

Pentrefoelas, Penmachno and Ysbyty Ifan Area – Nominated Stakeholder

Meeting Notes

Monday 2nd 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 D. O. Roberts

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: Where do you get the formula that calculates floor capacity from? We asked this question at the Roadshows 18 months ago and still have not received a response.
- A: The floor space calculation is provided by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- C: Don't feel that this formula makes sense and is not fair.
- Q: A child's learning environment is very important.
- A: Don't disagree with this.
- Q: Why hasn't the modernisation of Primary schools happened earlier?
- A: Conwy began 12 years ago and there has already been some rationalisation and modernisation of primary schools. The primary schools in Conwy town are a good example as they were all amalgamated into Ysgol Porth y Felin. Have to produce a strategy now as it is the only way to bid for and obtain the 21st Century capital funding from WAG and secure improvements for the future.
- C: There has been lots of investment in Secondary schools.
- A: This is true but have to consider the fact that these improvements were funded via private finance initiatives.
- C: Believe that it is WAG causing these problems and creating a need for rationalisation. They do not have a good record for giving funding to rural communities. Have to consider problems of amalgamation in the rural area. If there is bad weather, it will be difficult to transport the children to a school that is miles away.

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. It was accepted that there was a mistake for Ysgol Ysbyty Ifan as they had access to the Village Hall.

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

- Q: Who went around the schools to assess them against the 'Fit for Purpose' list?
- A: Officers from Site Management and the final list was signed off by the Headteacher.
- C: Agreed changes have been made since this document was published and these have not been included in the data.
- A: Accept that there have been some changes and when the list is reproduced in the final strategy, these will be included.
- C: These changes should have been made prior to this meeting and included on the data sheets.
- Q: We have queried the final list for our school with Site Management and they have not accepted that it should be changed, why?
- A: There are issues around whether one room has two uses and if this is the case, the list states that the second use is not available at the school.
- Q: Unfilled places offer an opportunity for the schools to use this space for something else. I also query the catchment area for the schools, what are the catchment areas?
- A: The catchment areas have been in place for several years and are set by the Ward Boundaries Commission using maps.
- C: These set catchment areas are not suitable for rural areas and are not the natural catchment areas for the schools.
- C: Believe that some of the statistics within the data are not correct. If they are not correct, how can we trust you to make the right decision for our area?
- Q: How is the cost per pupil calculated?
- A: It is the budget provided to the school divided by the number of pupils.
- C: If children are going to get moved further a field, the cost per head will increase through travel costs.
- A: Transport costs are not included in the cost per pupil. There is a separate budget for this but we do take you point into consideration.
- C: Our schools have good educational standards and £7000 on the education of each pupil is not much in order to ensure this is provided.
- A: Due to the number of pupils decreasing year on year, WAG will be providing us with a lower revenue budget to pass onto the schools. This means that year on year the schools will be receiving less money and they will need to work within the confines of this. Need to work together to face this problem without affecting educational standards.

- Q: What are we not providing in our schools now?
A: You are definitely providing a high standard of education but the buildings are very old and were built for the old curriculum. Need to obtain 21st Century funding and invest in them for the future. The revenue pot will continually decrease and therefore having 62 schools is not sustainable.
- Q: So this means that certain schools will have to close?
A: Yes this is the reality but this does not mean that any of these 3 schools will definitely close. Need to think about the various options that are available as money to sustain 62 will not be provided by WAG in the future.
- Q: Is this the main problem then – WAG insisting that you rationalise?
A: We need to produce a strategy that shows we are working within WAG guidelines to access capital funding for improvements.
- Q: If there is less money coming into Education, are you considering the future of the Education staff at Dinerth Road also?
A: We will be looking at rationalisation in Dinerth Road in the future.
- C: WAG don't support rural areas, this is another knock to the rural area.
A: Councillors are making the difficulties that we have in Conwy known to WAG and last year we did get an increase in the revenue budget allocated to us. Unfortunately we have received less this year and therefore you need to tell us why keeping 3 schools open across this area is important and why we should invest in 3 schools with low numbers.
- C: Feel like you are trying to make us work against each other and state why our school is better than another.
A: This is not the case, we want you to work together to find the best solution.
- C: We are scared to put our views forward in case you use our opinions against us.
A: Your opinions will not be used against you. The notes of this meeting will be circulated to those in attendance and published on the internet.
- C: Also concerned that if your boundaries change, the points we have made will be taken out of context.
A: This strategy will be in place for 5-15 years.
- Q: If we all put good ideas forward for why all 3 schools should be kept open, how will you choose which schools should close if any? Will you base it on the statistics?
A: It won't be based on the statistics solely and any changes will need to be prioritised.
- C: I'm not sure whether anything we say will make a difference, have a feeling that you are going to close our schools anyway.
A: Not the case, we have the facts but we need to get the human side of the argument.
- Q: Can you change the table regarding 'Fit for Purpose' and republish it?
A: Yes this can be done.

