

Appendix G – Minutes of meetings with School Council, Staff, Governors and Parents / Community – Llanfihangel Rhydithon

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**Report on meeting with the School Council of
Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School**

25th February 2016

Meeting with the School Council of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School

Officers in attendance:

Marianne Evans, Senior Manager School transformation
Sarah Astley, Project Manager, School Transformation Team
Jade Clay, Schools Transformation Programme Support Officer

School representatives in attendance:

Adam Shearman, Acting Headteacher, Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School
Nigel Bufton, Governor, Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School

A meeting with the School Council of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School was held on the 25th February 2016.

Sarah Astley, Project Manager explained the proposal to close the school. Pupils were then asked a number of questions. Their responses are summarised below:

1. What do you like about Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School?

- They know everyone in the school
- They have lots of friends and there is no bullying
- They all play with each other
- Because the school is small they all know each other better
- The teachers are nice
- Members of the community go to the school and read to them
- They like the activities they do – School Plays, Activities Day, Sports Day, Fundraising, St David’s Day activities
- P.E.
- The food is nice
- They have lots of books
- They like the outside play equipment – playhouse, shelter, climbing frames
- They get more 1-1 with the teachers
- The classes are small (10 pupils in one class and 20 pupils in another) so they get more attention from the teacher
- There is plenty of room in the classrooms
- The classes aren’t too noisy so they can concentrate
- They like D&T and Art and they think the teacher is fab

2. What don’t you like about Llanfihangel Rhydithon School?

- The school is cold in the mornings
- The conservation area is messy

3. What would be worse if you had to move schools?

- They will spend longer travelling and will have to get up earlier
- They will have to make new friends
- They will have different teachers
- They will have different classrooms
- They will be in bigger classes and the teacher will have less time to help them
- They will be separated from friends
- The bigger classes will be noisy so it will be harder to concentrate
- They will need to get used to a new school layout
- The play equipment at the school may not be as good
- There may not be enough toys etc. for everyone and they may not get a chance to use the play equipment
- Members of the community won't be able to read to them anymore
- There may be more arguing because they don't know each other
- School dinners may not be as nice
- They will have to queue for ages to get their dinner
- They will be in different classes to their current friends (Different age groups are in the same class at the moment)
- The teams will be larger for sports and so they may not get to have a go

4. Is there anything that would be better if you had to move schools?

- Make more friends – they would know more people when they went to high school
- The same ages will be in a class
- There is a larger field at Crossgates
- There will be more time for teachers to explain the lessons because they will only have to explain a lesson for 1 year and not 3/4 years
- Larger sports teams more opportunity to play sports

5. What do you think the impact of closure of the school would be on pupils with additional needs?

- They may not get as much time with specialists in a bigger school
- They may get annoyed with the long journey

6. Pupils were asked whether they had any further comments or concerns to raise. The following questions were raised?

- What would happen to the school building if the school closed?

Minutes of a meeting with staff of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School, held at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School on 1st March, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Gareth Jones, Senior Manager, School Central Support Services
Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, School Transformation
Catherine Cottle, HR Business Partner, Schools

Darren Ivey, Opinion Research Services
Kelly Lock, Opinion Research Services

Bernadette Morgan, member of staff
Ellen Thomas, Foundation Phase Teacher
Mary Lomax, Chair of Governors
Adam Wright, Key Stage 2 Teacher
Tracey Jones, member of staff
Joanne Bradford, member of staff
Sue Colman, Dolau playschool
Clare Morris, member of staff
June Hardwick, member of staff
Gemma Bradford, member of staff
Adam Shearman, Headteacher

Gareth Jones welcomed school staff to the meeting and attendees introduced themselves.

Gareth Jones explained the background leading up to the review of the school. It was noted that, in line with the School Transformation Policy, 2014, a range of criteria was used to determine schools to be reviewed. The School Organisation Review Panel had met with school governors between February and November, 2015, in order to discuss data for the school. This had resulted in a report to Cabinet in January, when Cabinet members had agreed to commence consultation on the closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School from 31st December, 2016, with Crossgates C P School being named as the receiving school. Reasons for the proposal were given as follows:

- The school has had fewer than 50 pupils on roll for the three previous years and numbers are not projected to increase to above 50.
- The funding per pupils is more than 120% of the Council's average.

Staff were informed that the purpose of the consultation meeting was to receive their views on the proposal to close the school and, should Cabinet take a decision to proceed with the proposal, a separate consultation with staff would take place in relation to the HR process.

Staff were informed that the minutes of the consultation meetings with staff, governors and parents and community would be shared with the headteacher and governing body and would be included with the report to be considered by the Council's Cabinet in May.

The following comments/questions were received from school representatives:

1. Question

If the Cabinet takes a decision to close the school, how does that affect us, as staff, from 31st December, 2016?

Response

The HR process with staff would not begin until the Council's Cabinet takes a final decision to close the school. If Cabinet members decide to take forward the recommendation to close the school, following the Cabinet meeting in May, then a statutory notice of closure will be published for a period of 28 days, of which 15 days must be school term time. During that period formal objections to the proposal may be received. Following the statutory notice period, a further report with an analysis of the responses received, will be considered by the Cabinet, which will take the final decision as to whether or not to close the school. There will be no referral to Welsh Government. Under new regulations, it will be the Council's Cabinet, which takes the final decision. If a decision is taken to close the school, discussion with staff will commence at the beginning of the autumn term. If the school closes on 31st December, it is important that pupils do not see any significant change during the autumn term. When Whitton School closed, the headteacher and some staff were employed to deal with the formal closure of the school after the pupils left the school.

2. Comment

We can't believe that this is happening. There were far fewer pupils in Llangurig CP School than in Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. There are a lot of children whose parents want them to come to this school. There is a new early years setting at Crossgates which operates from one of the mobile units.

Response

The 3+ setting operates from the double mobile and is not included in the school's capacity.

3. Question

If you have to put the children from this school and those from Nantmel C in W and Llanbister C P School into Crossgates CP School, where are the children from the early years setting going to go?

Response

A consultation is taking place on a proposal to change the age of school admission and the Cabinet will be considering a report on that proposal on 12th April. If the Council's Cabinet approves the proposal to change the school admission age then an assessment of the number of early years places will need to be undertaken. The early years mobiles at Crossgates CP School were funded from a different capital stream.

4. Comment

You will not have enough capacity for the children coming into the early years setting from here and from other early years settings.

Response

We need to have information on projected numbers in the early years setting so Cabinet members can be informed of the correct numbers.

5. Comment

There are a number of children on the list to come to this school next term and, in the future, and in the early years setting.

Response

Rhayader C in W School has been named as the receiving school for pupils of Nantmel C in W School and Crossgates C P School has been named as the receiving school for pupils of Llanbister and Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School. The capacity at Crossgates C P School has been considered.

6. Comment

At one point, numbers in the playgroup in Dolau went down to two children and, at that time, everyone in the community pulled together to keep the playgroup going.

7. Question

What size will the classes be at Crossgates C P School if it is proposed that Crossgates will be taking pupils from Llanbister and Llanfihangel Rhydithon Schools if the schools close?

Response

The current capacity of Crossgates C P School is 210 but the capacity of the school can be increased to 238. The school has 7 classes and the mobile on site, which is currently used for the breakfast club, but could be used to extend the capacity of the school. Guidelines for Key Stage 1 classes are that they should not exceed 30 but there is no legal limit for Key Stage 2 classes. The majority of junior classes in the Authority's schools are under 30 but junior classes can go up to 33.

8. Question

**So you can take pupils from a good building and put them in a mobile classroom?
Will the mobile be warm enough?**

Responses

Many portacabins are no different to classrooms. If the proposal was taken forward it would be recognised that some children would be educated in the mobile classroom.

One of the aspects to be considered is having an understanding of which schools parents wish their children to go to. The choice of alternative schools is more restricted in Dolau.

9. Question

What would your advice be to individual parents if they have a concern about the receiving school?

Response

Parents would need to visit individual local schools and make their choice. It would not be for me to advise the parents. The Authority has to ensure there are available places in the named receiving school.

Response

In a county like Powys it is difficult due to the county's rurality and sparsity. Is a balance of large and small schools needed? Some parents may choose a small school, because of what small schools have to offer and the council has to recognise that issue. It may look as if the council is trying to create a structure of large schools. There is a debate about the value of having smaller rural schools in the mix.

