

**Llanrwst / Capel Garmon Area 1 – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes**  
**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October 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)

**Observers:** Cllr I. Jenkins  
Cllr E. J. M. Thomas

**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)**

- C: 5pm is not a good time to hold the meeting.  
Q: What does 'fit for purpose' mean? How does it fit into different communities and resources?  
A: What constitutes a building that is 'fit for purpose' is detailed on the data sheets for Llanrwst / Capel Garmon i.e. a wet area, a staff area etc.  
C: Some of these criteria that make a school building 'fit for purpose' are not appropriate for schools in the rural area.  
C: This is an inappropriate time for this meeting and the invite was only received a week before.  
A: Apologies for time of meeting but aware that there is no ideal time and how invitation was sent out at short notice because of early date in programme of meetings.  
C: Ysgol Capel Garmon have been trying to improve and raised grants to do so. The Education Service, however, would not match the money.  
Q: Opportunity for further consultation?  
A: You can do so via the website and sending comments by e-mail or through the post.

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

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

- Q: Who makes the decision on school capacity?  
A: School capacity is based on floor space and is calculated via a Welsh Assembly Government formula.  
C: The school data for Capel Garmon is incorrect in the document. The school capacity is 41 and the document states 60. Concerned that Capel Garmon is poorly presented to the public in Conwy. It's not fair

that the whole County get to see this mistake and it is not rectified.  
How will this be corrected?

- A: The internet version of the document has been changed to 41.  
Q: Why were Trefriw, Bro Gwydir and Capel Garmon grouped together?  
A: Based upon location, chosen geographically.  
C: Concerned that to get to Llanrwst from Trefriw, have to use bridge and this might be a problem considering the flooding issues.  
A: No decisions have been made but this point will be taken into consideration.  
C: Need to think about qualitative issues not just the presented facts.  
A: The qualitative evidence will be collected via the Workshop.  
C: Concerns that there isn't enough time to get through all the information.  
A: Two hours was decided via the Council and thought this would be enough.  
Q: Is change in the area inevitable?  
A: The status quo is not sustainable.  
C: We therefore have to find the best way forward for this area.  
Q: Instead of working in groups why can't we debate all at once  
A: Better to get all your views written down and feedback  
C: Think the initial presentation should be more emphasis on the good educational standards in all Conwy Schools.

GT explained workshop part of the meeting and it was requested that all 7 sheets be discussed by the stakeholders from each school.

### **3. Workshop Feedback**

#### Ysgol Capel Garmon

##### Buildings

- We have a library, IT space, wet area, library, staff room
- You can have the most beautiful purpose-built building in the country, but this won't compensate for losing smaller class sizes, less individual attention & knowing your pupils. Ultimately the devastating effect on rural villages that the closure of a school will have.
- Council's failure to match the school's contribution has led to a lack of resources (£5,000) (which in turn can lead to a drop in numbers of pupils)
- £5,000 would have given us a staff room, SEN room, library & sick bay.
- The building itself is a traditional school building & its own history – this in itself is a valuable teaching resources.
- Buildings are sound
- "Fit for purpose" criteria cannot be a one size fits all!!
- We'll use the mobile library to supplement our own.
- Enclosed nursery play area is being built right now.
- We have no traffic problems (much less so than in a town)
- European/London building rules mean nothing in a farming community.

##### Community use of Buildings

- The school has previously applied for a Communities Grant last year (2008) for laptops for use in school and community use but was refused. The community is prepared to fundraise for these facilities so they can be shared by both pupils & community residents.

- Welsh lessons & computer lessons as well as community meeting can be held within the school.
- Cookery club
- Breakfast club
- Urdd – parents assist in this.
- The facility is/can be used right now. If you close it/knock it down it cannot be used and will never come back.

