

Towyn Area – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Monday 19th 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)
Cynan Jones (CJ) (TJB)

Observers: Cllr Dr S. H. Anderson

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. Explained that page 10 of the Areas for Review Document was not a criticism of separate infant and junior and apologies for not including benefits of those.

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

- C: Concerned that if schools do amalgamate the school will be too large.
A: Will take this point into account.
Q: Housing developments will increase in Kinmel Bay in the future, have you take this into account?
A: Have taken LDP into account and layered housing projections over our calculated projections.
Q: Why are these numbers not included in the document now?
A: We can't predict the future and don't know who will move into these developments. Projections are reviewed annually.
C: Lot of migration into this area – don't want a school that is packed tight and need room for extra capacity.
A: This is a good point and will be taken into account.
Q: Have you taken into consideration the caravans that are now occupied for 12 months?
A: Cllr Bevan has previously highlighted this point and the projections will be revisited on the basis of this.
Q: Why are the benefits of infant and junior amalgamation included in the document? There should have been a more balanced view presented/
A: Apologies for having included this but DP will provide the benefits of separate infant and junior schools during his presentation.
C: Need to consider the practicalities if going to build a completely new school. It needs to be sustainable for the future.
Q: Will staff be made redundant if amalgamation occurs?
A: We are currently putting together a HR Team for the project and we'll use this to advice staff through the next stages. We'll try to make use of natural changes such as retirement but cannot make any promises as yet.

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

One possibility could be an amalgamated school on one site but with two buildings. Must note that in terms of capacity calculation nursery children nor floor area not taken into consideration and that the school capacity is based on floor space. Pupil projections are based on the averages of a three year intake and are reviewed annually. DP noted that the school was serving its community.

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

Q: Query capacity of schools?

A: Capacity of schools can be rechecked.

C: Need to look past capacity and improve

A: Want to maintain and improve all buildings. If want to maintain 2 buildings, there is still the opportunity to apply to the pot of money for improvements.

GT explained workshop part of the meeting. Want to know 'What is working well at the moment?' and 'What could we improve?'

3. Workshop Feedback

What Works now?

- Separate sites – two age groups benefit from being kept apart
- Smaller more personal schools = children not lost in the system
- Ysgol y Foryd's inspection results!
- Transition from Y Foryd to Maes Owen helps with maturity – "I'm in a big school now"
- ASD – less intimidating in smaller schools as Government promote inclusion in main stream
- Separate infants give children more responsibility – especially yr 2. They have a chance to learn independence
- Less intimidating for 3 yr olds starting an infants school to starting a primary school

- Less children means – more PSE skills taught at lunch times – encourage healthy eating - children can be taught to play games and look after each other - yr1 & yr2 buddies
- Staff – specialist teachers employed
- Work as dedicated team/caring team
- Infants are going to a secure environment – leaving home for the first time
- Specific outdoors equipment (Y Foryd)/bikes etc. Might be ruined if shared with older children
- Pupils are happy – why change that?
- Pupil's wellbeing is being catered for
- Catering for children with additional needs works well in a small environment
- We have room for transient population – by spring we'll be full
- Staff personal knowledge of children in smaller schools – 500+ a problem at this crucial stage of development
- Staff specialise in specific key stage
- Development of responsibility in year 2 children
- Separate, safer play areas
- Good staff development opportunities & career structure
- Easier for subject leaders to monitor standards
- Excellent liaison opportunities

What could be improved?

- Tackle the shortage of space situation, some of the classrooms are too small/hot/dark
 - Heating needs to be upgraded
 - Extend & develop present facilities
 - Separate heating system for Y Foryd
 - More co-operation re subject areas, cross stages, sharing experience
 - 1 governing body to co-ordinate development of both schools
 - More inter school co-operation yrs 2/3 e.g. joint out of school clubs, staff exchange, visits
 - 2 classrooms in ysgol y Foryd need outside doors (this would not be hard to complete – already a wall of windows)
 - Larger playing field Y Foryd
 - Joint facilities, IT centre, Library (problems with timetabling/rotas?)
 - Better design for the Ysgol y Foryd building- build upwards?
 - Transition/better links & communication
 - Continuity of standards from infants to juniors
 - Better communication with parents of new starters at Maes Owen
 - Need common ethos/cultures/values
- Separate nursery school

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

Q: Have seen statistics that show separate schools are better than amalgamated. Think crucial issue is size.

A: Haven't seen these statistics but understand that if any type of amalgamation was to occur you would want to keep two sites

Q: Is this a money saving exercise, pupils are the most important?

- A: Pupils are paramount and this is not a money saving exercise. It is an approach to try and use money more efficiently. Need to get grant money to make improvements and need to meet the WAG criteria.
- Q: If schools moved to another site and you sell the current land, what will happen to the money from the sale? Will it come back to Education?
- A: Yes this money will need to be invested i.e. cost of new build
- C: This has been discussed in the past. Both buildings are not in very good condition and built over 50 years ago, can make improvements to buildings and would support the idea of one governing body. Neither school is big enough to refurbish into one school.
- C: If you are going to build a totally new school somewhere else, this would probably be accepted.
- A: The strategy will cover a 5-15 year time period, those areas wanting to change will go first.
- C: Once developers start building houses again in the area, you should consider building a new school at that point. Think you should consider other areas in the first instance.
- A: If you don't want to change, you have to remember that you won't get the opportunity for improvement for 5-15 years. There is a repair and maintenance pot of funding but this is diminishing.
- C: As you have said a new build doesn't have to be one building, can be 2 separate units on one site with 1 headteacher and 1 governing body. At the moment, there are huge travel problems at the current sites.
- A: What you have just proposed is something we can definitely look at. We could get planning to look at different sites and their feasibility. WAG are pleased with ideas that link into community use.
- C: Don't think our area is a priority in terms of new build.
- C: Don't think you are going to build a new school in Kinmel Bay as there are other schools in the County that definitely need money spending on them
- A: We do need to consider all schools across Conwy and prioritise according to level of need
- Q: Would two separate schools as they stand now get a bid approved for funding to improve?
- A: Doubtful as WAG want us to rationalise and this would not allow for that opportunity.
- Q: So this whole approach is about money and not pupils?
- A: Need to make use of resources as cost-efficiently as possible.
- C: Think governing body is very important in a school
- A: Acknowledge this as governing body holds everything together
- Q: How have other areas felt about infant and junior amalgamations?
- A: Most have reacted in a similar way, but there are local issues

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

Idea/Worry Wall

- Could school become too big?
- Need capacity for seasonal migration
- Change in use of caravan parks from 10 month to 12 month letting
- Revisit capacity calculation
- Should we look at an "ideal school" rather than capacity?

- Move to a new location, keep 2 separate buildings one infant one junior, plus sports hall and nursery
- Build new building on stilts to beat flooding
- Better parking and roads in to school
- I consider it better that the two schools remain separate due to the fact that the smaller school size provides fewer complexities. Ideally it would be best if both school buildings could be upgraded separately to provide 21st Century buildings. My concern is that finance will only be available for amalgamation
- Where does ASD fit into the plans as the Government is promoting Autism in mainstream
- How will staff be treated if schools merge?
- What impact will the changeover have on the children?