10. Comment

If Llanbister, Llanfihangel Rhydithon and Nantmel schools close there will be no other rural school in the area. We have children in this school who can only cope with a smaller number in the class. The education system is going to fail those children if there are no small schools.

Response

Yes. What suits one child may not suit another. That is a question we need to reflect on.

11. Question

How are the County Council going to ensure that standards of education are maintained if children are in bigger classes?

Response

There is evidence to show the Authority has both good small and good large schools. Standards of teaching and learning are monitored through the Schools Service challenge advisors. If the school was to close the transition process would need to be carefully managed.

12. Question

Teachers at this school put in a lot of effort. How do teachers know that the next school will ensure pupils achieve the targets set by teachers here? Have you got proof that when children move they can achieve their targets?

Response

In Ystradgynlais the Authority closed 10 primary schools and opened four new ones. When the new primary schools were inspected by Estyn they all received good reports and there is evidence that standards have improved. Pupils' progress can be tracked using the "Teacher Centre" Management Information System.

13. Comment

I am concerned that children whose progress is "average" get forgotten. We need evidence that their education is not affected.

14. Comment

Pupils in year 6 will only have a few months to move to High school meaning that the same children will be affected by two school closures.

Response

The County Council is proposing closure of Llandrindod High School but not the site. The proposal is for a dual sited secondary school.

15. Comment

There is concern about the effect on the pupils. If the decision is taken to close the school, December would be the wrong time for the school to close. It would be detrimental for year 5 and year 6 pupils to have to go through more than one transition.

Response

It is understood that you don't want the school to close but if the Cabinet takes the decision to close the school, do you think closure should be at the end of the academic year rather than in December?

16. Comment

We do not want the school to close but if it does, December would be the wrong time for the children.

Response

Because of the processes that are required to be followed we cannot close the school at end of summer term this year. Although we can undertake consultation during “purdah” for the Welsh Government elections, the Cabinet will not be taking decisions during that period.

17. Comment

I would like to know when the Cabinet members are going to visit our school.

Response

The community meeting tonight will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Cllr Barry Thomas, Leader of the Council, will also be present. You can put that comment to them but the response I would expect is that it is down to individual cabinet members as to whether or not they visit the school.

18. Comment

I think that it is a shame that the Cabinet can take the decision without visiting the school. We have high standards of attainment at this school.

Response

The Authority is required to ensure that standards at the named, receiving school are as good as or better than the closing school.

19. Question

Do the cabinet have any local representation?

Response

2 cabinet members represent wards in Radnorshire, one in Breconshire and the other members represent wards in Montgomeryshire.

Response

Is there anything you want to raise here, as staff, in addition to the issues likely to be raised at parent and community meeting? All issues raised in consultation will be taken account of. The Cabinet will need to consider all the issues included in the consultation report before members take any further decisions on the future of the school.

When responses to the consultation are received, they are collated and logged. Officers go through the responses analysing all the issues. Themes and sub themes will be identified and responded to and included in a report for Cabinet to be compiled by officers. Welsh Government require the Authority to bring to the fore issues identified by young people and the response from Estyn.

The Cabinet has a duty to consider all the responses received but also has the responsibility of determining the next steps.. The percentage of responses against the proposal does not necessarily mean the proposal will not be taken forward.

Response

A similar process is being followed in relation to consultation on the proposed change of school admission age. 675 responses have been received. These all have to be analysed and all issues raised documented.

20. Comment

It is the wrong time to have carried out consultation on the age of school admission. Schools will be against the proposal to change the school admission age if it lowers their numbers.

Response

One of issues not taken account of yet is the impact on the school's role if the school admission age changes.

21. Comment/Question

You are going to have to increase funding for pre-school settings if the school admission age changes. It won't save any money. The adult child ratios are not being revised then? Up to 4 years of age, the adult child ratio is 1:4.

Response

I will check on that but it is my understanding that the adult child ratio for a 3+ setting is 1:8.

School representatives were informed about the next steps in the process:

The consultation period closes on 24th March. Following the end of the consultation period, a report, which includes an analysis of the issues raised in the consultation and the Council's response to them, will be considered by the Cabinet. If the Cabinet decides to take forward the proposal, a statutory notice of closure will be published for a period of 28 days during which objections to the proposal may be submitted. Any objection to the proposal submitted during the consultation period will need to be re-submitted during the statutory notice period. Following the statutory notice period, a further report containing an analysis of all the issues raised will be prepared for the Cabinet. Following consideration of the report, the Cabinet will take the final decision on the proposal. If a decision is taken to close the school, then there will discussion with staff in relation to the HR processes to be followed. School staff were advised how to respond to the consultation. It was noted that written responses to the consultation can be submitted online, by letter, or by e-mailing school.moderniation@powys.gov.uk. Consultation responses need to be with the Authority by 24th March.

22. Question

If worse comes to the worst what are the options for staff?

Response

If the decision is taken to close the school, a business case will be produced to be agreed by the governing body. The governing body will be asked to declare the posts redundant. A consultation period with staff will follow. This is normally 30 days during which discussion will take place with individual staff. If the decision is taken to close the school, then it is unlikely there would be an alternative to making all posts redundant. At the end of the staff consultation period, staff would be informed they were at risk of redundancy and would be invited to register on the redeployment list. Those staff on the redeployment register would be informed of potential alternative employment

and would be guaranteed an interview for any post in which they express an interest. The Authority would hope to redeploy staff during the notice period but it would depend on staff personal circumstances as to whether an alternative offer of employment might be considered reasonable. The Authority's HR team will work with staff to try to secure alternative suitable employment and will discuss with them what alternative work might be available. If the end of the notice period is reached and no alternative employment has been secured, staff would be made redundant. If any staff secure a job on a lower rate of pay or with reduced hours, a compensatory payment would be made. If no alternative employment with the Authority is secured by the end of the notice period, a modification order is in place whereby the Council has an agreement with a group of employers and if staff secure employment with any of those employers within a month of their redundancy their continuous service with the Authority would stand and count towards sickness pay and redundancy with the new employer. Staff would need to pay back redundancy pay if they found work with the employer via the modification order within a month. In addition, if staff are reemployed by the Council within a 12 month period of their redundancy, they would be required to pay back redundancy. In relation to posts in schools, this would only apply if schools had adopted the Council's policy.

Response

Redundancy pay up to £30K is not liable for tax but compensatory payment incurs tax and NI charges.

23. Question

Would you need to pay back all redundancy pay if reemployed by the authority within 12 months?

Response

This will be checked.

Comment

If a decision is taken to close the school, the authority would support the governing body in writing the business case.

Comment

If staff are offered a maternity cover post, the redundancy pay would be paid at the end of the maternity cover period.

Comment

Staff need 2 years continuous service in order to qualify for redundancy pay. Continuous service with other local authorities would also count towards redundancy pay. If you get a quote for redundancy pay check it covers the period of service you have had.

Gareth Jones thanked school representatives for attending the meeting. He informed members who were governors that that they would welcome to join the next meeting for governors and the public consultation meeting later.

24. Question

Is there enough staff capacity within HR to deal with the process if the schools close?

Response

Additional capacity is being made available in the HR team.

Minutes of a meeting with governors of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School, held at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School on 1st March, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Ian Roberts, Head of Schools
Jane Thomas, Professional Lead Finance
Gareth Jones, Senior Manager, School Central Support Services
Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, Schools Transformation

Darren Ivey, ORS
Kelly Lock, ORS

Adam Shearman, Acting Headteacher
Steve Vipond, LEA Governor
Jo Bradford, Clerk to Governors
Carl Watkins, Community Governor
Ellen Thomas, Teacher Governor
Nigel Bufton, Parent Governor
Mary Lomax, Chair of Governors
Rob Lyon, Parent Governor
David Lewis, Community Governor
Cllr Hywel Lewis, Local Member

Apologies – Kath Bufton, Vice Chair of Governors

Ian Roberts welcomed governors to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He informed governors that the meeting was part of the formal consultation process around the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School as from 31st December, 2016.

He explained that it would be the Council's Cabinet which will take the final decision on the proposal and not officers. He informed governors that he would not be reiterating the proposal, of which they had already been informed, unless they wished him to do this.

Mary Lomax pointed out a discrepancy between the number of pupils on roll given in the consultation paper (28 on 29th January, 2016) and the number of pupils stated within a budget document supplied by the Authority which had stated 31.

