the future. Would have preferred to look at advantages and disadvantages of options.
- A: That is the next step of consultation.
- Q: Will we have a chance to be involved in that?
- A: Draft strategy will include all options and the preferred option for each area. We will consult on this draft strategy. This has been a valuable meeting for us. There has been different feedback across the County.

Some areas do want to change. There are many different options that can be discussed.

Q: If schools do close, what will happen to staff?

A: Once we start looking at a preferred option we will set up a HR Team to discuss everything with the Unions and advise staff. Cannot guarantee no job losses but as changes will not happen for 5 – 15 years we can make use of natural wastage.

Q: Equality of access to resources in terms of cost per pupil – are you trying to make this equal across all schools? How far will you take this policy?

A: Recognise that this figure will never be the same across all schools but we would like to reduce it to a more acceptable range. We therefore need to invest it as efficiently as possible.

C: Think that equality of expenditure is politically divisive. How equal do you want it to be?

A: Need to cost the preferred options and see what range of expenditure comes out.

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

Worry/Ideas Wall

- Wrap around care important and reliance on local volunteers
- Community
- Social aspects – more impact here than at a coastal school, so much more to lose
- Transporting children away from their 'community', how do they make friends locally?
- A new school has been built locally without a room for nursery group
- Less opportunities and experiences for children in a large school
- Re: "Equality of access to resources" – does the council recognise that spend per pupil will always be higher at smaller schools, and rural schools will always be smaller than urban ones. If so, what is the 'target' for equality of access to resources? It cannot be equality of per pupil spend, so 'how equal' does it need to get.
- The consultation document confuses *means* and *end*: How can buildings 'fit for purpose' be on an equal footing with 'educational standards' as a driver? The latter is surely a means to an end, the most important 'end' being educational standards
- The criteria 'where pupils live' seems to have no importance other than that it is council policy. Its relevance to the modernisation programme is not clear. It is not, e.g. a reliable indication of the degree to which a school is connected to its community.

- Why is Dolgarrog school practical space shown as 'class based' whereas other things using a shared room in all 3 schools are just shown as not available
- If LEA supported the school and lifted threat of closure we could attract more children, this has gone on since Dec 05
- What about all the school staff?
- Threat of closure is intervention in itself
- Keep school separate, but work together on some activities
- Perhaps change the title of the consultation as some parents do not fully understand the seriousness of the situation
- Birth rate nationally is rising at unprecedented rate – projections reflect what? Acceptance of a declining economy
- FACT – rural communities ARE stronger and people have more reliance on each other
- Ysgol Rowen brings people in Rowen together, which is really important given how many second homes and retirees that are in the village
- Rural schoolchildren must achieve equivalent educational standards as those from urban schools, or better
- The school is the heart of the community
- Data is misleading / wrong and gives false impression, a self fulfilling prophecy
- Re: catchment areas, please don't make any decisions until you are clear about why they are important (not at all clear so far) and they are defined correctly, and you have understood some of the reasons why some of the kids go to schools outside their catchment areas
- Will new built have space for Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (nursery school)?
- Is there anyone in favour of modernisation?
- Death of village community
- Distance - lot of travelling for 2 yr olds
- Larger classes - less one to one and discovering problems
- Nursery school - loss of purpose built location - if the school closes other village organisations will close
- A new area school would still be small based on your projections, risk of under resourcing

- Educational standards are paramount, we have good schools, let us attract some more children by reducing threat of closure
- Loss of Welsh language
- Give us the support to grow. We are already successful – let us continue
- 5-7pm not a good time to have a meeting if you want a proper consultation with parents
- We could still explore cost-cutting options that don't include closures
- Losing the language
- What will an area school gain? The council will gain two empty buildings but 2 communities will lose their schools, local jobs will be lost, children will lose their sense of belonging
- Worried about the standards and future of the Welsh language
- Are there less jobs in the schools?
- Small children shouldn't have to go on buses
- Ysgol Rowen has such a strong place within the village / community, e.g., the Christmas play is attended by all the old folks and those with no direct connection to the school
- Your reports suggests all 3 schools are lacking in facilities therefore educationally sub-standard. You seem to be trying to drive new parents away
- Worried about the statistics used by the Council - incorrect
- Need to consider new forms & structures for our schools. Multi-sites schools, mobile teachers, and resources. The 'solution' for rural schools need to be more creative
- Impossible to make informed judgements without reference to educational outcomes. We have no data on outcomes
- The damage is already done - in the eyes of the public small schools are the ones to close - therefore no new children to those schools
- Is it proven that larger schools are better for our children?
- (nursery school) - Loss of local jobs - 6 staff between the 3 areas
- Worries decision already made, seems like superficial consultation
- Children respect their local area
- Destroying the history and tradition of the village

- In the graphs you recognise parents going out of area for Welsh education but not English. Several children from our village go to an English school for the language
- What happens to the building? Building houses with no school for the children!
- Will any money be save by amalgamation? And how will education standards suffer with increased class sizes
- Nothing wrong with mixed age groups – teachers empathy and understanding
- Changing school catchments without consultation
- Numbers in our school in the last 10 years
- Put money into groups of schools working together
- Statistics as presented are doing small schools no favours in the eyes of the public
- Generations of families have been to the school
- I simply don't accept projected pupil numbers for Ysgol Rowen, based on how many bodies there are in the village
- More opportunities for all in a smaller school
- Economic impact on community must be considered
- Teachers can recognise problems in children quicker in a smaller school
- Risk of making mixed age group classes too big (this works well in smaller classes)
- Local information should add to the statistics
- Educational standards and inspection reports should be as important as the statistical information
- How much 'weighting' is placed on the statistical indicators
- Do you take the 'soft' facts into consideration in addition to the stats?
- How relevant are catchment areas – when parental choice is a legal right?
- Small numbers are very misleading when using %ages
- Do catchment areas based on post codes and parish boundaries reflect the reality? Why is it important?

- Rural areas do not have access to as many services as urban schools