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Tuesday, 18th February, 2025

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Ysgol Bro Cynllaith – Consultation Report – Local Member comment.

Cllr Aled Davies

Transforming Education in Powys

The strategy for Transforming Education in Powys has a clear Vision Statement and Guiding Principles which are key to the transformation of the Powys education system.

The Vision Statement is as follows:

‘All children and young people in Powys will experience a high-quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically productive, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens of **21st century Wales**’

The proposal to close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith falls at the first hurdle, as stated in the revised impact assessment;

‘The closest provision for most pupils would be located in England, and that pupils transferring to provision in England would no longer access the Welsh curriculum, nor would they have the opportunity to learn Welsh in school.’

Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is unusual as all the children attending the school live within the school’s catchment. However, 90% of those children live closer to Shropshire schools. This demonstrates the remoteness of the school within Powys. So remote that only one of the nine Cabinet members attended one of the two meetings available to meet the community and visit the school.

Many of the current pupils walk to school, every child would have to be bussed out of the community to attend school in the future, with the first child catching the school bus soon after 7:30 in the morning if attending the new ‘catchment’ school, Ysgol Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant.

At Learning and Skills scrutiny 12 February 2025 the question of catchment was thrown into disarray. The recommendation within this report is that if children wish to attend a school in Powys and to receive free school transport that the receiving school has to be Llanrhaeadr YM, however officers suggested that catchment maps may soon be re-drawn casts doubt on much of the information contain within the report which makes a mockery of the consultation.

Current home to school transport policy only allows children, who need and rely on free school transport, to attend a school that is dictated to them by the Cabinet of Powys CC. It is likely that parents will appeal the decision, insisting that Powys CC must transport eligible children to their closest school as legislation dictates. As a consequence, the financial savings contained within this report are likely to evaporate.

Many of the inaccuracies in the original report remain in the Consultation report, such as class structure of the receiving school and a number of questions raised in the last scrutiny meeting remain unanswered. Such as the educational and financial impact on secondary education in the area. Once a pathway to Shropshire schools, primary and secondary, has been established it will be difficult to break. It is essential that Powys CC ensure high retention levels in its schools, especially as the Welsh Government pushes for a greater number of course options to be made available for children. Low pupil numbers will lead to a lower number of options.

Alternative model

An alternative model emerged from the consultation and was strongly supported. The proposal is that Ysgol Bro Cynllaith would close and become part of Ysgol Llanfyllin, an all-through school, however the school site would be retained in Llansilin for local children to attend. Crucially it is suggested that there would be an option to review the future of the Llansilin site once Ysgol Llanfyllin has a new school building. In the original Transformation program the re-build would have begun, urgency is paramount, additional momentum is required to the investment in education in North Powys.

There are a number of educational and financial advantages, such as;

Improved outcomes for children

Availability of greater number of teachers with a wider range of expertise.

Improve transition arrangement.

Resilient and robust structure.

Cost reductions, more effective use of resources.

Identical travel routes for siblings receiving secondary education and easy travel for extra-curricular activities.

Continuation of wrap around services.

Clear environmental and community benefits.

Higher retention of children.

Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is in a good state of repair and would require little extensive maintenance until the review of the site future would take place once the new build is complete.

Rural schools have additional protection from closure under legislation, introduced by a Powys based Welsh Government Education Minister. I have serious concerns that not all the legislation has not been followed, certainly not in spirit. The Council

has failed to 'demonstrate that all alternatives to closure have been thoroughly considered and that closure is the most appropriate course of action'

The strategy for Transforming Education in the north east of Powys is quickly becoming a program of school closer and disinvestment. **The alternative model, 'classroom in the countryside' is an opportunity to ensure that the children and young people of Llansilin belong in a 21st century Wales.**

I wish to attach the following two letters from Llansilin Community Council as part of my local member comment, as they reinforce many points

Dated 19 November 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re. PROPOSAL TO CLOSE YSGOL BRO CYNLLAITH

Llansilin Community Council (LCC) strongly opposes Powys County Council's (PCC) proposal to close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith (Powys County Council, 2024). The school is a cornerstone of our village, which uniquely boasts a village hall, church, chapel, school, community shop, and pub - features that are increasingly rare in rural communities. The proposed closure threatens to undermine the social, cultural, and educational fabric of Llansilin, with far-reaching negative consequences.

On Thursday, 7 November 2024, a public meeting was held at Llansilin Memorial Hall to gather community views on the proposed closure. The meeting was well-attended, with unanimous opposition to the closure expressed by attendees. Sadly, no representatives from PCC attended, although invitations were extended, leaving the community concerned about the transparency and inclusivity of the consultation process.

The meeting highlighted significant concerns about the decision-making process and the detrimental impacts of the closure. Key points raised include:

Community and Growth

- Growing Population: Llansilin is experiencing growth, with potential for increased school enrollment.
- Local Support: The village is very supportive of school events. This would be more difficult if held farther afield.

Travel and Logistics

- Impact on Family Life: Increased travel times would reduce family time and negatively affect student well-being.
- Safety Concerns: Additional transportation requirements, including a lack of bus stops and safe transfer logistics, pose significant risks.