Gareth Jones explained that the figure of 31 include nursery pupils which are funded. The capacity information provided to Welsh Government is based on the number of pupils in the Reception to Year 6 year groups

1. Comment

There is confusion around the figures provided for the capacity of Crossgates C P School. I was under the impression you could not transfer pupils from a permanent school building to a mobile classroom.

Response

The capacity of 238 at Crossgates C P School includes use of the mobile classroom.

2. Question

What is the capacity of Crossgates CP School excluding the mobile classroom?

Response

The current capacity of Crossgates School, excluding the mobile classroom, is 210. There are currently 7 teaching spaces including nursery and reception. If the mobile classroom is included, that brings the capacity of the school up to 238. In the same way if the mobile classroom was included in the capacity calculation for this school it would bring the capacity of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School up to approximately 70.

3. Question

How many pupils are there in Crossgates C P School?

Response

In January this year there were 140 pupils in Crossgates CP School from reception to year 6.

The current 210 place capacity at Crossgates Schools includes the nursery.

4. Question

How many of the criteria for review of a school have to be met in order to trigger a review?

Response

There are a range of triggers for review of school.

5. Comment/Question

So one criteria met in relation to review of this school is the fact that the number of pupils on roll is below 50. Crossgates CP School has surplus capacity. Why has that not triggered a review of Crossgates School?

Response

When the review started every primary school in Powys was mapped against 6/7 criteria. A lot of schools met one of the criteria and a judgement had to be made as to which schools would be reviewed. The range of criteria which might trigger review of a school include:

Pupil numbers
Level of surplus capacity
Cost per pupil
Building condition

6. Comment

The condition of this school building is not urgent enough to trigger a review. This building will be standing for a long time.

Response

It is open to you to challenge the data in the consultation report via written representation which could form part of the report to the Cabinet.

Funding per pupil was one of a range of a criteria considered but we are not here to debate with you but to receive your views.

7. Question

Has Estyn have been informed about the proposal? Will Estyn be inspecting the receiving school?

Response

Yes, Estyn has been sent a copy of the consultation document as part of the formal process. Estyn will provide a response before the end of the consultation period which will be included in the consultation report to cabinet. Estyn will look at data and the performance of the receiving school but will not carry out an inspection of the school as a result of the proposal. The Authority has to ensure that the standards in the receiving school are as good as or better than the closing school.

8. Comment

Estyn last carried out an inspection of Crossgates CP School 6 years ago.

Response

The Local Authority cannot dictate to Estyn when to inspect a school but inspections are normally carried out on a 6-year cycle and it is anticipated that the school will be inspected this academic year

9. Question

What would happen if standards fall at Crossgates School?

Response

Any school is only 20 days from inspection.

10. Comment

You are talking about dramatically increasing numbers at Crossgates School. You will be taking children from a school where they are receiving a high standard of education. There is a new headteacher at Crossgates who will have had relatively little experience in dealing with a school with a large number of pupils.

Response

There is currently no evidence which would raise concerns about standards at Crossgates School.

11. Comment

A Cabinet member indicated that one of the schools near here had been assessed as being in the "red" category.

Response

The categorisation colour grading is a support category which indicates what support a school needs. If you are referring to a school under review, that school is in special measures and entitled to 25 days of support. Estyn would have data and look at how a school compares within its family of schools. It will look at attendance, quartile performance, previous inspection report and outcome of monitoring visits.

Response

We recognise that Crossgates School could initially face challenges due to the transition but we don't anticipate it would have long term effect on leadership but that is something we have to take into account.

There is a permanent leadership arrangement in place at Crossgates School, which is a strength.

12. Comment

We have a permanent leadership arrangement at this school.

Response

You only have a temporary leadership arrangement at this school.

13. Comment

We have tried to work with you in the past to arrive at a more permanent leadership arrangement.

Response

It would not be possible for the school to formally federate with Llanelwedd C in W School because Llanelwedd is a Church controlled school whereas Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is a Community Primary school.

14. Comment

We were going to look into becoming a Church in Wales School. A 9-month contract was going to be put in place for the headteacher.

Response

Legally, if the status of the school was changed to a Church in Wales School, the headteacher post would need to be advertised nationally.

15. Comment

We now have to put our energies into saving the school.

16. Comment

Shutting schools should be a last resort. We should be celebrating rural schools.

17. Comment

Of the three schools under review, Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is the cheapest school to run and it has excellent standards.

Mary Lomax provided a Powerpoint presentation, a copy of which she requested to be submitted with the Cabinet report.

In response to the presentation the following comments were noted:

- There are no concerns about standards at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School
- When comparing standards at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School with other schools, it is important to note there are significant differences in the make-up of cohorts of pupils at different schools so using percentages to compare standards does not give the complete picture.
- Some schools may have pupils within a cohort with a very high level of special education needs or complex physical, emotional or behavioural difficulties, who may be unlikely to achieve core subject indicators and this can “skew” percentage rates for the whole cohort in relation to attainment.

- There are differences between small schools – included in the sample given in the presentation are schools with Welsh medium stream and schools in areas of deprivation.
- A fairer comparison would be to compare the attainment levels achieved by pupils at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School with the levels achieved by pupils in schools within the same family of schools.

18. Comment

The data presented shows that Llanfihangel Rhydithon School offers “value for money”.

Response

It shows that there are no concerns about standards of education in Llanfihangel Rhydithon School.

Response

The reasons for the proposal are stated in the consultation document. It is not about standards of education at the school. It is about low pupil numbers.

Response

It is unlikely average costs would go up if numbers went up. The formula is generated from different elements driven by a number of factors e.g. pupil numbers. Other aspects of funding are based on lump sums and the floor area in the school and that can sometimes distort the cost per pupil. When there are fewer pupils in a school that drives up the cost per pupil. If you had more pupils the average cost per pupil would come down.

19. Comment

A parent has provided me with figures that indicate you will not be transferring the full cost of the pupil when they are transfer to another school.

Response

Only part of the funding will be transferred. The receiving schools will only receive funding for the pupil related elements. They do not need additional premises funding as this is already provided. Because the receiving school will have more pupils, the per pupil cost will go down. In terms of the current years formula, the per pupil funding at Crossgates is £3,265. If all the pupils were to transfer to Crossgates School from Llanbister CP School and Llanfihangel Rhydithon School that cost would change.

Response

There are two different elements of funding. The pupil figures quoted in the consultation document don't include nursery but the per pupil funding does include funding for nursery aged children. You have per pupil funding and a 0.65 teacher funded to all schools – lump sum element. For small schools the Authority provides a small school allowance for schools with 30 pupils or less. We need to make sure nursery and early years classes are under 30. Schools with 31 pupils or more get funded at 2.30 f.t.e.

Other factors include property-related costs. If the square meterage of the receiving school is not increasing, there will be no extra funding for premises acquired or provided.

20. Comment

This building is here. It does not cost you anything. All those children in Crossgates School will cost the Council money. You are not taking into account the additional travel costs. We have independent quotes to indicate that additional transport costs will be £58,000.

Response

More work needs to be done in order to have a better understanding of which schools parents will choose to send their children, should Llanfihangel Rhydithon School close. However, the transport figure quoted in the document is the authority's estimated additional cost of transport.

21. Comment

The estimates of transport costs we have provided have been based on parents choosing to send their children to Crossgates School.

Response

I would encourage you to submit that information so that it can be included as part of the Cabinet report. Provide us with that information to bring to the attention of the Cabinet, including the names of transport providers. We would want to know how that transport provider has given a figure of £58K when our figures are far less.

22. Question/Comment

I would not want to put my 4 year old on the bus. Is there a protocol in place in relation to shared transport with secondary school children and journey times? Children could be travelling up to 1 hour on school transport.

Response

Safeguarding the children is paramount.

23. Comment

That includes wellbeing. Children may get upset on the bus. The buses will need supervision on them.

Response

The Authority is currently consulting on changing the age of school admission to the start of the academic year following a child's fourth birthday. The Authority has no statutory responsibility for transporting children under the age of 5. The Authority does not normally provide escorts on mainstream transport routes.

24. Question

How long are mobiles likely to last? In the transformation document it says children should not be moved from a permanent structure to a temporary classroom.

Response

We would want the Cabinet to be aware of parents' concern around that.

25. Comment

You may be able to fit the children in the mobile but there could be 39 children from Dolau, Llanbister and Crossgates nursery going into a classroom in January 2017.