#### Values of Rural Schools

- As a strong community we will go the extra mile to fund resources.
- The only significant facility in the community. Vital for rural areas.
- No other facilities provided in the village i.e. leisure centre, library (regular), no regular buses, no adequate recycling.
- Very little return for Council Tax other than school, yet other towns have all sorts of facilities.
- Low class numbers (less than 30) are better! 30 is an imposed limit and not something to aim towards.
- It is an extended facility
- School's values are the same as the families' values
- It understands the needs of a farming community
- It assists the children to understand the community the kids are from. The kids learn what it means to be Welsh.
- They learn respect because of a wider age range
- Builds respect for the community
- Amplifies the benefits & objectives of Welsh language education

#### The school as a community asset

- Used as a community resource i.e. Welsh lessons, computer lessons (community will raise funds for computers)
- Single most important resource in the village that brings everyone together.
- Creating better communities is “one of the Welsh Assembly Government’s main priorities for Rural Wales” P29 Rural Development Plan “where there is.....a pleasant & safe environment and active & inclusive social networks”
- Meeting point which brings community together
- We (the community) have already shown that we can and will commit significant funds for school improvement i.e. fund £10,000 required for providing multi-purpose room- staff, special needs, quiet area, meetings etc.
- Once you close a school down in a community, you lose that asset & will not get it back.

#### Education

- Catchment areas are only lines on a map. Today people travel more based on more reasons (work etc) so the catchment line presents a false image.
- Small class size is good!
- More one to one focus- should be embraced not discouraged
- Mixed classes provide a positive learning environment & should not be put forward as undesirable. (promotes confidence & social skills)
- Many families choose this school because it is small + all of the above.

- Smaller class sizes offer a complete education where the teacher recognises the needs of each individual child and can satisfy those needs.
- Children want to come to school – happy to come because they are offered support

### Children's Needs and Welfare

- Every child's needs gets fully met as the children's history & needs are known to the teachers
- One parent writes: My child's significant difficulties were spotted very early on after arriving at the school & dealt with immediately. As a result his reading & writing have improved++
- The children are taught in the medium of Welsh and are able to speak it with their friends and families
- Any rationalisation (closures) will have a massive negative /traumatic effect on our children's development
- Every child has a voice
- Behaviour standards are higher in small schools, especially a school like Capel Garmon
- All of the children look after each other and are brought up respecting their neighbours & members of the community
- It provides an essential sense of identity that is 110% Welsh
- Every child is a happy child and every child feels safe
- Incidents of bullying can be dealt with quickly & effectively due to small classes
- Children are brought up with respect and this cannot be measured within figures that the L.A. collate
- The introduction to education & culture received at Capel Garmon is invaluable – sadly this is not measured

### Social

- See points made on sheet "the school as a community asset" and "children's needs & welfare"
- Less social & behavioural problems
- Pulls community together and everyone help each other from a young age
- Social points for communities
- Ensure the future of the Welsh language in our communities – where the language is strong and alive now
- Being bilingual offers work opportunities as adults
- Children get to know adults in the area
- No crime in the village
- Events in the school bring the whole community together
- Fantastic cooperation with the Bro Garmon charity
- Yr Odyn is a way of giving the whole community information about the school activities

### Ysgol Trefriw

#### Community Use of Buildings

- Ti a Fi
- Cylch Meithrin
- Royal Visits
- Computer classes
- Welsh classes

- Cookery Club
- After School Club
- Breakfast Club
- Urdd
- Fundraising events & meetings
- Concerts
- Film nights for the community
- Gardening Club

#### The school as a community asset

- Child seen as a person in their own right
- Relatively young population
- Low cost housing & social housing – helps young families in the village
- School reflects bi-lingual
- Loss of school results in higher costs for L.A.
- Reduced house prices – reduce council tax
- Without a school village only fit for old people & second home owners
- Encourages Welsh language
- When children are included in community activities it encourages parents and the community to be included
- School is the heartbeat of the community

#### Social

- Anti social behaviour linked to bigger schools. In small schools children look after each other.
- Affect local businesses, chapels, village halls if lose Trefriw school.
- Ti a Fi & Ysgol Feithrin – important to get new people included in local community, stressing importance of Welsh language
- Fostering a sense of belonging to a whole community . Trefriw school includes community via fundraising activities – supported by local businesses etc.
- Community recognises the value of the school to keep the village vibrant
- Focal point for all community events
- Identify peoples/parents' needs & offer a supportive network. A more personable approach – because staff feel part of the community. In a large school not so committed to the community.

#### Buildings

- Why hasn't the County supported some schools? What is your criteria regarding spending on buildings?
- Old building is a teaching resource in its own right giving the opportunity to flavour the curriculum.
- School has had no capital investment.

