

Llansannan Area – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Monday 16th 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 S. L. Williams

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.

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

Q: If you haven't decided anything, why are 7 schools still safe?

A: Those areas will be reviewed eventually but they don't need immediate attention like certain other areas do. Most of the areas where there are currently no reasons for change do not have problems with unfilled places or are close to the fit for purpose standards already.

Q: Will the data in the Areas for Review document be updated prior to writing the draft strategy?

A: We do accept that the data is only correct at the time it is published and we will therefore continue to review the data. The data will be reviewed prior to producing the draft strategy. Any decisions made won't be solely based on the statistics presented.

Q: How many of the 7 'safe' areas are in the rural area?

A: 1 area is in the rural area. There are 17 areas for initial review and there is a mixture in there of both coastal and rural areas. It was important for us to get this balance.

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)

- Q: What do you think about children not going to their local school?
A: Because of parental choice this is happening across all schools in the County.
C: Parents taking their children to schools outside the catchment causes problems for local schools.
A: It is true if people chose their local schools, the problem of unfilled places might be solved in some schools. We use the transport policy to try and support local schools.
Q: Is there any work being done on why people are not choosing their local schools?
A: Haven't asked parents this question as parental choice is the law. There could be many reasons such as work patterns, where family live, perception of the education provided by a school.
C: Do think its down to perception.
Q: Have you consulted with Denbighshire and Gwynedd regarding this document?
A: No not as yet. All Counties across Wales are facing the same problem as Conwy and have to produce a modernisation strategy. We will start discussing schools with them once we start developing the draft strategy.
Q: Are there any financial implications of transporting children to other counties? Do you know how many children from Conwy are transported to Denbighshire?
A: We do know how many children are transported to Denbighshire but the information is not available this evening.
Q: Where do children live who are outside the catchment and come to Bro Aled?
A: Don't have this information with us now but this can be provided.
Q: Which catchment are the children from Tan y Fron located in?
A: Accept that these children are in the Rhydgaed catchment and we do transport them to Bro Aled. This is an historical issue. Accept that there are also social issues in the rural area which affect the school chosen for children.

GT introduced workshop and asked for feedback on what all present wanted education to know about the area and their schools.

3. Workshop Feedback

Ysgol Bro Aled

Education in a Rural Area

- Welsh is being protected

- Awareness of family contribution i.e. families follow a pattern from generation to generation

Children's needs and welfare

- Rural school fosters a sense of belonging
- 85% from Welsh speaking families
- Important that children do not travel far
- Children educated in their mother tongue
- Lunchtime facilities for children - play resources and safety

Values of Rural Schools

- Essential that children go to their local school and not have to travel far to be educated
- That the children contribute to the community such as going to chapel. eisteddfodau, urdd, developing confidence and a sense of belonging
- Playing in their mother tongue which means socialising naturally through the Welsh language
- Rural school recognise and respect the old local traditions
- Once a school is closed the community is scattered, made poorer and there is no possibility of undoing the damage. There are plenty of examples in this area e.g. Ysgol Tanyfron and Ysgol Nantglyn
- Proud family connections of having been educated in the school - parents and grandparents

Buildings and Resources

- Disabled toilets
- Disabled ramp
- Meeting space
- Large parking area
- Adequate/safe facilities for nursery stage and years 1 & 2
- Plans to invest in a computer suite in the next financial year - April 2010
- Fridge available for children and teachers for lunch boxes, after school cooking club,

- Water fountain
- Climbing Wall
- Vegetable garden, wildflower area, conservation
- Solar panels to save energy - school is striving for ECO schools status
- Recycling bins
- Large playing area - large safe yard
- Outside tables
- Basketball/ Netball outside

Social Issues

- A social catchment area is different to a geographical catchment area
- Rural school fosters a feeling of belonging to a community
- Closing rural schools will destroy the Welsh Language and its use in the area and a feeling of Welshness
- Continue traditions
- Lose the school, lose the community, lose the sense of belonging and most importantly the children of the area being scattered