Response

Should closure happen we will need to work with the receiving school in relation to their class structure. The classes may need to be restructured to make class sizes manageable. There will be significant work with the receiving school to ensure the class structure is suitable.

26. Comment

Mobile classrooms should not be used as a permanent solution.

27. Comment

You cannot fit any more than 30 pupils in a classroom

Response

The maximum capacity for a classroom is 30 according to the Measurement of Schools Capacity (Wales) regulations. In terms of number of places we can only take account of a maximum of 30 unless a classroom is a double classroom. 2.3 square metres is the allocation per nursery and reception aged pupil with 1.86 square meters being used for other children.

28. Comment

We know there are quite a lot of pupils coming from Llandrindod to Crossgates School. What happens if that continues? What is going to happen to the capacity of Crossgates School if more pupils come from Llandrindod and small schools are going to close? Crossgates School is going to run out of room.

Response

A number of families are moving in and out of Llandrindod. There have been a number of admission appeals. A number of those admission appeals have been lost by the parents and if that trend continues it is going to place pressure on places at Crossgates School.

29. Question

Isn't it good practice for schools to have 10% surplus capacity?

Response

Welsh Government expects local authorities to plan for pupil place demand.

30. Comment

But there will be no surplus capacity. You are sacrificing two schools to build up the numbers at Crossgates School.

31. Comment

There will be no encouragement for young families to move into the area because there will be no places for children in the school.

32. Comment

Once you start closing schools you will never open them again.

33. Comment

130 new houses are going to be built in Crossgates. Schools will be at capacity.

34. Comment

A development of affordable housing is also planned for Llandewi.

Response

You are putting forward your argument to maintain school provision at Dolau. You have mentioned transport costs, the capacity of Crossgates School and that is the purpose of consultation - to enter into dialogue with you as communities to bring up issues such as these. You have the local information which we may not have to hand.

Response

There are around 60,000 Band D properties in Powys. On average there is 1 primary school aged child for every 6 Band D properties.

35. Comment

If you close this school what is there here for the children? You are not looking long term. You think you will save £60k by closing 3 schools but you are not looking long term.

Response

Llanfihangel Rhydithon School has the 13th highest funding per pupil of all Powys schools. If the school had been funded on 31 pupils last year the per pupil funding would have been over £5,000.

36. Question

If you have a big school of over 500 pupils and funded at £5268k per pupil would you say that was an expensive school?

37. Question

What is the cost per pupil for the federated schools in the North of the county?

Response

The cost per pupil for Ysgol Llanbrynmair is £4269, for Ysgol Glantwymyn £3781 per pupil, and for Ysgol Carno £4392 per pupils so comparable with Dolau.

Ysgol Carno has a capacity of 49 excluding nursery. The capacity of Ysgol Glantwymyn at 84 (excluding nursery) is higher and the capacity of Ysgol Llanbrynmair is currently 53 excluding nursery.

The per pupil funding for Ysgol Bro hydigen is higher because of funding placed in the secondary sector.

Ysgol Bro Hydigen also receives a Welsh language uplift. The catchment area is complex demographically and there are increasing numbers in the Welsh stream.

38. Question

Why have different figures been used for average per pupil funding in different reports for the Cabinet. The average per pupil funding quoted in the report on the Welshpool primary schools review was different to that quoted in the report for Cabinet in relation to Llanfihangel Rhydithon School even though the reports were received by the Cabinet on the same day.

Response

That will have to be looked at.

39. Comment

You are using two different calculations. Which one are you using? There can't be two averages.

Response

The cost per pupil at Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP would still be in excess of 120% of the county average.

40. Comment

No - it would be 106%.

Response

I understand you are challenging the figures but the Cabinet did decide to consult on the closure. If the data is wrong then that needs correcting in the Cabinet report. We need to ensure the data for Llanfihangel Rhydithon is correct so if there are errors those need to be corrected. We are consulting on your situation here based on your data. We need to ensure the data is right for your school.

41. Comment

There were 31 pupils, including early years, in the school, in January 2015, but in the consultation document it says there were 29.

Response

There were 29 pupils in the school from Reception to Year 6 in 2015/2016 year and 28 pupils from Reception to Year 6 in January, 2016.

42. Comment

In 2017 there will 36 pupils in the school including the nursery.

Response

The PLASC data will be verified in March in advance of the report on the proposal being taken to Cabinet in May.

Response

I understand it impacts on percentages but data on pupil numbers is only accurate at a given point in time.

43. Comment

We have also informed you about two pupils receiving free school meals.

Response

We have used the PLASC data for January 2015.

44. Question

How does that give the school a chance if you are using outdated data?

Response

The report that goes to Cabinet will include January 2016 data.

Response

Following consultation, there will still need to be a dialogue with the school to update the data on pupil numbers.

Response

We tried to give the Cabinet members an up to date fact sheet and it was dismissed in cabinet.

Response

All the data re the number of pupils on free school meals would be contained within the Community Impact Assessment.

45. Question

It is understood that as the land and buildings are owned by the Authority the agreed asset management process would be followed in the event of the school's closure and any capital receipts would go back to the Authority. What would happen about parking for the community hall if the school building is disposed of?

Response

That is part of the discussion to be had with the community.

Where other schools with community halls attached have closed, there has been an agreement that part of the parking space would be transferred to the community but a full discussion will be needed should Cabinet take a decision to close the school.

46. Question

What weighting is given to the impact on the community of a school's closure?

Response

No weighting is applied, but it is a factor that the Cabinet is required to consider.

47. Comment

According to Welsh Government guidelines weighting should be applied.

Response

In event of closure the impact on the community, particularly around community use of school facilities that are concerned with education, has to be taken into account and there is one statement that says the wider implications on the community need to be considered. At the moment we are only beginning to gather information about the impact on the community, if the school closes. The Community Impact Assessment is a draft document which will be added to as the process goes forward. Information gathered will be included in a final Community Impact Assessment.

Response

It is important the Cabinet members attending the public meeting hear your views about the impact school closure will have on the community.

It was noted that figures prepared by a parent would be presented at the public meeting.

Ian Roberts thanked governors for attending and for their contributions.

Minutes of a meeting with parents and community of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School, held at Dolau Community Hall on 1st March, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Cllr B Thomas, Leader of the Council
 Cllr A Jones, Portfolio Holder for Education
 Ian Roberts, Head of Schools Service
 Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, Schools Transformation
 Jane Thomas, Professional Lead Finance
 Gareth Jones, Senior Manager, School Central Support Services

Darren Ivey, Opinion Research Services

Kelly Lock, Opinion Research Services

Edward Jones	parent	Becky Price	Former pupil and member of Dolau YFC
James Hughes	parent	Elliot Watkins	Former pupil and member of Dolau YFC
Rachel Hughes	parent	Luan Price	Staff member and parent of former pupil
Anna Jones	parent	Gemma Bradford	Staff member
Kate Jones	concerned local	Gary Price	PCC Cllr for Llandrindod Wells
Rob Lyon	parent governor	Matthew Williams	Llanbister School
Jess Lyon	parent	Keith Williams	Dolau & Llanbister Sch.
Phil Grierson	local resident	Barry Bevan	Parent
Kevin Lewis	parent	Jane Bevan	Parent
Helen McCarthy	chairman hall committee	Alison Ewart	Parent
Gillian Preece	chairman Dolau playschool and parent	Chris Morris	Parent
Jessica Bufton	parent	Clare Morris	Parent
Liz Lewis	parent chair of Dolau mothers and toddlers	Tracey Jones	Parent
Glenda Lawrence	parent	Andrew Jones	Parent
John Lawrence	parent	Elizabeth Newman	Community member
Clare Haslam	Nantmel School	Rev Andrew Perrin	Parish priest
Rachel Powell	Former pupil	Meurig Jones	Community Councillor
Joy Gayther	Community member	Daniel Drew	Community member
Phil Gayther	Community member	Darrilyn Drew	Community member
Tim Gayther	Former pupil	Cathy Hughes	Parent of prospective pupil
Katrina Gayther	Former pupil	Richard Thomas	Former pupil and parent
Dorothy Jones	Community	Carol Thomas	Parent
Victor Jones	Community	Ben Duggan	Former pupil
Carl Watkins	Parent governor	Jolene Powell	Community member
Wendy Watkins	Parent	Pearl Ruell	Community member
Myra Powell	Parent and YFC Leader	Joanne Bradford	Staff member
Stephen Powell	Parent, YFC vice president and community	Ellen Thomas	Staff member