#### Education

- *Children have a right to an education in their communities*
- Easier to identify children with special needs in smaller classes.
- More one to one attention produces more confident children & needs addressed
- Easier to promote Welsh language in smaller schools
- Children can access more activities in smaller schools – wider curriculum
- Consistently good inspections suggesting delivery of education is good

- Parents are more able to discuss issues regarding progress/problems regarding their child.

#### Values of rural schools

- More bullying at larger schools
- Rural schools – they look after themselves
- Greater ownership of local school
- Natural environment for foundation phase

#### Children's needs & welfare

- Children with special needs catered for better in small schools – not segregated
- Smaller – get more help & attention
- Transport – accessible, length of school day , pick up points, safety, flooding, under 5's

#### Ysgol Bro Gwydir

##### Children's needs & welfare

- County should be consistent regarding all schools
- Work together
- Ensure safety
- Create a safe and adequate space
- Relationships with outside people e.g. social workers
- Keep in touch with parents

##### Community Use of Buildings

- After school club/breakfast club
- Yr Urdd
- Young Farmers
- Eisteddfod

##### Values of Rural Schools

- Values of every school to offer the best
- Consistency in terms of the County
- Central to the community

##### The school as a community asset

- After school club
- Use of the Hall by the Community
- Ti a Fi group
- Meetings
- Use of a playing field

##### Social

- Happiness
- A happy and friendly atmosphere
- Community events
- Going out to the community
- After school club/breakfast club

- School helps the community
- Close relationship
- Regular information for parents and teachers
- Social skills
- Teams/clubs after school

### Education

- Complete education
- Levels of teaching
- Differentiate
- Specialisms
- Special Needs
- Results
- Achieve full potential
- Discipline
  
- Buildings
- Appropriate sized Hall (including Hall nearby)
- Appropriate classrooms
- Plenty of room
- Safety
- Size of the yard/infants yard
- Medical room
- Playing field
- Woodland/garden/outside area
- Meeting room/SEN

### Summing Up – Main points

#### Trefriw

- Don't want to close the school
- School is central to the community
- Good feel to the school
- Children are part of the community
- Respect
- No social problems
- School = Heartbeat of Community

#### Bro Gwydir

- Gwerthoedd yr un fath (*values are the same*)

#### Capel Garmon

- Extended Family
- Share values
- Continuation of values
- School is fundamental
- Passion
- Class sizes – limit/cap
- Fiscal benefit v educational benefit
- Positive learning environment
- Older children nurture other children – paternal
- Many families choose small schools – keep the choice

- Community commitment - £ - documented – will do more
- Creating better communities – Welsh Assembly Govt Rural Plan
- Once closed – never come back
- Cyclical nature of rural population over time
- Need to draw young people back
- School is the only doorstep facility

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

Q: You say no decisions have been made, but think that decisions have been made and we need to know what they are?

A: Future of each school has not been decided.

Q: Why do the changes have to be made?

A: Status quo is not sustainable

C: The 'fit for purpose' criteria doesn't really relate to our schools

A: Education have looked at the criteria and noted what is not available at the school. These are the facts but they do not take the qualitative issues into consideration.

Q: If our schools don't meet these 'fit for purpose' standards, what will happen?

A: If school makes a decision that they don't want to be 'fit for purpose', any future Estyn reports will take this into consideration

Q: What is the cost to the Authority of bringing all schools up to the 'fit for purpose' standard?

A: There is a limited amount of money available to pay for the refurbishments. A strategy is required to prioritise how the money will be spent. Over the past 12 years in Conwy, almost all schools have received some investment.

Q: In terms of a definition of need, having something that is 'fit for purpose' is not needed, it is something that would be nice to have

A: If we get feedback from every meeting that the 'fit for purpose' criteria are not appropriate, this will be taken into consideration. This list is not the be all and end all for accessing the funding, community use is also important so this will be considered

Q: Can we put forward other options such as federalisation instead of full amalgamation of all the schools?

A: Yes all options are being considered

C: Bottom line is that this is all to do with money

A: This is having to happen because of the numbers of pupils in the schools and their affect on the budget.

Q: How many schools across the County are you looking to close?

A: No figure in place – we need to work out the best way of organising our schools and optimising resources

Q: Can we be creative rather than just closing schools?

