



Proposal to establish a new English-medium Church in Wales (Voluntary Controlled) (C in W) Primary School and a new Welsh-medium Community Primary (CP) School in Welshpool

Objection Report

1. Introduction

Powys County Council consulted on a proposal to establish a new English-medium Church-in-Wales (Voluntary Controlled) (C in W) Primary School and a new Welsh-medium Community Primary (CP) School in Welshpool during the period from the 5th September 2016 to the 18th October 2016.

On the 22nd November 2016, the council's Cabinet agreed to proceed with the establishment of the two new schools. A Statutory Notice was published on the 25th November 2016 which proposed the following:

From 31 August 2017:

- i. The Council proposes to discontinue the following four schools:*
 - *Ardwyn Nursery and Infants School;*
 - *Gungrog Nursery and Infants Church-in-Wales (Voluntary Controlled) School;*
 - *Oldford Nursery and Infants School;*
 - *Ysgol Maesydre.*

From 1 September 2017:

- i. The Diocese proposes to establish a new English-medium Church-in-Wales (Voluntary Controlled) primary school that will operate initially on the current sites of Ysgol Maesydre, Gungrog and Oldford schools, until it transfers in 2018/19 to a new school building that will be built on land at Welshpool High School;*
- ii. The Council proposes to establish a new Welsh-medium community primary school that will operate initially from the current site of Ardwyn School, until it transfers in 2018/19 to a new school building that will be built on the current site of Ysgol Maesydre.*

The Objection Period ended on the 23rd December 2016.

2. Objections received

One objection was received during the statutory objection period. This objection was received from the Welshpool branch of the Labour Party.

The issues raised in this objection are listed in the table on the following pages, along with the authority's response to each issue.

3. Issues raised in Objections

Issue ref	Issue	Local authority response
1	<p>Education should be organized in the best interests of the children, rather than for the convenience of administrators, or in pursuance of government grants for alleged economies of scale</p>	<p>All school reorganisation proposals taken forward are done so in order to provide the best possible opportunities for current and future pupils.</p> <p>‘Transformation learning and skills’ is one of the priorities in the One Powys Plan, and within this priority, the plan states the authority’s aspiration to ensure that ‘all children and young people are supported to achieve their full potential’. The purpose of the proposal is not to pursue government grants, but to utilise these grants for the benefit of current and future pupils in Welshpool.</p>
2	<p>Concern about the distance of the proposed new school from Oldford Estate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is 1.5 miles from the far end of Oldford Estate to the proposed new school - The route passes through the busiest part of town at the busiest time of day - Inevitable that children of 5 or 6 years of age will end up walking the route to school on their own - May be argued that a bus service will be organized, wither privately, or by local government, however buses are often missed - Concern that a 5 year old sent to catch the bus on their own who misses it will try to find their way to school on their own - Distance of 1.5 miles is an incentive for those parents who have them to use the car – this is something to be discouraged 	<p>The authority recognises that the location of the new English-medium school is further for some parents than others, particularly those living on the Oldford Estate. However, the school is still within 2 miles from the edge of Welshpool town, and therefore pupils would not be eligible for free home-to-school transport to the new school.</p> <p>Access to the school and the impact on highways/travel will be a key factor when the school is designed. If the plans are submitted for planning approval, the authority’s Highways Service is a statutory consultee, and its views will be considered at this stage.</p> <p>The authority has a duty to provide safe walking routes to schools, and these will be identified and planned as part of the design process for the new schools. Safeguarding of pupils is the utmost priority for the authority. However, the authority would not expect pupils of early years age and in the lower Juniors to be walking to school or travelling on public transport without being accompanied by a responsible adult.</p> <p>The authority notes the comment that buses can be missed, however this is the situation faced by a large proportion of pupils across Powys who are reliant on home to school transport. Should pupils miss any public transport that is available in Welshpool, the pupils’ parents would be expected to make appropriate arrangements to ensure that they could attend school. The authority would not consider it appropriate for a pupil of 5 or 6 years old</p>