Sue Colman	councillor Playleader Dolau playschool	David Lewis Caroline Phillips John Phillips	Community member Community member Football coach
Karon Duggan William Brown	Parent Parent of former pupil	Cllr John Powell Steve Vipond Sarah Griffiths	Dolau School PCC Member Governor Parent of 2015/16 starter
Valerie Freeman	Former member of staff	Bernadette Underhill	Parent of former pupils
Ellen Louise E M Duggan	Dolau YFC Parent of child in playgroup	Mark Underhill	Parent of former pupils
Andrew Duggan	Parent of child in playgroup	Rhian Duggan	Parent of former pupils
John Nixon Kathleen Nixon Menna Bennett	Grandparent of pupil Grandparent of pupil Parent of child at playgroup	Jennifer Bufton Hannah Baker	Former pupil Parent of former pupils
Michael Lawrence	Grandparent	Michael Baker	Parent of former pupils
Andrew Lewis	Relative of pupil	Linda Allen	Community member
Ruth Lewis	Relative of pupil	David Allen	Community member
Sandra Ruell	Community member	Sandra Thomas	Community member
Janet Watkins	Community member	Rob Shelton	Community member
Nikki Lewis	Community member	Barbara Shelton	Community member
Gwyn Probert	Community member	Kirsty Williams	AM Brecon & Radnor
Wayne Davies	Community member	Ben Hardwick	Former pupil, Dolau YFC
Ellyn Thomas	Community member	Sarah Price	Former pupil, Dolau YFC
Naomi Jones	Community member	Dan Price	Community member
Evan Jones	Community member	Julie Hardwick	Community member & staff
Claire Bowen	Community member	Phil Hardwick	Community member and former pupil
Abi Morris	Community member	Wendy Duggan	Parent of former pupil and community member
Barry Gwynne	Community member	Elizabeth Lewis	Parent of former pupil and community member
Colette Gwynne	Community member	Amy Haddon	Parent of prospective pupil
Ruth Billingsley	Grandparent of prospective pupils		
Andrew Billingsley	Grandparent of prospective pupils		
Carolyn Kennard	Parent of former pupils		
Bob Kennard	Parent of former pupils		
Mark Davies	Former pupil Dolau YFC		
Andrew Davies	Parent of former pupils and YFC leader		

Cllr Arwel Jones welcomed parents and community members to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He informed those attending that the meeting was part of the formal consultation

process on the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School as from 31st December, 2016. He explained that consultation is a regulatory process with the aim of improving transparency, efficiency and public involvement. It was noted that consultation meetings had already taken place with the staff and governing body of the school.

Officers and Cabinet members introduced themselves.

Darren Ivey from Opinion Research Services (ORS) explained his role as an independent facilitator for the consultation process. He informed those attending of the proposed format and structure of the event. It was noted that the Council has a legal requirement to consider all comments received and respond to them. Darren Ivey explained what consultation is – a debate to inform a decision. It was stressed that no decision has yet been taken on the future of the school and that the only decision that has been made to date is the decision to consult. Consultation is not a referendum or a vote based on how many people support a particular proposal. It was noted that the Council's Cabinet would ultimately make a decision on the future of the school, based on various factors including the outcome of consultation, data, and the evidence provided.

Marianne Evans informed those attending of the context of the review. It was explained that the Cabinet had agreed a new schools transformation policy in 2014 which outlined the process for reorganisation of schools. All schools were assessed against a range of criteria. Any school which met one of criteria could be subject to review. The review process for Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School started in December 2014 and members of the School Organisation Review Panel had met with governors of the school between February and December 2015. Recommendation to close school was considered by Cabinet in December which took the decision to consult on closure of the school. It was explained that reasons for proposal low pupil numbers: The school has had fewer than 50 pupils on roll for three previous years and numbers on roll are not projected to increase significantly. The cost per pupil is over the average cost per pupil for the county's primary schools. Parents and community members were informed that consultation would close on 24th March, 2016, following which a full analysis of all the issues raised would be undertaken before a report was taken to the Council's Cabinet, when members would take a decision on the next steps.

It was explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for parents and community members to express their views on the proposal and to ask questions.

1. Question

The decision likely to be based on low pupil numbers. Can you explain on what basis that you project that numbers in future will be as low as they are now?

Response

In terms of how we project pupil numbers for individual schools, colleagues in the Health Service provide us with information on live birth data and we also take into account information in the Local Development Plan in relation to the number of houses to be built in each community. The accuracy of the data is better for a wider catchment area and varies on individual primary school basis. We know the number of pupils in the current year and have received information from the school around numbers expected in the next few years. We also need to factor in the Impact of any change to the school admission age. In planning of school places, we need to identify pupil numbers correctly. We are required to ensure that there is not a significant number of surplus places in schools. Welsh Government guidelines indicate a maximum of 10% surplus places when measured across the Authority's whole school estate.

2. Comment

Something that puzzles me is that no great account is taken of in population change in area. At this point in time there is a natural dip in numbers in schools in the area and currently there are fewer children but the houses that the older generation occupy are going to be occupied by a younger generation. Whitton School has closed and you are now proposing to close 3 schools in this area. There will be no primary school between Whitton and Crossgates and no school between here and Presteigne. You need to look at demography of the population and their ages. Your proposal is “short termism.” There are going to be dips in the population of children but the numbers are going to rise. This is a very good school and has been so for many years. I would say greater consideration needs to be given to the area and its remoteness with regard to schools and the people who live here.

Response

You are right. There is demographic change across the authority. Our statisticians provide an estimated population growth in the 50+ but not for the under 50s. It is acknowledged that there are going to be peaks and troughs in individual areas.

Across the county as a whole, the Authority has 700 fewer pupils in the secondary sector than in previous years. We know primary school population is starting to increase across the county. There are some areas where there is a shortage of places but there are other areas where there are significant surplus places. Are part of the Schools Service Asset Management Plan data on projected pupil numbers from existing housing stock and from potential future housing stock under the Local Development Plan is considered. Local housing developments will be taken into account.

3. Comment

I think you have to accept that pupil numbers could climb within a few years if more houses are built and there are more jobs. It is about having a long term vision.

A parent provided a presentation in relation to calculations on the cost school closure:



Financial Analysis of proposal to close school revised 2402. Financial info Dolau

4. Comment

In consultation document it states that £66298 of the total delegated budget does not transfer with the pupils to their alternative school. Given Dolau’s total delegated budget is £132271, we derive that £65, 973 is the budget that gets transferred to the pupils’ alternative school. This seems a low amount and equates to £2356 per pupil.

When the budget per pupil according to “My Local School” at Crossgates in 2015 was £3702 per pupil, we would expect the delegated budget per pupil from Dolau to equate to the delegated budget for a Crossgates pupil.

If this were the case the delegated budget transferring would be £3702 x 28 which make £103,656 which makes an estimate saving of £28,615 not £66,298.

The savings for the Headteacher post you have said is £15,580. We cannot understand where that figure has come from.

You have said that the canteen subsidy of £10,000 is going to be saved there is no canteen at Dolau – all the meals are cooked in Crossgates and get transferred to Dolau.

You have estimated the cost of transporting the pupils to Crossgates to be £22800. This means £3.65 per child per day. We asked a current transport provider for a quote and they came up with an estimate of between £12-15 per day per child. $32 \times 13.50 \times 195$ school days equating to £84,234 transport costs over the school year.

There are only 2 children at this school who have school transport. All other children are brought to school by their parents.

According to my calculations the savings of £64,993.50 are based on the lowest numbers in the school. If you transfer pupils from Llanfihangel Rhydithon School to Crossgates it is going to cost you £15,798.50.

Response

Please submit your calculations as part of the formal consultation and we will look at them

5. Question

Could you please provide clarity for parents and stakeholders in relation to the delegated budget for pupils transferring?

Response

In terms of the delegated funding we gave the figure of the amount that would not transfer with pupil. Schools are funded based on the formula and not on the individual cost per pupil.

6. Question

So the children will receive less funding per pupil if the school closes and they transfer to the receiving school?