Community use of buildings

- Merched y Wawr
- WI
- Young Farmers
- Historic society
- Bro Aled Choir
- ATB
- Urdd
- Eisteddfodau
- Nursery schools
- Older people's club
- Ti a Fi

- NFU
- Bowling
- Concerts
- Community Council
- School Club
- Agricultural show
- Parent teachers' association
- Governors' society
- Saturday talk (Welsh learners)
- Coffee mornings - fundraising for charities
- Cylch yr Aled
- Private parties

The school as part of the community

- Is there a price on community?
- Is there a price on a Welsh Community?
- The buildings used by a number of local organisations - see other sheet
- The school is the heart of the community and children, teachers, parents, friends and neighbours get value from the good work
- The latest Estyn Report says that the school's contribution to the community is priceless. As the schools are following Estyn dictats does the Council have to do the same?

Rhydgaled

Education in a Rural area

- Support each other
- Co-operation
- Future of rural areas

- Location of the school - creates interest in nature
- Work and the rural economy
- Develop roots

Community use of Building

- Meetings held at the school
- Used by nursery school on occasion

The school as part of the community

- Without a school the village hall wouldn't survive - the success of the nursery group feeding the school
- School = Community Hall = events and organisations in the community

Values of a rural school

- Children educated in their community
- Keeps the community alive
- Support local issues - link between various organisations
- Support and develop the Welsh Language
- Support and develop the Welsh Culture
- Feeling of family/belonging
- Safety

Buildings & Resources

- Well constructed
- Quality of resources
- Mini bus for local use
- Many laptops – broadband
- Adapted the classroom to accommodate the foundation phase
- Resource room - art, music, technology, physical education, staff meetings

- Wild garden, planning and vegetable garden - care for the environment

Children's needs and welfare

- Quality Education
- Short journey to school
- Care and safety
- Class of acceptable size
- The right to education and socialising through the medium of Welsh
- Education in the community
- Children can't hide their social problems as easily in a small school e.g. bullying
- No need to travel as far especially in winter
- Pupils get special attention if needed in a small school
- Teachers know the children and are aware of their needs in a small school
- An opportunity for each child to participate in school activities in a small school

The school as part of the community

- Essential to maintain the community
- Importance to the Welsh Language
- Co-operation for the future
- Educate the children in the values of the environment around them - agriculture

Social Issues

- Allows local community to know, socialise and support each other
- Social skills - different/better?
- Socialise with different age groups
- A family element, close, know each other and support each other

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)

- Q: Are you using this approach to consultation as you saw what happened in Gwynedd and the uproar created by parents?
- A: Yes we have learnt from what has happened in other Counties. We are taking the process slowly in order to consult fairly and produce the best outcomes.
- Q: Do you get a lot of pressure from WAG to make cuts?
- A: The Welsh Assembly does expect us to reduce unfilled places as it's a WAG policy and we have to respond to it. We also have to show Estyn that we are responding to the task that WAG has set us. We have to deal with the revenue funding we're given and invest it efficiently. We therefore cannot sustain 62 schools in the future.
- Q: Can you get funding from other areas such as European grants?
- A: As an Authority we know how much money we will get from WAG and we can access some capital funding grants from Europe. There are not however many pots to access.
- Q: Why is Llanefydd safe?
- A: Llanefydd will eventually be reviewed but it is not in need of any immediate action due to its location, its low number of unfilled places and the resources available in the school.
- Q: Why has the data not been updated since changes have been made at the schools?
- A: The data was correct at the time of publishing but it will be reviewed and corrections made prior to the development and publication of the draft strategy.
- Q: There is not a problem with Rhydgaled in terms of unfilled places so why are we under initial review.
- A: There are many resources that are not available or up to standard according to the current list in the document. We do however understand that the list needs updating.
- Q: What are the options for this area?
- A: Federalisation, clustering or an area school. The preferred option will be discussed with yourselves when it is finally chosen.
- Q: Is the plan to close Rhydgaled and move the children up to Bro Aled?
- A: There is no plan in place, there are a number of options on the table and we have to consider all of those. Next level of consultation is to look at all the options, choose a preferred option and present this in the draft strategy. Some areas do want to change and these will be prioritised when the draft strategy is written.
- C: Need to remember the effects of travelling a long distance if you close a school and transport the children to another. There will be problems in the winter.
- A: Should we come to an option where travel is involved, we will do an options appraisal of all the benefits and disadvantages of this. When looking at a preferred option, we definitely need to consider travel as well as the effect it will have on the community.