A: Current structure is not sustainable but no decisions have been made so creative options are welcomed

C: If there is no money, there is no way for you to afford creative options

Q: Is this project linked in with the Rural Development Plan?

A: Working in parallel but have worked closely with Community Development and asking them to look at areas for initial review with view to investment

Q: Why is Betws y Coed not for initial review?

A: Areas looked at geographically, need to offer all children the best opportunities. Trying to look outside the box for creative options i.e.

federalisation and looking at schools that already share some resources. Have tried to be consistent across all schools with 'fit for purpose' but accept that the list may not be suitable for all areas and this will be taken into consideration. Any changes could take 10-15 years to implement.

Q: Why is Ysgol Llanefydd not for initial review?

A: Simply because of its location and the fact that there are no other schools nearby.

C: Need to carefully consider sending any pupils from Trefriw to Llanrwst

Q: There are at least 2 teachers in every school at the moment, will this change in the future?

A: Might have to in order to most efficient use of available resources

Q: Understand that you are trying to make the best out of a bad situation but have to negotiate harder with WAG

A: Representations are constantly being made to WAG

C: This work is already having a negative effect on small rural schools as parents won't send their children to those schools as they think they are going to close. Need to shout more about what rural schools do and achieve.

Q: What about the Local Members, what background in education do they have to be making the decision on final strategy?

A: The Councillors will take on all the important points made and use this to make their final decision. You can approach your Local Member to get your points heard.

C: Sometimes think decisions are already made behind closed doors.

A: All decisions have to be made in consultation with the public. Once draft strategy written, will be consulting on this also

C: Longer this is drawn out, the harder it becomes for smaller schools as parents won't send their children there unless they know they are safe

A: Appreciate this and trying to move as quickly as possible. Strategy will be clear, there will be individual school consultations on the option put forward for that school

Q: How many letters would you require to be sent to WAG in order for our LEA to get more funding?

A: Unknown but definitely need a strategy in place

Q: Have you discussed closure of any particular school?

A: No this has not occurred within the modernisation project timetable

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

### Car Park

- Trefriw is already working in partnership with other rural schools i.e. Dolgarrog, Betws y Coed, Tal y Bont etc. Why the need to move to Llanrwst? Perhaps a Federation of small schools.
- Recognise the value of rural schools – need imaginative solutions such as federation or additional sharing of resources and specialisms but KEEP SCHOOL SITES OPEN or community will die.

### Ideas Wall

- The status quo is an option
- Tell us more about what options you have considered
- Look at how our children are doing educationally. This wasn't addressed at the meeting – big changes could have negative impact. From what I

understand the standard of education in Conwy is high – let's not sabotage that.

- Promote Rural Schools & their achievements. Different schools suit different children.
- Even numbers out between schools – don't push class sizes to their limit.
- Negative Publicity on school closures is already putting off potential newcomers from sending their children to small schools & boosting their numbers.
- New curriculum encourages movement/choice between activities in class – libraries/IT facilities do not have to be in a "room" for this to take place.
- Why was the meeting chaired in English by a non-Welsh speaker?
- Strengthen & support joint working between schools
- Look at resources you have already – library facilities could be part met by the mobile library service – boosting another public service which is struggling.
- Why not lower class sizes in large schools by bussing kids to fill small ones? Our Estyn reports show that small schools do well. This will create an expansion pool in order to meet the needs of Conwy's regeneration policy – more young people = more kids.
- Schools are already working together to provide joint activities – this could be encouraged further whilst still keeping own identities (e.g. sports/drama)

#### Worry Wall

- Meeting not long enough for views to be heard – need more time
- "Something" will have to change is a decision!!
- Destroy Rural Communities
- People/families will not come to live in villages where there is no school
- If communities lose their heart this change the village. Families move out, rich city dwellers buy 2<sup>nd</sup> homes, pub closes, no-one to go there. Where are the lovely Welsh villages then?
- If you close rural schools my kids will be less likely to return when they're older!
- You are creating small school v large school situation.
- The impression given is that decisions have already been made. Speakers seemed ill prepared and spring the "consultation" to lessen the impact.
- What plans do you have for the closed schools? Houses for young families with nowhere to send their children?