Projected Pupil Numbers and Capacity

- **Inaccurate Projections:** Questions remain over pupil number forecasts; actual figures may be higher than projected.
- **Surplus Capacity Misrepresentation:** There is ambiguity around whether outdated facilities (e.g., the hut) are included in calculations.

Educational and Well-being Concerns

- **Stress on Larger Classes:** Transferring pupils to larger schools risks straining resources, especially for children with special needs.
- **Supportive Environment:** Small class sizes at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith enable tailored support for students with autism and other needs.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** The lack of after-school transport in alternative schools limits extracurricular opportunities.
- **Mental Health Impact:** The transition could negatively affect pupils' mental health and well-being.

School Building and Condition

- **Outdated Reports:** The classification of 'C - poor' relies on a condition report from 2018, which does not reflect recent improvements, including new windows, electrics, a boiler, and resurfacing.

Impact on Community

- **Demographic Shift:** Closing the school would alter community demographics, reduce local employment, and limit volunteering opportunities.
- **Cultural Loss:** The school offers valuable historical and cultural education tied to the Llansilin area.
- **Early Childhood Development:** Growth in the "Stay and Play" group (from 6 to 16 children per session) underscores the school's importance for young families.

Concerns About Alternative Schools

- **Capacity Issues:** There is no evidence that alternative schools can accommodate an influx of students.
- **Lack of Consultation:** Local stakeholders, including affected schools, have not been adequately consulted.
- **Reduced Engagement:** Hosting events in other locations would diminish local participation.

LCC therefore concludes that closing Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is unsustainable. It would fail to deliver claimed economic benefits, and yet result in significant social and environmental harm.

We urge PCC to instead consider the 'Classroom in the Countryside' model with Ysgol Llanfyllin proposed by the school's Board of Governors (Ysgol Bro Cynllaith School Governors, 2024). The classroom in the countryside model as presented in the consultation response offers several benefits, particularly as an alternative to school closures in rural areas. Here's a summary of its advantages:

Cost Savings

- Reduces administrative costs by eliminating the need for a separate headteacher, with leadership provided by a parent school.
- Avoids transport and additional staffing costs at alternative schools.
- Keeps building maintenance costs manageable since the building would still require upkeep even if repurposed for community use.

Increased Resilience

- Allows a larger pool of staff to provide coverage during absences, addressing one of the significant challenges for small schools.

Enhanced Educational Quality:

- Ensures continuity of small mixed-age classes, which foster phase-based learning while benefiting from the expertise and resources of a larger school.
- Facilitates collaboration and sharing of best practices among teaching staff.

Staff Development Opportunities:

- Expands professional growth options by integrating staff into a larger network associated with the parent school.

Preservation of Welsh Education and Culture:

- Maintains local access to Welsh language and curriculum, preventing migration of pupils to schools in England, which could dilute exposure to Welsh education.

Access to Extracurricular Activities:

- Retains existing extracurricular options while enabling participation in activities requiring larger group sizes, such as team sports, through collaboration with the parent school.

Community and Parental Engagement:

- Keeps the school as a physical presence in the village, sustaining strong relationships with parents and ensuring smoother transitions to secondary education.

- Supports the local community, which benefits from the school as a hub of activity and cultural preservation.

This model seeks to balance cost-efficiency with maintaining the educational and cultural benefits of rural schools. It would ensure the sustainability of both schools while addressing community concerns. PCC has a legal obligation to consider this reasonable alternative under the Welsh Government's Schools Organisation Code (Welsh Government, 2018).

LCC trusts that this matter will be approached with the seriousness and care it deserves. The future of our village, its children, and the community depends on it.

And 16th February 2025

Councillors,

During the consultation period, Llansilin Community Council (LCC) proposed an alternative to closure—the Classroom in the Countryside model in partnership with Ysgol Llanfyllin (please see attached).

As you will be aware, there is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. Under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code, you are required to demonstrate that all alternatives to closure have been thoroughly considered.

However, the Consultation Report issued by Powys County Council fails to provide such evidence regarding the Classroom in the Countryside model. Notably, LCC has observed that no financial modelling has been undertaken—or, if it has, no evidence of this has been presented in the report.

Given this lack of thorough assessment, it is difficult to accept the conclusion that closure is the best option. LCC will now be considering its next course of action.

We urge you to review this matter carefully and ensure that all viable alternatives receive proper consideration before any final decision is made.

Yours Sincerely,

Chris Hooper

Clerk, LLansilin Community Council

Ysgol Golwg Pen y Fan Strategic Outline Case – Local Member Comments

Firstly, we welcome that some progress is now being made with the production of the SOC for Ysgol Golwg Pen y Fan. Based on the information provided there would appear to be advantages to the pupils attending this school, as it would provide a much improved learning environment for their education. Likewise, this new school would be beneficial to the teachers and support staff working there.

From the information supplied the Local Authority would also potentially make savings from the reduction in backlog maintenance of the current school sites, which in the time of financial challenge would appear sensible.

Two other points to mention. The first is, in relation to the **optimism bias** which reflects a 65k differential per year – how assured is this lower figure ?

The second point is, will pupils from the former Cradoc school have access to free school transport ?

Cllr Chris Walsh & Cllr Liz Rijnenberg

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