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

- Steeped in the traditions, feeling of belonging, heritage of their area.
- Strong parental support
- The school is the heart of the community - the two things support each other, pulls people together, of all ages
- Small class sizes are considered good in public schools - the same should be true for rural schools

The school as part of the community

- The school is an integral part of the community - the heart of the community
- The schools' events are an important part of the community's calendar: thanksgiving (in the church), carol singing - house to house - people from the community, parents and governors attend
- The school uses the hall - positive
- The school and the community support each other
- Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin part of the school community (use the building)
- Support rural traditions and culture - develop citizens and leaders for the future - feed the youth club, young farmers, committees
- The young farmers have designed and created "Gardderchog" that is the garden for the foundation phase

Education

- Welsh Language - Welsh being spoken naturally in every home and on the school yard - refined - totally natural - rich
- Mixed age groups - useful to raise standards - challenges younger pupils - promotes team work
- Local pride - an understanding of their environment
- The schools in the cluster work together but it's important to have education on the children's doorstep: people from the community come through the door to enrich the children's education by teaching local history which is passed from generation to generation
- All the children have an agricultural background

Children's Needs and Welfare

- Accountability for each other
- The strength between the home and the school - problems are solved straight away
- Children of different ages care for each other - a family unit
- Strength of the relationship between the different families
- Local loyalty
- Everyone has their say - everybody's voice is heard
- Everyone participates - the opportunities available to each pupil e.g. travelling, eisteddfod, sports..
- Better recognition of the children - their backgrounds and their needs

Social

- The school is unique - naturally Welsh - the language of the classroom and yard
- All the committees and correspondence totally in Welsh

- Feeling of belonging - respect for the community, the school and the family unit: as a result no vandalism, bullying and social problems
- Agricultural families
- Employs local people - helps the economy and the community e.g. supervisors, cook, caretaker
- The pupils imbued with high level principles and morality
- A feeling of social responsibility
- Families want to return to this community

Pentrefoelas

Community Use of Buildings

- Community Centre
- Groups - Young Farmers, Children's Club, Mother & Toddler's Group, Nursery School, Godre Hiraethog (Older People), Merched y Wawr, Urdd, Netball, Snooker
- Whist Drives
- Christmas Fair
- Eisteddfod Tai
- Drama Companies
- Various committees
- Activities
- Community Council
- Fundraising
- Christmas Supper
- Concerts
- Learners
- WEA courses for adults

The school as a part of the community (Village)

- Is there a danger of the child not knowing his/her community and the community not knowing the child? i.e. start school at 3 years of age - may get to know another village better than his/her own
- Parents get to know each other - strengthens the community
- The school keeps the language in the area
- Incomers get a chance to blend in to the community

Social

- How and to whom are local houses let? - problems as a result of people moving in
- In a small school sudden immigration can affect the balance of a community/school/language
- Economic - lack of work in the rural area, lack of people = lack of children

Buildings & Resources

- Nursery group have their own room
- Outside Sports facilities, field and yard - safe
- Registered Emergency Shelter
- A safe area for children to get on and off the bus

Education

- Everyone knows each other
- Strength of keeping the language

Children's needs & welfare

- Children's travelling distance from school
- Distance to fetch a child from school if ill. More obligations for teachers to look after sick children
- If a school has small numbers - a child can be on his/her own in a year - disadvantage/concern
- Children should be taught in their community

Penmachno

Children's needs & welfare

- The distance for children of nursery/primary age - need education within a reasonable distance
- About 60% walk to school
- The school provides nursery education locally
- Strong feeling by parents that we should have a school within a reasonable distance
- Closing Penmachno school would mean a journey of up to 10 miles one way - terrible for children of age 3-4, also for those aged 10-11
- The teacher/pupil ratio supports the development of each individual child