		<p>to walk to school on their own.</p> <p>It is recognised that some parents may want to use their cars because of the change of location of the school. The authority will, however, investigate whether alternative transport arrangements could be put in place e.g. use of public transport/community transport, which would help parents who live furthest away from the school, and would help to discourage the use of cars.</p>
3	<p>Concern about combining children of a very young age into a school with older pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children of a young age learn to socialize better, and therefore learn better, in small groups, with other children of roughly the same age and from the same locality - 1982 study of small schools in Jersey by the Cambridge Institute of Education reported that “Headteachers can feel secure that there is no evidence that small schools are less educationally viable than large schools” - Estyn reported in 2006 that “small schools are as good as the rest and particularly good at working with parents” - Moving Oldford School across town will lose community spirit - Transition from infant to junior school need not be traumatic, but seen as part of ‘growing up’ - Acknowledgement of staffing difficulties and impact of staff absence in small schools. Suggestion that ‘clustering’ of schools and the sharing of specialist staff and floating teachers would overcome 	<p>Powys County Council is committed to ensuring that all children and young people have an equal opportunity to receive the best possible education.</p> <p>The council aspires to have an educational infrastructure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides all learners with opportunities to achieve high standards of achievement and attainment; • Provides for first class teaching and learning provision reflecting national, regional and local priorities; • Has high quality resilient leadership and management; • Provides robust linguistic continuity and progression; • Improves cost-effectiveness and efficiency; • Has the right number of schools in the right place for the current and future pupil population of Powys; • Has school buildings and blocks that are assessed as condition A or B; • Minimises dependency on temporary accommodation; and • Reduces overall surplus places in schools. <p>Most primary provision in Powys and the rest of Wales is delivered in all through primary schools where infants and juniors attend the same school. Apart from Welshpool, there are only 2 other examples in Powys where there are separate infants and junior schools.</p> <p>If the proposal is implemented, the new English-medium school will be one of the largest primary schools in Powys, and the authority recognises that this could be a cause for concern for parents who have been used to the smaller schools currently operating in Welshpool. However, the new schools will be designed to ensure that pupils can thrive in</p>

	<p>this.</p>	<p>an environment that is safe and inspiring.</p> <p>The authority acknowledges that some pupils might be happier in a small class situation, however the authority's view is that the classroom arrangement in the new schools will have benefits for pupils. Schools are bound by regulations relating to class sizes, which mean that there cannot be more than 30 pupils in classes in the foundation phases. The governing bodies of the new schools would also be expected that junior class sizes were maintained at an appropriate size.</p> <p>In the new English-medium school, pupils will be taught in classes with pupils of the same age. This is likely to improve a teacher's ability to better meet the needs of all learners and the authority is confident that pupils achieve well in larger class as well as in smaller classes. The new school is being designed to accommodate pupils living in the town of Welshpool, therefore it is expected that all pupils will be from the Welshpool locality.</p> <p>The Welsh-medium school will be built for 150 pupils, which would mean 5 classes. This would include some mixed-age classes. In addition, the Welsh-medium school will be the only Welsh-medium provision in the Welshpool catchment, therefore it will serve a larger catchment area, and it is likely that the school will include a mixture of pupils living in Welshpool and pupils living in the areas surrounding Welshpool.</p> <p>The authority recognises that performance levels vary between all types and sizes of schools, both within Powys and across Wales. The benefit of larger schools is their ability to attract high quality resilient leadership and management, with headteachers, senior leaders and staff who can focus on raising standards.</p> <p>The authority notes the concerns in relation to the impact of the closure of Oldford School on community spirit. A community impact assessment has been prepared in respect of this proposal, this was updated following the consultation period to take account of issues raised during the consultation period, and was considered by Cabinet when determining whether or not to proceed with the publication of statutory notices. The community impact assessment concluded that although all four current schools have strong links with the local community, the proposal would not have an adverse impact on the community of Welshpool. There will be two 21st C Schools in the town rather than four ageing schools, and community cohesion</p>
--	--------------	---