- Q: How many schools are under initial review on the coast?
- A: 23
- Q: Why can't the authority spend more on education?
- A: Council is mindful of the importance of education and has prioritised spend in this area for a number of years. There are other services that need investment and the Council has to distribute the pot as efficiently as possible.
- C: Closing schools in rural areas will have more of an impact than on the coast.
- C: If we were allowed to build affordable housing in the rural area, this would increase the number of young people living here and pupil numbers in the schools. This should be fed back to the Council. Is it Council policy to ensure people live in towns?
- A: No this is not the policy. The Council is aware of the affordable housing issues in rural areas. The next Local Development Plan will make it easier for people to build affordable housing in rural areas and this will make it easier for local people to build local houses. The Local Development Plan will be published in 2010 and therefore run alongside the development of this strategy.
- C: I think there isn't enough co-operation between different departments of the Council. Need to invest in rural communities and provide more services in this area.
- A: We agree that co-operation is needed and we are working alongside community development services to ensure this happens. There is a representative from community development here tonight who is listening to your views and will take them forward.
- C: This is all about cost. If we had a few more pupils in our schools, the cost per pupil would change significantly.
- A: Agree that a small increase in the number of pupils at these schools would impact on the cost per pupil.
- C: Not a lot of discussion about the standard of education in both schools. As the buildings are old, does this make the standard of education worse?
- A: No evidence for this and we are very proud of the standards achieved in all our schools. If we do invest capital in a school, there is evidence that standards will improve. We need a strategy in place to ensure that we invest as efficiently as possible. We are not worried about the standards achieved in any of our schools.
- C: This policy of reducing unfilled places by WAG affects every school in Wales. It particularly affects rural education and WAG need to understand that a rural education does cost money and should be supported anyhow.
- A: Agree with that 100%. We do make this case to WAG. We just want to offer the children the best education possible in their locality within the budgetary confines we face. 62 schools are not sustainable but this does not mean we have to close rural schools.
- C: If close the schools you are removing the heart of the community. If there is a school in the area, it encourages people to move to the village.
- C: There are no jobs to keep people in their communities. Smaller schools give people a better education. You have to spend more on lifelong learning in coastal areas as they haven't had as good an education earlier on in life.
- A: There is no evidence for this.

- C: Losing good quality teachers in schools faced with possibility of closure.
- A: Have taken this into consideration and therefore reviewing schools in both coastal and rural areas. There is also a decrease in pupil population however so it is probable that schools will have to make staff redundant as a result of this.
- C: Education isn't just about buildings. Have to take into consideration the value of educating people in the rural area and in the countryside.
- A: Accept this and it will be taken into account.
- C: Once the school is closed, it will never open again.
- A: Understand this and this is why we want to discuss things with you. We want to get the best possible education for the children in this area.
- Q: Why don't you invest money now in rural areas?
- A: Cannot invest in 62 schools. We can only access capital funds through the strategy and this needs to show we are willing to make changes.
- Q: We understand that there will probably be a change in this area. What does federalisation actually mean?
- A: There are many different types but basically it means keeping both buildings in place with the staff but having one head and one governing body. This would still create unfilled places but need to weigh this against having a school building in the community.
- Q: Would federalisation only be possible between the 2 schools?
- A: Could involve other schools in the area but we haven't looked into this. There are many benefits to federalisation as it allows teachers to focus more on education.
- Q: Is it true that most of the unfilled places are in coastal schools?
- A: Can calculate this but don't have the information to hand.
- Q: Will there be a chance to discuss this again?
- A: Yes we are going to be looking at how we are going to consult on the next stage and include it in the process.
- Q: Have you contacted high schools to note their opinions of these 2 primary schools?
- A: Not at this stage but will do once start looking at different options and preferred option.
- Q: If you can't fund 62 schools, how many schools are you looking at?
- A: We cannot calculate how many schools we are looking at in the end at this point in time. We need to consider what's best for a particular area.
- C: Should start considering just one teacher in a school if that is all that is needed.

