

Appendix C – Minutes of meetings with Staff and Governors

Contents

Consultation meeting with Staff of Llangedwyn C. in W. School.....	2
Consultation meeting with Governors of Llangedwyn C. In W. School	15

Consultation meeting with Staff of Llangedwyn C. in W. School

16th November 2023

Present

Staff:

Catherine Hart, Headteacher

Haf Pugh, Teacher

Sammy Jones, Teaching Assistant

Tracey Jones, Cleaner

Sarah Hughes, Breakfast Club and After School Club

Emma Williams, Administrator

Diocesan Representative

Barry Wilson, Archdeacon of Montgomery, on behalf of the Diocese of St Asaph

Officers:

Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation

Eurig Towns, Service Manager for School Improvement

Rachel Hudson, HR Business Manager (Schools)

Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education

Marianne Evans welcomed all to the meeting. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

It was explained that there would be a brief presentation with an opportunity for discussion, comments, and questions to the officers afterwards. It was explained that the meeting would be recorded for minuting purposes but the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been completed.

Marianne Evans gave a Powerpoint presentation which outlined the background to the current proposal and explained that in October 2023, Powys County Council's Cabinet gave approval to proceed with a proposal to close Llangedwyn C. in W. School. The consultation commenced on 12 October 2023, and it will continue until the 23 November 2023.

The proposal is:

- To close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School.

Following the presentation, staff were given the opportunity to ask any questions or to make any comments in relation to the matter.

Teacher: Staff were discussing before the meeting about communication. I know Councillor Pete was very passionate and very strong in saying that he wouldn't make the same mistakes as the previous Cabinet in terms of communication. As staff members we feel the communication hasn't been transparent or appropriate, and I wanted to share some examples with you. Firstly in the Llanfyllin Catchment review, all the small schools arrived there first before any other schools. As members of staff it was very difficult seeing that information on the screen without any prior warning. I understand why that would be done but it was difficult, and several members of staff reported that they felt like everyone looked at you in a big room of people, and it caused people a lot of anxiety.

Marianne Evans: We did get that feedback from the session, so we have acknowledged that.

Teacher: The other one was the way in which the original consultation news was told. It was leaked out locally on social media so some members of staff found out via social media, friends, their children's schools apps.

This resulted in staff being told during the school day, then being very upset and having to carry on a school day and work with the children which was a very challenging situation, having to send staff off to take some time for their well-being to actually be upset, but then expecting them to return and being able to work with the children. That was a difficult situation to manage.

Marianne Evans: I can understand that, we did have an agreed protocol in terms of letters coming out, unless there was a timing issue in terms of when things appeared on social media and some people hadn't had the letters.

Headteacher: I think the letter came out in the morning and it went to all schools in the catchment, but for some schools in the catchment it was more significant than others and bigger schools just threw it onto their social media straight away whereas obviously for us it was discussed at the governors meeting the night before. We were going to take the time to talk to staff but that was taken out of our hands because obviously with social media and things these days people information can be shared quickly.

Member of staff: I got it on my child's app, my child goes to a different school, but thankfully I hadn't opened it. Had I opened it I would have found out before other people.

Marianne Evans: It was quite challenging to try and manage that communication across the whole catchment, and as you say, the impact on some schools was very different, we can understand that.

Teacher: With part-time staff it was very challenging for Catherine trying to communicate to everyone and stay in the procedures.

Marianne Evans: We were having communication problems at that time anyway as Catherine was in Bulth Wells.

Teacher: The final point on communication is that recently we as staff were impacted by finding out the Cabinet decision two days before the letter from Lynette Lovell was written and sent out to schools. This was also detrimental to a few members of staff.

We just want to communicate that in terms of sharing information going forward, transparency is important, and ensuring staff members are communicated with. I know that they are public meetings, but we expected communication from Powys, especially after Cllr Pete's promise that he wouldn't make the same mistakes. Sadly we feel those same mistakes have been made, and they have impacted people negatively.

Headteacher: I think it's very difficult because the meeting went on during the school day.

Teacher: Yes, and a letter coming out on the same day would have been far more appropriate than having it on social media for two days before the letter.

Marianne Evans: The issue is that in the past Council meetings, Cabinet meetings would be in person, however now they are broadcast online. I think the broadcasting causes us more problems actually, because journalists could be watching it live – previously we've had live tweeting during sessions which doesn't help. It's a tricky one to manage and I do apologise if you felt not supported or not communicated well with. Thank you for telling us. Is there anything else?

How are you all feeling? Let's start with that.

Member of staff: Not great, but I think it's just you go into almost robotic mode when you are with the children, you just keep going don't you, and you just push that to the back as you've just got to be happy for the children.