Response

The Fair Funding Formula is made up of a number of elements. There is a teaching cost allowance, and, in addition to that there is a Foundation Phase allocation based on the number of pupils in the nursery to year 2. The rest is based on lump sums payable, property and other factors. The lump sum Crossgates and Dolau would receive would be the same lump sum for .60 or .65 of teacher. We are not going to provide Crossgates School with two lump sums. Part of the funding is based on premises costs of school. We will provide a breakdown of the figures for the funding to be transferred with the pupils to Crossgates. In respect of the kitchen subsidy, there is no canteen at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School but there is the cost of a van on daily basis and the cost of staff employed on site to serve meals has to be taken into account but we will provide a detailed calculation. In terms of transport the cost of this is not provided on a per pupil basis. It is dependent on the size of vehicle used to transport the children and 75% -80% of the cost is of the cost of the bus. We can provide more clarification and detail around the figures. For 10 of the pupils who attend the school Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is not the closest school and there may be some pupils already attending Crossgates School for whom Llanfihangel Rhydithon is the closest school. There is also some use of shared transport between primary and secondary, where appropriate, to Llandrindod High School.

7. Question

Could you please provide the basis of the £15,580 saving from the Headteacher's post?

Response

The way the authority funds a school for teaching costs is based on the average teaching costs for the school. Even though there is shared headship with Llanelwedd Church in Wales school, Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is still funded as if the school has a separate Headteacher. The figure of £15580 is the difference in cost between leadership scale on Point 12 and the highest scale a main scale Headteacher would be employed on. We can provide you with a breakdown of the figures.

8. Question

When can you provide the figures? We need a chance to respond to them.

Response

The figures can be provided by the end of next week.

9. Question

Should you not have had those figures already? Should not you have accurate documentation on which you base your proposal? How can you put a school into consultation when do not have accurate figures and facts?

Response

The figures are accurate in terms of the delegated budget but we will provide a breakdown. The figures in relation to the cost of transport are to be clarified. The differences in teacher's pay are based on figures which I am happy to share with you.

Response

The transport figures are based on figures provided by the Authority's Transport Team. They are going to review the figures. The transport figures you have provided are based on a quote.

10. Comment

You should be consulting with the correct figures; not the incorrect figures.

11. Comment

In terms of school transport some work has been completed on how many miles the children would have to travel if the school closes. 37 children would like to come to this school. I have assumed the pickup will be at public road and not at their doorstep. I calculated if all the children transferred from Llanfihangel Rhydithon School to Crossgates School they would be travelling a total of 32,456 extra miles a year.

Response

Please submit that information as part of the consultation. This consultation is about evidence for the final decision making. Thank you for work you have put in.

Response

The Council's home to school transport policy states that primary school children would not be expected to travel more than 45 minutes each way to school.

12. Comment/Question

I live between Llanbardarn and Felindre. In this area we have already seen closures of Dolfor C P School and Beguildy Church in Wales School. There is individual consultation but no facility for different schools to work together. I have looked at the demographic changes. In 10 years the numbers over 50 will have doubled but the numbers of under 15s will have gone down by 20%. Powys needs to have more vision get more younger people into this area. If you close down the schools how are you going to attract younger people to the area? Have you looked at other areas where there are small rural schools? What about federation? Llanbister C P School and Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School should be working together to make sure we have the most viable primary school system we can get. Have you looked at new technologies? Have you looked at video conferencing between schools? You have a responsibility to have a vision for the future and to look at new ways of working so that small schools can be viable and there is career progression for teachers, which is essential. I would look for more vision and evidence that you have done your homework.

Response

I will respond to the points you have raised around federation and looking at school over 2/3 sites. Under Welsh Government regulations it is not possible to federate a Church controlled school with a Community Primary school so it would not be possible for Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School to federate with Llanelwedd Church in Wales School. They are not Powys County Council regulations but national regulations. Federated school would be funded as separate schools but governors could choose for those schools to have a single budget. Another model would be to close both schools and open a single school over both sites. In terms of primary schools, a .6 lump sum would only be provided to one school. The authority could change its formula if it wished to and it is something that has been considered. The formula will be reviewed again during the next financial year.

13. Comment

The small school in Gloucestershire I was referring to has just two classes and their Ofsted reports have improved since federation. It is the Wye Forest federation in Gloucestershire.

Response

The funding and function of schools in England is different to Wales.

Response

Alternative ways of schools working together to keep schools open have been given consideration.

14. Comment/Question

I have been looking at data from "My Local School". Are the four new primary schools in Ystradygnlais as cost effective as you had hoped? All exceed the cost per pupil average and there is a super school in Machynlleth which is failing its pupils. Would the finance department think the School Organisation Review Panel's time would be better spent on Ysgol Bro Hyddgen as it is failing educationally and financially? Making schools bigger does not make them better either financially or educationally.

15. Question

What evidence is there that bigger schools are better?

Response

Ysgol Bro Hyddgen is not a failing school. If you are referring to the national categorisation of schools, Ysgol Bro Hyddgen has been judged as being in a “red” support category. Any school at any time could need additional support to stabilise. Ysgol Bro Hyddgen was established in September 2014. What the “red” support category means is that a school in that category will be given 25 days support. If you look at pupil outcomes in the primary sector for Ysgol Bro Hyddgen (formerly Machynlleth CP School) these have improved continuously over the last four years. Categorisation of schools is not a league table. It is a support category and schools can move between support categories.

16. Question

Why do they not include a category for the Foundation Stage for Ysgol Bro Hyddgen?

Response

I would have expected the Foundation phase details to be included on the website, but, if not, I will raise it with Welsh Government officials

Response

To clarify on facts, for the four primary schools in Ystradgynlais the per pupil funding ranges from between £3500 and £4189 per pupil. In relation to the budget position, each school has set a balanced or surplus budget apart from one which has a small deficit budget of £464. All four schools are in compliance with the Scheme for Financing Schools.

Response

There are a number of factors within the Fair Funding Formula, which take account of funding - one is SEN funding and that is based on pupil numbers and 50% based on number of pupils receiving free school meals. The amount of funding to those schools provided under the SEN allowance is higher in deprived areas. For the Welsh medium primary school in Ystradgynlais, Ysgol Dyffryn y Glowyr, there is some additional funding around Welsh medium. More detail can be provided around this, if required.

Response

The arguments are around protecting this school rather than comparing it with other schools.

17. Question/Comment

I want to focus on the capacity within the receiving school. My first question is in terms of the last Estyn inspection for Crossgates and for Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School. This school was deemed as “adequate” in May 2012. Crossgates CP School was last inspected in June 2010 under the previous Estyn regime. The two schools were inspected under different regimes. How can you say that the named receiving school is better than or as good as Llanfihangel Rhydithon School?

My second question relates to the capacity of Crossgates School. In 2005 the Board agreed to provide development money in order to remodel an extension to Crossgates School. Before that time the school had capacity for 100 pupils. The Council spent £2.2m. I wanted to point out that you are saying that the school has a capacity of 210 and you are proposing to use a mobile classroom in order to bring the capacity of the school up to 238. At the Cabinet meeting in 2005, members asked that mobile classrooms should not be regarded as permanent fixtures. As part of the planning application for the extension and the remodelling of school a condition was placed on granting of planning permission in relation to the capacity of the school that the number of pupils varies between 162-179, a maximum of 6 for kitchen staff and the number of school staff between 30 -40. Does your

planning consent allow you to increase the capacity of school? Conditions were put on the planning consent in relation to the capacity of the school.

Response

I refer to your question in relation to the receiving school and standards. In any school reorganisation proposal there has to be consultation with Estyn during the consultation period and Estyn are expected to make a comment about the named receiving school. The Inspection Framework differed in 2010. Both this school and Crossgates School have been categorised as being in a “yellow” support category and both schools are entitled to the same level of support. Both schools would have been placed on the vertical access in the National Model of School Categorisation as standard 2. The standards at Crossgates School are as good as those at Llanfihangel Rhydithon. Both schools are categorised as B. There are robust systems in place for planning for self-improvement and both schools are performing equally as well.

Response

The capacity of a school is based on the physical measurement of classrooms used to teach in. Crossgates School has 7 classrooms. The larger of the classroom is used for the Nursery. The guidelines state that children in the Nursery age group should be allowed 2.3 square metres per pupil. That room has a capacity of 30. The mobile is 53 square metres and has a capacity of 28. It is understood that the mobile is of suitable quality for teaching. There are a number of schools across Powys with mobiles and the interior of those mobiles is equivalent to permanent builds, and, in many cases, better. Ysgol Carno has been delivering education through a number of mobiles joined together. In terms of the planning conditions your comments have been noted and this will be checked with colleagues in Planning and Property Services.