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

Idea/Worry Wall

- More travelling for children
- Rural roads - it would be difficult to travel further to another school
- A social catchment is different to a geographical catchment

- Need to release Council owned land to build more affordable housing in Groes. This is needed to keep the school for the future
- Rural schools are important to maintain and develop the Welsh Language (Cross reference with Conwy's language policy and that of the Assembly)
- The effect of bad weather on the transport of children to other schools
- Closing a school - closing a community leads to the killing of the Language
- We must ensure that we don't create animosity amongst parents when discussing schools
- The Councils take advantage of the economic climate and gain the empathy of the majority
- The Council would prefer if everyone lived in the towns
- Ysgol Rhydgaled and the Village Hall at Groes depend on each other
- Without Ysgol Rhydgaled it will be difficult to maintain the Hall at y Groes
- Rural schools are willing to co-operate to save money, share resources etc to secure a future
- People and communities in the rural areas are punished
- Education in our community
- Invest in the rolling stock and accept it will cost – invest in the future, not cut
- Was it a mistake to give parents choice when choosing a school? - the effect of this is less children in some schools and paying for transporting children across the country
- Children are the future of our communities - in order for them to keep their language they must have Welsh language education
- Avoiding rumour mongering – avoiding self fulfilling prophecy i.e. rumours or threats mean kids & families change schools/move from the area
- The future of the Welsh Language
- No school - no community
- The effect of travelling on the health of children and their ability to concentrate

- That the money saved by closing schools will be spent on urban schools
- A primary school in a rural area is essential to maintain the Welsh Language
- That Dilwyn will have an ulcer after this
- Need to think more creatively - share the resources of the Education Department, Community Centre, Chapel = combine the funds to invest in rural services
- Does this automatically lead to school closures?
- A procreation grant from the Assembly to encourage the birth of bilingual children in rural areas
- If something happens to Ysgol Rhydgaled, it will be Denbigh and Henllan that profit not Bro Aled
- That the Council put a price on community
- The right of every child to be educated 2-3 miles from their home
- What happens if you cut capacity and then in years to come there is a reversal?
- Children disperse and separate
- What's the difference between what's spent in rural areas compared to urban areas?
- Invest in the current rolling stock of schools and communities. This will cost but what price for rural cohesion invest in the future
- The flourishing of communities is all important
- Amalgamation is a false economy e.g. Rhyd kids go to Denbigh
- County Council should seek funding from areas outside of the Assembly e.g. HLF, Europe, Cadw, commercial
- The right of every child to be taught through the medium of Welsh in our communities
- Children in small schools like Rhydgaled are fluent in Welsh after a year. Moving to a larger school will definitely kill the language
- Perform a study in to why kids are going out of their school catchment
- Local schools for local children
- More young people will move away if there is no local school

- Cross reference the Education Strategy with the Community Strategy (+ social strategy?)
- A lack of understanding of the natural and agricultural environment if children move to a town school e.g. Denbigh
- Some parents can't drive, so no way for children to travel
- Extra travelling for the children – weather conditions