		<p>in the town will be strengthened.</p> <p>The authority notes the comments made in relation to staffing. The authority's view is that the proposal will have a positive impact on staff and will provide greater flexibility to the two schools in terms of staffing. However the authority acknowledges that the proposal is creating a period of uncertainty for the affected staff, and is keen to conclude the process as swiftly as possible to minimise this period of uncertainty.</p>
4	<p>Concern about lack of choice for parents who do not wish their children to have a faith education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proportion of people describing themselves as non-religious varies between 45% and 55% depending on the survey quoted, this figure has been increasing - Current breakdown of primary schools in Welshpool, apart from the specialist Ardwyn school, is 1 Church in Wales and 2 CP schools, however it is proposed that the new 'super school' will be C in W - Proposal will deny non-religious parents the choice to send their children to a non-faith school - Strange that parents are given the choice of Welsh-medium education for their children, but must send their children to a faith school - Recognise and applaud the role of the church in previous centuries, but firmly of the opinion that faith schools have no place in a modern education system 	<p>Powys County Council and the Church in Wales are joint education providers in the catchment area of Welshpool. Reorganising education in Welshpool will provide parents with a choice of both non-faith and faith-based education and is an improvement on the current situation. Currently, parents wishing to have faith-based education for their children throughout their primary school years are not able to do so, as pupils from Gungrog CiW School have to transfer to Ysgol Maesydre, which is a community primary school.</p> <p>The authority acknowledges that recent census data shows an increase in the proportion of people describing themselves as non-religious, although they remain in the minority in Wales. However, as stated in the consultation document in respect of this proposal, the authority is of the view that <i>'Church in Wales schools seek to provide the highest possible standard of education within a distinctively Christian context, underpinned by a clear code of values derived from the Gospels. They do not seek to convert but to serve, and to provide a strong Christian ethos and educational vision help to raise standards and achievement and enable every child to fulfil their potential. A church school does not measure its success criteria by pupils adhering to Christianity, but seeks rather to equip its pupils with the knowledge and understanding for them to critically evaluate the moral and ethical challenges of life and to find their own response, be that within Christianity or not. The aim of a church school is to give a gift of a deep and broad education, allowing the children to make a personal, informed decision about matters of faith'</i>.</p> <p>There are Church in Wales schools in most unitary authority areas in Wales, and across Wales, approximately 51,000 children and young people attend a denominational school, with approximately 21,000 of these attending a Church in Wales school. Church in Wales schools are similar to non-denominational schools, and are inclusive by nature, serving children and young people in a range of communities. They also form a natural point of community focus, whether in the inner city or in rural villages.</p>

		<p>In the same way as non-denominational schools, Church in Wales schools are committed to celebrating the rich heritage of faith, language and culture of Wales, offering the very best education to the children of Wales in a safe and secure Christian context. Church schools, in the spirit of Successful Futures, aim to equip their pupils as ethical and informed citizens, by developing their abilities to connect, critically reflect upon, evaluate and apply their learning to their own nascent and growing understanding of religion and belief, and of themselves, society and the world.</p> <p>Should the proposal be supported, parents would be able to choose to place their children in either the English-medium CiW school, or the Welsh-medium community primary school. There are also a range of other English-medium community primary schools in the vicinity of Welshpool, with Leighton CP School being the closest at a distance of around 2 miles from the centre of Welshpool town. Admissions for the new English-medium CiW school and the new Welsh-medium CP school in Welshpool, as well as the other CP schools in the Welshpool catchment area, are administered by the council's Admissions Team, and places would be allocated in accordance with the authority's Admissions Criteria. There would be no requirement for pupils attending the Church in Wales school to be from Christian / religions families. Similarly, there would be no requirement for pupils attending the Welsh-medium school to be from Welsh-speaking families.</p> <p>A Voluntary Controlled Church in Wales school delivers the same RE syllabus as a community school and has the same legal obligation to provide a daily act of collective worship for staff and pupils. The right of withdrawal from both these remains unchanged.</p>
5	<p>Recommended alternative model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oldford and Gungrog remain at their present locations and continue to serve households in the south and north of town as nursery and infants schools - Gungrog is extended to accommodate the English language pupils from Ardwyn - Oldford and Gungrog form a cluster with Leighton to share resources including 	<p>A wide range of options were evaluated as part of the Strategic Outline Case in respect of the Welshpool project, which included combinations of new build and remodelling. However, the option appraisal exercise in the Strategic Outline Case concluded that the best value-for-money option, which brought the most benefits, was to build two new schools. This would lead to the following benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensures pupils are taught in school buildings that are in good condition – removes the current ageing stock and reduces on-going maintenance costs - Reduces the number of surplus places in the area - Provides an opportunity to develop a coherent primary school infrastructure, mitigating

	<p>staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maesydre receives extensive repairs / extension and remains an English-medium school for 8 to 11 year olds - A survey takes place to see if Ardwyn can be extended to accommodate Welsh medium for 4 to 11 year olds. If this is not possible, a new school will have to be built for Welsh-medium education - Gungrog School should cease to be a Church in Wales School - We feel that the £6.35m that is the PCC contribution to the proposal would be sufficient to implement the above. 	<p>the social and educational problems that are currently experienced in Ysgol Maesydre when pupils transfer from three separate infant schools</p>
--	--	---