Community Use of Buildings

- A number of societies use the building - committees, practices, events e.g. Christmas Fair, the Church hold meetings

Values of Rural Schools

- Economic impact - local jobs
- Economic impact - attracts young people back to live in the community
- Teachers and other staff live locally
- Focal point for the community - stimulates social integration and cohesion
- School is an essential element in a fairly isolated community such as Penmachno

The school as part of the community

- Children who attend the village school develop a sense of community responsibility
- "The school is an integral part of the community" - Estyn report
- Central to community activities - summer fair, concerts, services etc
- Integrate children of all backgrounds in the life of the community
- The school benefits from the support of the community - fundraising activities, parents & friends visit the school to support education & help with concerts etc.

Social

- Projected figures for 2014 is 33 pupils - based on under 5s in the community at present
- The Authority's report is misleading in suggesting 20 in 2014 - on the evidence of a few years that are different to the historic pattern
- A figure of 33 on the basis of children already born
- On the basis of these figures the empty spaces would be down to 50% and cost per head down to £4,200

Education

- Travelling costs low - most walk to school - others have short journeys
- Environmental impact - carbon footprint increases if children have to travel
- The cost of teaching one child is reasonable - even if it costs £7,000 - you would have to consider the cost of transport if children are taught outside the area - good chance numbers will increase - thus bringing cost per head down
- The school is the only service that the County provides this community - no swimming pools, leisure/social centres, libraries etc. Reasonable to expect a larger investment in education therefore

Buildings & Resources

- "All pupils have easy access to a wide range of resources which meet their needs" - Estyn Report
- Adequate rooms for all the pupils
- Room for teaching small groups/special needs, peripatetic teachers, instrument teaching etc
- Plenty of room for pupils in the Foundation Phase - 16 different areas in the classroom
- Resources outside :
- A reasonable sized playground for the number of children
 - foundation phase activities
 - substantial yard - play yard games
 - nature garden
 - vegetable garden
 - climbing wall
- "The school meets the needs of all children and gives good value for money" - Estyn report

Summing Up – Main points

- Is the formula fair? re publish the statistics
- Education for citizenship
- Transport - important in a rural area - what about the cost?
- Are the stats correct?
- Is the interpretation of the stats correct?
- Empty spaces are an opportunity
- The catchment area is not necessarily the parish boundary or post codes
- It may be possible to use community resources e.g. Village halls

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 and this would be provided via the Head teachers.

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

Q: Could you rationalise the clusters of schools on the coast and leave the schools in the rural areas out of the strategy?

A: This is an option but do need to take into consideration whether we need 3 schools with 20 pupils each.

Q: If you do amalgamate these 3 schools, the distance to travel is too great and children might not get sent to this amalgamated school

A: This point will definitely be taken into consideration as decisions are made.

Q: What amount of money do you hope to save?

A: There is no specific amount as this is not about saving money. It's about making the most efficient use of the resources we've got.

Q: Will an option be chosen that saves the most money?

A: Can't say that money is not an issue in any of the decisions made but the well-being of the children is the most important.

C: You need to consider the value and contribution of education in the rural area.

C: If you close a large school, this could have a more significant effect on unfilled places.

A: This is an option.

C: Concerned that you have 7 Key Priorities but maintaining the Welsh language is not one of them.

A: As noted in the presentation, our commitment to our Welsh Language policy will underpin the whole strategy.

C: The cost per pupil as presented in the document seems quite misleading.

A: As with all statistics, we do accept the fact that they are only accurate at the time they are produced. The cost per pupil however is not just published in this document, it is also published annually in the Section 52.

Q: Does the cost per pupil include travel costs?

A: No it does not.

C: The cost per pupil reflects badly on small schools but children in the rural area haven't got access to other facilities such as swimming pools etc.

C: Think travel costs should have been included in cost per pupil.

A: We take this point on board.

Q: Will the strategy be written and published before the election?

A: We have explained to councillors that it should not be an election issue as this is a local issue and not one for Westminster.

Q: How did you choose the areas and those that were for initial review?

A: Put together clusters of schools where various available options would work geographically and those for initial review were based on issues within the four main drivers.

Q: Have you made any decisions as yet?

A: No, no decisions have been made as yet.