Eurig Towns: We do understand, it is an emotional time, but we want you to know that you are able to share and express how you feel to us.

Marianne Evans: Is it worth here bringing Rachel from HR in? Rachel will explain to you more about the process, if the decision is to close Llangedwyn school.

Rachel Hudson: There's a few things we can do to help and support you before any decision is made. If you want to have HR drop in sessions or one to one meetings, or staff meetings, then we can do that, we can come to the school and sit with you and

we can answer any questions that we're able to answer about your own personal situations – that's before the decision is made. We can meet with you on a group basis if that's what you'd like to do.

Of course you have the support of your trade unions as well, we work with them kind of hand in hand all the time and they provide us with really good challenge around these processes, so that's a really valuable part of the process.

Marianne has asked me to talk about what happens if the decision is made to close the school. We are in a formal consultation at the moment, that is a different kind of consultation to the one that we would then do with you in the event that the decision was made to close. If that happened, we would start a formal consultation process with you all with the trade unions. Usually, that process is to do with getting feedback and alternative proposals, but that's what this part of the process is for. So now is the time to share your thoughts, share your ideas, share your feelings around what's being proposed.

If we get to the formal HR consultation, that will be after the decision has been made and so the staffing consultation would be about what you want as individuals in your own personal situations. Again, we can come to you, we can talk about having group meetings, we can have one to ones. You're all entitled and encouraged to take up the offer of a one to one consultation meeting, which would be you, your union rep if you have one, or a colleague if you prefer, and someone from HR to ask any questions and make any points that you want to make in relation to your own personal situation, because there are a number of options that you might have. And again, this is all if the decision is taken.

If the school is going to close with effect from the end of August next year, then either we can look to redeploy you to other suitable roles either in schools or elsewhere in the Council. That is a possibility and we will work very hard with you to try and identify any suitable vacancies for you. If you wish, you have the option to take redundancy because your post will no longer be there. If you don't want that to happen, then we will work with you to do everything we can to avoid that happening. In the last school closure we had we were very successful in redeploying people to other schools in the area. I think nearly everybody got the outcome that they wanted out of that process. We appreciate that it is a horrible thing to be happening to your school and we are here to support you in any way that we can.

There is also the Employment Assistant Programme, Vivup, which can provide support such as counselling. Other things we can offer to you if you want it are things like support with writing CVs, support with interview techniques. If we get to the formal HR consultation, it's more about what you want it to be by that stage.

What we want to do is support you within this process as much as we possibly can, appreciating that it is a horrible time for you.

Marianne Evans: Thank you. Has anyone got any specific questions about the process should we get that far?

Teacher: I'm under the impression that if you were to choose redeployment and were unsuccessful at interview, you would no longer have your redundancy rights because you have chosen redeployment. Am I correct in thinking that?

Rachel Hudson: No, if you apply for a role and you are unsuccessful at interview and that happens to the extent that you don't have an alternative role to go to by the 31st August, then you would get your redundancy, yes. I think what you might be thinking of is a bit of legislation that says that if you are offered a suitable alternative employment then you may forfeit your right to a redundancy payment. I think that might be what you're thinking of, however I don't believe Powys has ever actually used that. If what you want out of this process is to come out with a bit of a redundancy package then in all likelihood that is what you will get. If anyone would like indicative figures of what that settlement might look like, just let us know. I'll give you my contact details before the end of the meeting.

Member of Staff: I was going to ask about calculated redundancy next.

Rachel Hudson: It can take a couple of weeks to get them back. If you can let me know as soon as possible if you do want them, I can get them from payroll. It is important to say that they are estimates. The other thing you need to think about is if you do have an estimate, you need to ensure that it's got the correct continuous service date on the amount.

Marianne Evans: There was a question asked before about how the redundancy is calculated?

Rachel Hudson: It is calculated based on your length of service, your age and your weekly salary.

Member of Staff: Is the amount of weeks calculated based on your age?

Rachel Hudson: There are statutory tables around that, that's Payroll's department. I will ask Payroll to make those calculations for you. There are statutory tables that you could look at in the meantime if you wanted to, but bear in mind that those are probably based on the statutory maximum pay per week, which I think is about £280 off the top of my head. In Powys we base it on your actual weekly pay depending on if you're of pensionable age, in which case it's slightly different. We can talk about this on a one to one basis though.

Rachel Hudson: Would you like us to come out and do a drop in session this side of Christmas?

Member of Staff: I think it would be good.

Rachel Hudson: It will either be myself or Sarah Jones. I will get in touch with the Headteacher about that.

Marianne Evans: Any further issues, concerns or questions?

Headteacher: Would the end of employment day be the 31st of August?

