

Old Colwyn Area 1 – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Thursday 26th 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. S. Squire
Cllr G. Jones
Cllr B. Cossey
Cllr C. Carlisle

1. Introduction

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

2. Presentations

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

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

Q: Have you looked at other Authorities where amalgamation has not worked?

A: We have looked at what has happened in other authorities and that is why we are consulting at every stage of the process to ensure that the right way forward is chosen for each area.

Q: There are a number of schools under the 'review in 2-5 years' section that have a high number of unfilled places and are not fit for purpose. Why are these not included in the initial review and aren't they being disadvantaged by this?

A: All schools will be considered in due course but we have had to prioritise and these schools in the second category had additional reasons.

C: You are doing them a disservice by not including them in the initial review and allowing them to bid for the capital funding.

A: There are issues in those schools that go further than simply the buildings. If those schools came forward and said they were interested in change now, we would certainly consider them.

C: Is this process really about modernisation and improvement or simply about cost savings?

A: Both are integral to each other. Its not about cost savings but we need to work within the budgetary confines that we have. We do take on your comments and although 17 areas are for initial review, this does

not mean there will be a change in 17 areas. It's a flexible approach, if none of the 17 areas want to change and a decision is made not to undertake changes in these areas then we could bring on the schools who will be reviewed in 2-5 years online earlier.

C: These schools are under initial review so that means there has been a decision.

A: There is a decision in that they are being initially discussed but that does not mean there will be any change.

Q: Why are we under initial review?

A: Because we are discussing infant and junior amalgamations in all areas where they exist in the County. Need to be consistent across all the areas and need to show we have undertaken a robust consultation.

C: The two schools do serve the community well as they stand. Don't mend something that isn't broken.

C: We don't have a problem discussing the possibility of an infant and junior amalgamation but the benefits of amalgamation should not have been published in the Areas for Review document. It has made us feel suspicious and as two separate schools we work extremely efficiently. We work closely together.

C: We also don't like the concept of a federal head and including this in previous documentation has raised suspicion.

A: In the previous documentation, we had to note all possible options for the future across all areas.

DP then gave a presentation on the specific school data including information on 'fit for purpose', unfilled places and catchment areas. By coming to Old Colwyn today, it did not mean that both the schools were definitely going to amalgamate. All areas with an infant and junior school were being discussed in the same manner. There were some areas who were interested in amalgamation. Referred to page 10 of the Areas for Review document and stated that both schools are achieving these benefits. Page 10 is not a criticism of schools and how they are operating now. The way it is written on page 10 could look like infant and junior amalgamations are a strategy but this is not the case and apologies for this. The benefits listed came from Torfaen and were approved by the Welsh Minister as a list of possible benefits. DP then gave list of possible benefits for separate infant and junior schools:

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

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

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

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

In terms of continued investment in school buildings, whether or not the 21st Century schools capital funding was allocated to us, we would still need to invest in school buildings and provide maintenance.

Noted that we wanted to discuss possibility of infant and junior amalgamations whilst there was a pot of money available to be able to make this happen.

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

- Q: According to the list of benefits of amalgamated schools, there is a perceived dip in children at Year 3. Where did you get this information from as never heard of it?
- A: The Welsh Assembly Government have done work on this but we have assessed it in our schools and it is not happening.
- Q: What is missing in our schools?
- A: There are not many facilities missing in either school. You are only under initial review as you have separate infant and junior schools. If there is a chance to access money for a brand new school building, we have to come to you and ask this question.
- C: Don't think the data should have been presented in a one size fits all manner. What about the outcomes of Estyn reports?
- A: Can't compare these because some schools have not had an inspection for 6 years. Also cannot compare educational standards because of the number of pupils in the schools. We will do further research once we start putting together the draft strategy.
- Q: Is the 21st Century schools strategy being put forward by WAG to ensure that schools with poor standards in South Wales are brought up to the standard we already have? Is there even a chance of use accessing any of this money when there are larger problems elsewhere?
- A: That is a good point and that is why we need a robust strategy in place to access the money as best we can.
- Q: What would be the cost of building a brand new school for 400 pupils?
- A: A ball park figure would be £8-9million. We are unclear at the moment how much money WAG will allocate.
- C: We would be so far down the pecking order in terms of receiving money for a brand new school, there is no real point in discussing it. It's not what we want anyway.

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

3. Workshop Feedback

What's working well?