18. Comment/Question

My 3 children have all attended Dolau playgroup. The standard of development of the children provided by the playgroup is second to none. The number of pupils in the playgroup went down to 2 at one time that the playgroup was under threat of closure. The community sought financial help and promoted the setting. There are now 15 children on the waiting list for the playgroup and those children who have siblings who will also be joining the playgroup. Dolau Playgroup attracts children from up to 15 miles away. The playgroup was not mentioned in the consultation document. The consultation document is incomplete. What will happen to playgroup if our wonderful school closes?

Response

The authority is consulting on a proposal to change of the age of primary school admission. The consultation closes today. As part of the consultation consideration will be given as to the delivery of enhanced pre-school provision. Account will need to be taken of whether a funded pre-school setting is needed in this area and that will be included in the Community Impact Assessment.

19. Comment/Question

We bought a property here in May and there are a number of other young couples in the area. What will be impact if there is no school in this area? What impact do you think closing the school will have on the future of the village and the wider community and on young people moving into the area to start families?

Response

That is a valid question and I am not denying that closure of a school in any village will not have an impact in any community. We want to give the children of Powys the best education possible.

20. Comment

If you want to do that you should be keeping this school open.

21. Comment

I moved to the area a few years ago and the mother and toddler group was my main point of interaction with other mothers in the area. I now feel part of the community and my daughter is part of the playgroup. Without having local groups young mothers could be isolated. If the school closed there would not be opportunity for mothers to interact with other mothers in the area.

22. Question

What would the class sizes in Crossgates School be if Llanbister CP and Llanfihangel Rhydithon School were to close and pupils transfer to Crossgates? It has been minuted there could be class sizes of 34 at Crossgates School.

Response

For pupils up to year 2 there is a statutory requirement that there cannot normally be more than 30 pupils in a class. The main exception is when children are admitted to school outside the normal admission round. For KS2 classes there is no statutory limit for class size although the Authority provides additional funding for classes over 33. In terms of individual year groups schools do not always function with single age classes. If the Cabinet approve the recommendations in respect of both Llanbister and Llanfihangel Rhydithon Schools, officers would need a discussion with the receiving school and with the parents about their chosen schools.

23. Comment/Question

If Llanfihangel Rhydithon School was to close there would be no alternative school other than Crossgates CP School. What options do parents have?

Response

I would agree if you are parent in Dolau the options in relation to alternative schools would be few.

24. Question

What would be an alternative rural school?

Response

That would depend on what you consider to be a rural school. Welsh Government would consider Crossgates C P School to be a rural school. In England schools are being built to accommodate up to 120 per year group. I acknowledge that if Llanfihangel Rhydithon School was to close, options for alternative schools would be limited.

25. Question

I would like to ask how many children get bused from Llandrindod to Crossgates because Llandrindod schools are deemed to be full. If the two Llandrindod primary schools are full where will the overspill go to?

Response

There are two different transport methods to Crossgates School as there is a bus run by the school. In terms of Llandrindod Primary schools there are some year groups that are full in Llandrindod C P School and in Trefonnen Church in Wales School. Trefonnen is a dual stream school.

26. Question

Crossgates School is due for an inspection imminently. Has Estyn been made aware that the pupil numbers in Crossgates School may be increasing the numbers by 50% and that may have an impact on how staff deal with it?

Response

Estyn is aware of the proposal and has an opportunity to come back to us for more information if they need it. Any school is only 20 days from inspection and Crossgates School has not yet been inspected under current cycle.

27. Question

What will you do if you close this school and Crossgates School has a poor Estyn inspection? Would you reopen this school?

Response

That is an interesting question but, at this point in time, the national categorisation model states Crossgates CP School has a similar categorisation as Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. If Llanfihangel Rhydithon school closes and pupils go to Crossgates School the Local Authority would need to work with the school to ensure that standards continue to improve. It is not possible to answer the question as to whether the school would be reopened if Crossgates School had a poor inspection outcome as that would prejudice cabinet decision. No decision to close the school has yet been taken.

28. Comment

The Council's slogan is "Strong communities in the green heart of Wales". Schools are the nucleus of a community. It starts with the toddler group, then play group which is full and thriving and which feeds Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. The school offers a variety of clubs. The local youth club, young farmers club run by volunteers, W.I., bowls club and chapel affiliated group are all based at this school site. I would suggest the Cabinet thinks hard before killing this community for £60K and not to mention neighbouring communities of Llanbister and Nantmel.

29. Comment

I am getting the impression that you are changing the rules as you go along. You have only got to look at the number of people in this hall tonight to know how well supported the school is. It would be a grave mistake to try and close it.

30. Comment

The reason for your recommendation is financial. There was a school half a mile from here before the present school site and the numbers in the school went up. My great grandfather offered this particular site for the school. It gave the opportunity for young families to come in to this area to live at low rent – low cost housing. Those families have stayed in this area. The County Council had holdings as well. When you do the calculations don't make assumptions. It is not guesswork. This community was important then and it is now.

31. Question

Would the Panel agree that teaching and leadership at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School are not in question?

Response

Standards at the school are not in question.

32. Comment/Question

On 26th February, Cllr Wynne Jones stated in the “County Times” savings from school closures are insignificant and school reorganisation is about the quality of education. Is the proposal to close the school about education or finance?

Response

Transforming learning and skills is a key priority under the Powys One Plan. It states that the authority needs to reorganise schools to ensure affordability and sustainability.

33. Comment

I am currently the Vice Chair of Friends of Dolau School. Over a number of years the Friends of Dolau School have raised £28K to finance play equipment and to subsidise school trips and swimming. I have friends in larger primary schools who struggle to form a committee. The Friends of Dolau School have raised over £6K in the past 12 months. Friends of Dolau School have raised £209 for every pupil in the school whereas Friends of Crossgates School have only raised £9.86 per pupil. In rural communities parents come together to raise money for the children. That is more difficult in larger schools.

34. Question/Comment

Where you have implemented previous school closures for instance in Howey, Beguildy and Rhosgoch what follow up monitoring has there been? Has children’s welfare suffered as a results of changes? Where can your research be viewed? You cannot make life changing decisions without full analysis of outcomes.

Response

In Ystradgynlais the authority closed 10 primary schools, ranging from 20 – 150 pupils in capacity, and opened 4 new primary schools as part of the School Modernisation Programme. When the new schools were inspect some were rated as good and some as outstanding in terms of practice for wellbeing. Each school had a good inspection outcome with no Estyn follow up. Obviously a school move impacts on individual pupils differently and that is determined by a range of factors including additional learning needs and emotional and social factors. Those children with additional needs will receive additional support. There is no evidence to suggest that the school reorganisation in Ystradgynlais had a detrimental impact on the pupils.

35. Comment/Question from young people of Dolau Youth Club

Dolau Youth Club was formed over 15 years ago. The Youth Club meets in this hall and the next closest youth club is in Llandrindod. If you close this school there would be no youth club and no community - no thanks! How can you justify the destruction of our community?

Ian Roberts thanked the young people for their comments.

Response

As children and young people who have gone to Dolau School you still value coming back and seeing your friends and using this building to socialise. Thank you for speaking so passionately.

36. Comment

Can I say when you said the consultation document is a work in progress, the consultation document should not be work in progress. It is not legally possible to change the consultation document. The document you consult on has to be accurate otherwise, legally, I think you may be in some difficulty if parents and the community were to take a legal challenge on the status of your consultation. People have chosen to send their children to a small, rural school for many different reasons. Now you are saying that this community will no longer have a choice and that is not fair when other communities have that choice. Schools in rural Radnorshire are strategically important. It is illegal to make parents travel a mile with their children to catch the bus. Parents do that to be helpful. The policy you are operating could be legally challenged. Ystradgynlais has been a success. All our schools and teachers are doing their best for the children. There are other options to keep children within their communities and the community wants to work with you to achieve that. The only thing that is stopping is your funding formula. It worked in Ystradgynlais because the community was offered something better. Pupils were not being shoehorned into a school, which did not have the capacity to take them. They were offered new buildings so it not fair to compare school reorganisation in Ystradgynlais with the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. Powys County Council needs to offer this community something better - a vision and a future where young people want to stay and to work. There is a better and more imaginative option that will keep children here. That could be Powys County Council's legacy. It would be better than closing Radnorshire schools.