Rachel Hudson: We have to follow a statutory process in terms of consultation. That's what our intention would be but in the event that consultation took longer or we weren't in a position to start consultation until a later date than has been estimated, then it might be that we either extend people's employment or we do a payment in lieu of notice. This would be discussed with you at the time. If we don't get to a certain point before we need to give notice, we will look to either extend your employment which we've done in other schools where we've not managed to hit the deadlines, or we would seek your agreement to do a payment in lieu of notice, which means you would finish on the 31st August but you would get extra pay to compensate the fact that you didn't get your full notice period.

Teacher: What is the official notice period after your cabinet decisions? From my reading previously it was six months, but that was old information so I just wanted some clarity on that. If the consultation goes through and the school closes, what is the official notice period that will be given to the school?

Marianne Evans: As it stands now, the school would close on the 31st August 2024. The HR processes would come in after a final decision was made.

Sarah Astley: We try to give at least a term's notice of closure of a school after the final decision is made where possible, but this is not a requirement.

Member of Staff: What happens to the school and to all of the belongings?

Sarah Astley: We try and redistribute as much as we can to other schools. There would be archiving that would need to be done of personal information. Then for the other resources, we work with receiving schools primarily, so we look at where the pupils transferred to and offer those schools the opportunity to have whatever resources they want, then we open it out more widely. We try and ensure as much as possible is redistributed to either schools or community groups.

In terms of archiving normally the school does the archiving, however there are other situations where we have done things a bit differently. We can provide additional funding for additional hours if needed. We then pick up the distribution of the other resources – we wouldn't be asking you to clear everything before the end of the term. We would be looking at working with the other schools from September onwards, to keep things as normal as possible for the pupils.

In the past there was a push to clear schools by the end of the term, which was difficult for the staff and the pupils so we've moved away from that and we're very much trying to keep things as normal as possible.

Once the archiving has been completed, we'll transport the boxes down to Llandrindod. As I said, there have been situations where things have happened differently, but generally we do ask the school to sort the boxing of the archiving. We'll provide the boxes and guidance as to what needs storing.

Marianne Evans: In terms of the building, the building will be emptied. We don't own the building, so we will be working with the Diocese and the Llandedwyn Estate to transfer it back. We want that to happen as soon as possible as we don't want an empty building.

Sarah Astley: Normally, we aim for half a term or a term at most, so if we're starting to redistribute resources in September, we would be looking at handing the building back by half term if possible, or the end of term at the latest.

Marianne Evans: How is it in the community here?

Member of Staff: There is a good community here and it is difficult. In the past there's always been lots of children. Now we don't have the children and it's heartbreaking. I think some members of the community probably understand, but for others it is very difficult. I'm not here all the time but other members of staff are here all the time and it's difficult.

Teacher: The community seems supportive but upset would be my views. The difficulty I have found with the children is members of the community such as bus drivers, local visitors and others saying in front of the children 'Oh your school is closing'. That isn't appropriate and has been quite challenging for us as staff.

Member of Staff: The children have really struggled. We've tried to support them, which is quite hard as they're getting told different things from different people.

Teacher: It's quite awkward when someone says that in front of the children or to the children, where do you go with that?

Marianne Evans: Sometimes people don't think do they.

Teacher: It's not just adults, children will do it too. We had a report from a child that had been bullying another child with the taunt of 'your school is closing'.

Member of Staff: It is just a very difficult time, especially when you don't know the answers. If the children ever say anything to me I always change the subject.

Member of Staff: It can be very difficult as the children look to us, but at this moment we don't have all of the information.

Teacher: You don't want to lie, but currently we don't have the information to give them.

Marianne Evans: Is there any additional support you need for the children?

Teacher: It's very difficult as parents feel upset and concerned about the process. It's really hard to know what we should and shouldn't be saying to the children. Obviously, we're not really saying anything, we're just saying 'they're talking about lots of ideas'

Marianne Evans: That is the situation at the moment. As the process goes forward and depending where it goes, there will be different messages and the children will probably need to be communicated with in a different way at each stage, which is difficult.

Eurig Towns: We know it's difficult for the children, and it often comes back onto the staff, as you know the children so well then you work with them. You are often the ones providing that support. I'll go back to what Rachel said, it's what support you need as well as staff, because you provide day to day support. It does take it out of you to stay strong. So we need to provide support for you as well, so that you have somebody that you can rely on and talk to, so you feel supported. You're probably in the best place to support the children as you know them. However, we don't want you to think all the pressure is on you, you need support too, and that's why Rachel is offering that support. If there is anything else we can do to support you, please let us know as we understand it is a difficult situation. I know we're not living it, you are living it, but we've been through this situation before supporting other schools, supporting other teachers through this, so we do understand some of what you're going through.