- Buildings are fit for purpose. Buildings don't 'make' a school – dedicated teachers & support staff go beyond the 'norm'
- Positive ethos
- Keen to embrace new initiatives – Foundation phase pilot. Teachers chosen to advise other schools at local & national level.
- Projected fall in numbers is relatively small
- Good parental involvement & satisfaction
- Positive, effective support to both schools from committed governors
- Both schools work exceptionally well TOGETHER.
- "Leave well alone"
- Federal head therefore would not be an option for these 2 schools.
- In a large amalgamated school the head may be more distant
- Good leadership in both schools
- Good value for money – cost per pupil
- Excellent provision for children with additional learning needs (described as outstanding in Estyn reports)
- Smaller, separate schools focus more on individual pupils
- Early years provision recognised as outstanding by Estyn
- Both schools popular – few unfilled places
- Well resourced
- Teaching of Welsh 2nd language = good
- Missing key facilities now addressed – ICT suite, staff work area

- Pupils from outside catchment area attend due to excellent standards at TGJ and HG
- Strong links between infant and juniors – teachers, sharing of facilities, governors in kind, transition programmes, heads, data shared.
- Progression is continuous – no dip
- End of key stages in both schools = above cluster, county and national average
- In addition to formal learning pupils also benefit from emphasis on social and emotional development – good pastoral care
- Good community links – helped by locations in heart of Old Colwyn village
- Children are happy, eager to come to school
- Teachers are specialists in their relevant age groups
- Separate infant / juniors allow infant children to gain independence and take on responsibilities (to feel the oldest in their school)
- Liaison – staff, governors, management (between both schools)
- Transition
- Sharing of resources – Infants use junior ICT suite
- Produces happy children, good pastoral care. Emphasis on social and emotional development as well as learning needs
- Outstanding teaching and learning (Inspection report Nov 2008)
- Excellent community links and support
- Good range of extra-curricular activities – some supported and run by members of local community
- End of keystage results above national average

What could be improved?

(Both schools)

- All weather facility
- Breakfast club if possible
- Enhanced car parking / traffic parking

- Buildings / facility with a community link i.e scout link, new community centre
- Improve playground in T Gwynn
- Complete replacement of windows in Ty Gwynn
- Lollypop person / Zebra crossing
- Reduce car speed to 20mph near schools.

What could be improved?

(Ysgol Hen Golwyn)

- Boys toilets
- Windows
- Minafon field development

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

- Q: Is there land in the area that could be used to build a new school.
Cllr Cossey answered: Yes there is available land in Old Colwyn but that does not necessarily mean it would be used for a new school.
- C: Can we state that we do not want to go forward and we are happy as we are?
A: Yes, we now know that this meeting of stakeholders is stating there is no interest in amalgamating these two schools.
- C: We want 'NO CHANGE'
A: Heard your message loud and clear. Have clarity around what you want. There has been a different response in other areas. We have to make some difficult recommendations and put these forward to the Cabinet. We definitely take your message on board of no change.
- C: We don't want a federal head either, prefer the focused attention that the two heads can provide.
A: Understand that as well, but it must be noted that we do not have a rush of staff wanting to be a head teacher and when there are changes in the future i.e. retirement, this will have to be carefully considered. This will not happen in this area though.
- C: We have people who could become heads.
A: Agree and governors need to undertake some succession planning.
- Q: What if the Cabinet and councillors go against your recommendation of no change?
A: If they did that, we would still have to come back here to further consult with you. If Councillors go against what you want, you can still appeal to WAG so there are many other options available. WAG are putting pressure on us to reduce unfilled places.
- C: Both schools produce happy and well-balanced children.

C: No educational reason to change but maybe there is the opportunity to look at what can be done with investment monies in the schools.

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

Idea/Worry Wall

- Foundation phase – Early adopters & well established
- Although there are some small issues re: “fit for purpose” buildings. There is a really positive ethos in both schools which I as a parent feel is much more important than the buildings.
- As stated, both schools are excellent schools. The spend per pupil does not appear higher than other schools. Why is there a need to change schools that are achieving well.
- Amalgamating both schools would detract from successes in the foundation phase as there is a much more formal learning style in junior schools.
- The change from infant to junior (which is very well managed in T.Gwynn & Hen Golwyn) gives children the benefit of having moved schools already which helps when moving from KS2 to KS3.
- Our schools don't have unfilled places – pupil projections.
- Excellent schools with very high educational standards. If there were to be an opportunity for enhanced resources then I'd be in favour.
- Parental & Choice – Schools full
- What research / evidence supports dip from yr2 to yr3?
- Excellent standards, range of educational opportunities, professionalism of staff
- Closing down to open a few years late? Cost more? Amalgamation? – Hen Golwyn and T. Gwyn Jones becoming main school for area site situated not as good for parking etc busier roads nearby (? Big enough), bad weather affecting trips to school because of hills.
- Strong standards – Estyn. Excellent so why change? Fit for purpose buildings - What provisions will be made?
- Amalgamation does not = good school – no research to back this.
- Excellent Estyn reports
- Buildings – improve standards? (Building not school)
- Why are we in priority? – Initial review.

- Quality of teaching
- Having such a large school would have a negative impact on the social and emotional well-being of the pupils. As a parent I would remove my children from the school, and seek an alternative smaller school if they were amalgamated.
- Welcome an enhancement of the playing fields adjacent to T. Gwynn (an all weather facility if possible)
- Both schools are centrally located. This would be lost if they amalgamated as there is no centrally located site big enough to accommodate a larger school.
- My main concern is re: size of amalgamated school. Ysgol Hen Golwyn is already the largest feeder primary to Bryn Elan, without amalgamation.
- Please reassure me that changes for changes sake will not be made just to save finances. T Gwynn Jones and Hen Golwyn are both fantastic schools in need of support to top up their facilities to support the great work they do.