37. Comment/Question

Unfortunately, I cannot say exactly what I want to say. I was one of the children who were ousted when the council closed another school. This had a negative effect on my education. The UN Rights of the Child states that for all administrative authorities the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. Under this consultation our children are suffering emotionally. My child is suffering. It is having a huge effect on him, his siblings and my family. You are not doing your best for my children. How is this consultation in the best interests of our children?

38. Comment

I think you should be ashamed of yourselves. I went to this school. We had the introduction of a mobile classroom, a canteen and a hall. In future I hope to have my children educated at this school. Why should I have to put my children on a bus to Crossgates. Would you agree with me if I wanted to start a family and for them to go to a rural school I should go to Montgomeryshire?

Response

You have asked a question about rural schools and I appreciate it is an emotive subject. The Cabinet members will be coming to visit the schools. That won't be a public meeting. They will be coming to see the schools working before the paper goes to cabinet. As many Cabinet members as possible will come to visit the school. You mentioned Montgomeryshire. There have been schools closed in

Montgomeryshire too. Difficult decisions have to be taken. We are taking this matter seriously. We want the best education possible for our children. The comments you have made will be taken on board. The minutes of this meeting will be submitted with the Cabinet report.

39. Comment

I have a daughter in year 5 whose formal education at this school has been successful. She will spend her final year in primary school with children she has not met and she will have to travel an extra 100 miles per week. Due to proposals for the Secondary schools she also be disrupted in her final year of Secondary education. We live in a deprived area of Wales and Powys County Council is trying to deprive my child of a decent education. How can this disruption in an important phase of her primary education be an advantage to my daughter? She will be in a bigger class if the school closes.

Response

With any school organisation proposal there will always be children who are nearing the end of their time in the primary school and, should Cabinet decide to go ahead with the proposal, it would be essential that Crossgates School staff work closely with staff in Llanfihangel Rhydithon School to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. You are right that the transition year would need to be managed effectively. The Cabinet has decided consultation on a proposal to close Llandrindod and Builth High Schools but to retain education on both of the sites. No decision has been taken to close the Secondary schools.

40. Comment/Question

I am a community councillor of Dolau and Vice President of the Young Farmers Club but, most importantly, a parent of children at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. I know how supportive this community is. The Powys One Plan mentions how important it is for members of communities to have a sense of pride in where they live. As a community we have raised £28,641 for the school. Why hasn't the option of federation been included in the consultation document? Closure must be the last resort. Your savings don't add up. The pupil number figures are incorrect. The Cabinet has based its decision on the wrong figures and that disgusts me. I hope you will put forward a true picture of what happens in this community. My child is scared of going to school in a community where she knows the children do not like her. These proceedings have affected the children. Sometimes it is better to find a solution that works for communities and not budgets. Not one child will leave this school until you drag us out the door!

Response

Thank you for all the comments we have heard tonight, not only about education but about the value the school gives to the community. After this consultation a report which includes all the issues raised during the consultation, including during the meeting with school council, will be prepared for the Cabinet. Part of that report will include a Community Impact Assessment. The Cabinet has a statutory duty to consider all issues raised during consultation and part of that will be the impact on the community. The issues you have raised tonight will inform the Community Impact Assessment. All points made in this meeting have been noted.

41. Question

My daughter is due to start at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School after Easter. If the school closes, my daughter will be here for 2 terms and then move on. Alternatively, she could start at the receiving school. What is your advice to me?

Response

That is your decision. If I was to say to you leave your child here that is your decision. If I was to say move your child that could be perceived as prejudicing the decision of the Cabinet.

42. Comment/Question

The people here tonight are very passionate about keeping the school open. It is all very well for Cabinet members to read the reports but they cannot see the passion here about our village school. Young people are moving into the area. There is a total of 64 developments in the UDP planned for Llandewi, Llandgely and Penybont. Where is the vision of councillors? Where will future generations go to school with all those houses being built?

Response

Your response shows the value of local consultation in providing information on how the community is changing.

43. Comment/Question

One of questioners mentioned for school children who attend Llanfihangel Rhydithon School Crossgates is their closest school and for some pupils who attend Crossgates School, Llanfihangel Rhydithon is the closest school. I have 3 children in Llanfihangel Rhydithon School and Crossgates C P School is our nearest school but I chose to bring our children to Dolau and I have been "blown away" by the quality of the teaching at the school and the community. There is no other choice of rural school if Llanfihangel Rhydithon School was to close. Don't our children have human rights? The pupils from Llanfihangel Rhydithon School have excelled when they move on to High School. Do parents have any choice and human rights in relation to their choice of school? Parents have a right to choose rural education for their children.

Response

The issues are rural choice and affordability and sustainability of education in communities such as Dolau. You have made it clear that you feel strongly about the need for a choice to be there as well. You are concerned about the lack of choice of schooling for your children in surrounding areas when there are no other options. There is no other school between here and Crossgates and between here and Presteigne. You believe that closing the school at Dolau would take away the choice for parents in relation to their children's education.

44. Comment

There is a difference in closing a small school and transferring children to a larger school from putting one or two children into a large year group. The model for school reorganisation in Ystradgynlais was different.

Response

When Dolfor School closed the majority of pupils went to a school in Newtown, which is a very high performing school. Well-being of pupil is good in that school. There are always cases where some children may not be as comfortable with change as others initially. You are right the model in Ystradgynlais was different.

45. Comment

I would like to welcome the Panel to Dolau School tonight. I am a past pupil and I live and run a business in Dolau which employs 5 people. In this hall there are farmers, builders, engineers. Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is more than just a school. It is part of the rural

economy that pays for Powys County Council. My children are in Dolau School and my child's teachers have supported him with his reading. There are increasing numbers in the playgroup. The school staff are second to none. The condition of the school building is good and there is room to expand. The school's standards are leading the way in Powys. Mr W teaches the children to play rugby in his own time. Pupil teacher relationships are important. If pupils are happy then they will learn. To use a rugby analogy – The children are our forwards, we are the backs and you should be our supporters. I would like to thank you for providing an opportunity to community to discuss the future of the school. Dolau School will not close. This is our school, our future and our children's future. This is the future of Powys. Dolau School will not close.

46. Comment

I have been a football coach at Dolau School for 27 years and my children went to this school. If you had seen the school's Christmas concert you would not be thinking of closing this school today.

47. Comment

I want to say that I know someone who lives in Dolfor who has chosen to take her child to Kerry because she wants her child to go to a rural school. Choice is important in Dolfor too.

48. Comment/Question

The school in any community is the "beating heart of the village". I want to ask the Portfolio Holder if you have done research into where solutions for saving small schools have been successful. Have you seen the success of Dilwyn and Almeley schools in Herefordshire where pupil numbers are less? Have you spoken to governors and Cabinet members for education in other rural counties where they have been able to save their schools?

Response

Powys is part of a regional network which includes other Welsh rural authorities. There has been regular discussion in ERW (Education Regional Working) around school reorganisation. In a demographically complex area as Powys it is not possible to have a "one size fits all solution." Members of the association of directors in Wales meet regularly to discuss what is happening with school reorganisation in other local authority areas.

Response

As Leader of the Council I am a member of the ERW Joint Committee. The comments you have made will be noted and mentioned in the report.

Response

Thank you for the impassioned and clear way you have put your comments across. This has been useful in contributing to the process. We have heard the issues you have raised around the capacity at the receiving school, in relation to the sustainability of the community, the wellbeing of children and the divisive effects of school closures on communities in the area. We have heard your concerns in relation to school transport. This meeting has been a really useful session.

Next Steps

Marianne Evans described the next steps in the statutory process.

- Formal consultation closes on 24th March.
- Responses should be submitted in writing before the end of the consultation period, either online, via letter to the School Modernisation Team at County Hall, Llandrinod Wells, LD1 5LG, or via e-mail to school.modernisation@powys.gov.uk
- Following closure of the formal consultation period, all issues raised during consultation will be analysed and included within a report to the Council's Cabinet in May when Cabinet Members will take a decision on whether or not to publish a statutory notice of closure.
- Clarification will be provided in relation to questions raised during the meeting concerning finance/figures.

Marianne Evans also clarified a point that had been raised by Kirsty Williams earlier – the consultation document is not a 'work in progress'. It is the published consultation document for this formal consultation.

Cllr Arwel Jones thanked parents and community members for attending the meeting and urged them to respond to the consultation. He informed them that every issue raised would receive a response and would be included in the report for the Cabinet.