- Q: Why is Ysgol Betws Y Coed not for initial review with 80% unfilled places?
- A: There are underlying issues in this area that have to be looked into more carefully. The school will be reviewed within 2-5 years.
- Q: If our school was closed, would you accept that we would want our children to go a school that provided for the same level of Welshness?
- A: This would be possible as we have to prove that children would receive the same value in a new school.

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

Ideas Wall

- In a small school I feel that the confidence of children is strong because everyone has an opportunity to participate e.g. everyone has the opportunity to go on the School Council to give their opinions and to talk as a class about specific issues. - Siwan Rhys Yr 10
- Nobody has ever said that cost per pupil has to be the same. Children in rural areas have to travel to swimming pools/theatres/rugby pitches etc.
- We can't put 3year olds on a bus to travel 8/9 miles with children they do not know from other areas.
- Is it possible to save money by amalgamating schools on the coast?(and leaving the rural schools alone)
- Ysbyty Ifan- Every pupil is a member of the Urdd. Every pupil has school lunch. Every pupil learns a musical instrument.
- Ysbyty Ifan -A school that has Welsh as its school yard language
- Ysbyty Ifan - Siwan Rhys BI 10 Because the confidence of pupils and former pupils of Ysgol Ysbyty Ifan is so high they are able to make more of their lives e.g. I was recently nominated to represent Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy on a trip to London and Cardiff to visit the Houses of Parliament with representatives of other schools. If I didn't have enough confidence I couldn't do this. Also many pupils and former pupils of the school have won in the Urdd eisteddfod and this is in no small part due to the work of the teachers who give up their time freely.
- How did you put Pentrefoelas Penmachno and Ysbyty Ifan together in a cluster? What about Capel Garmon in this cluster?
- Ysbyty Ifan- Cultured Children
- Ysbyty Ifan - An agricultural background to every family in Ysbyty Ifan. Where else do you have this?
- Ysbyty Ifan - Important: habitat, a feeling of belonging, heritage, identity, history, culture, community responsibility
- Ysbyty Ifan - Not a single child get free school meals. Does this not add to cost per head?
- Ysbyty Ifan - The shoe doesn't fit every child.
- Ysbyty Ifan - Children from outside the catchment area come to Ysbyty Ifan because they socialise here. this is their natural area - a line on a map doesn't make a school
- Ysbyty Ifan - What is the formula for cost per head?
- Ysbyty Ifan. Taking children away from their communities and their families to a school that's further away.
- Ysbyty Ifan That children from the school take part in Church services - lose the school = losing the Church.

- Welsh Language and Identity important to us as a family - this is available in Ysbyty Ifan
- Ysbyty Ifan - In a small school there are opportunities for the younger age groups not just the older children. This is because opportunities are open to all ages. Siwan Rhys Yr 10 Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy
- Ysbyty Ifan - Welsh is the language of 100% of the families and the playground - this is unique within Conwy and maybe within Wales - must protect this
- Ysbyty Ifan - The school protects the Welsh identity of the community/area
- Penmachno - Why haven't you taken into consideration the number of under 5's? We know that there are a large number of pre-school children in the Penmachno area; we expect numbers to go up to 30+
- Move the Education Department from Ffordd Dinerth to Llanrwst. It would increase local employment - devolve Conwy Council!
- Children will have to travel miles to school
- Small class sizes are considered good in public schools - the same should be true for rural schools
- Carbon footprint - what effect will transporting children have? when they could walk!
- A child on its own in a year group.
- Idea - join schools that are close together within 1 urban community e.g. lot of schools close together on the coast - join these together
- People from the community are employed - e.g. supervisors, cooks, caretakers, classroom assistants - a boost to the local economy
- Misleading to use percentages when numbers involved are so small - for example cost per child
- What about Conwy being progressive and announcing an Urban and a Rural strategy?
- There are rural regeneration committees being set up by Conwy to keep the rural areas alive. Close the schools and this is a total waste of money. There won't be a population in the rural area if the children are moved from their habitat to be educated. They won't have roots.
- Will you publish the cost per head including transport and lunch for each school and any other cost?
- Negative language such as "not available" regarding resources in a document like make us feel defensive - this doesn't help.
- The needs of each child is different - how is it possible to have the same figure for everyone? Some need more some need less

Worry Wall

- A worry - that the communication and checking of the quality of data is very poor in the Council.
- The document should be correct and clear