Headteacher: I think it's also important to recognize that you're not just supporting the children, you are here every day supporting the parents as well. They come in as well looking to you for support and that's a burden to carry, especially when you're struggling with the uncertainty yourself and you don't have it. You're getting it from every angle basically, as well as the uncertainty of your own position.

Marianne Evans: Make sure to support each other as well, that's key as staff. I know you're part of the federation with Llanfechain, have there been any issues there since this proposal came out or are the relationships between both schools strong?

Member of Staff: From this school, you do sort of feel like the underdog, we're being kicked and kicked and they're getting bigger. Going from one school to another you can definitely feel it.

Teacher: It is a very us and them situation, which is very sad and has limited some of the work and progression we can do together.

Headteacher: I think in terms of the federation up to the point where the decision was made, there was an equality, there's now an inequality. An inequality upsets the balance doesn't it. I think we can see that with parents as well, not so much for the parents there as nothing has changed but more about the parents here. It's hard and it puts up barriers and that's the opposite of what we want to have. Unfortunately, with the process as it is, it is inevitable.

Marianne Evans: In terms of the proposal, we could see the strengths of the federation, pupils already know the staff at Llanfechain, they know their peers. So we thought it would be best for the children. But I can see from the situation that it could be challenging for yourselves. I hope when the children go to Llanfechain that they're treated right.

Teacher: It has been more inclusive. At times in the past we have eaten our lunch separate and things, and that has been really uninclusive. We discussed that to move forward and work together to create solutions.

Headteacher: I think there is a difficulty when you're part of a very small community and you go into a larger community, the dynamics can seem quite challenging. You've got lots of children coming from lots of different backgrounds, different cultures, but are coming together, and misunderstandings do occur. It doesn't happen here very much as they all know each other. However this is different in a larger environment. Wherever they are going it's really important they're supported. One of the risks that these children here have at the moment is that everything is so safe and so secure that anything else is going to seem too challenging.

Marianne Evans: Should the proposal go forward, we should be working with Llanfechain and any other school, should the child choose another school. We work with that school then to provide support for the transition and to make it as easy as possible for not only the child but also the family. It's all difficult, but it's manageable.

Member of Staff: Most of the children that come here aren't from here, some are from England so the transitions are going to be different.

Headteacher: You also have the added complication of not wanting to move, so the alternative isn't a welcome alternative and you're hypervigilant in that situation, as anybody would be. I think it's a very complicated and very grown-up dynamic that these very young, immature children have to get their heads around and they're impacted by their peers around them. They're impacted by what they're hearing at home, there's a lot of things impacting them and it's not as simple as picking them up from one place and putting them into another place.

Marianne Evans: That's where it's important that there is support, from us and the school improvement team, HR and the ALN team. We're all here to support if this goes forward.

Member of Staff: I think the parents will need support with moving their children or what happens next. The parents don't really understand what's going on, but I think they're seriously going to need as to what they do next. Some of them are in Reception and that's the first time they've been in School, they don't really know what they're doing. Also, children settling from a school of seven where you're all friends and everybody knows each other to maybe a school of 100. That's a massive transition for a child, and there are never not going to be problems. If it all goes forward do they get transition days in the summer and things like that?

Marianne Evans: A lot depends on the receiving school and the headteacher.

Sarah Astley: The first part to work through if we get there is the admissions arrangements, and securing places in alternative schools, as everyone's situation will be slightly different in terms of transport entitlement and so on. Once parents have worked through that stage and we know where the pupils are going, then it's the transition to the receiving schools.

Headteacher: I think there's a lot of work to be done between the receiving schools and parents to help them feel confident, because at the moment their confidence has been shattered. You also talked about transport, will all of the pupils here get transport and where will they get it too?

Marianne Evans: We will have to follow the Council Policy which is that if the child lives more than 2 miles away from their closest school, then they get transport. So we wouldn't be providing transport to children who live closer to Pontrobert, or if they live in England, we wouldn't be able to provide transport for those pupils.

Headteacher: What about if pupils live closer to Llangedwyn but Llanfechain isn't their next closest school, would you provide transport to them?

Marianne Evans: We would provide transport to Llanfechain.

Teacher: On the Pontrobert example, Pontrobert is a Welsh Language School. Say hypothetically if somebody lived in Pontrobert and that was their closest school, would they get transport to their closest English medium school?

Marianne Evans: No, because the new Council policy came in in 2020. So we only transport to the closest school. In the last previous version of the transport policy, we transported to the closest school in the language of choice, now that's changed in the latest policy.

Teacher: I have a question linked to transition and ALN. Is there any consideration for children with additional learning needs as an extra within this procedure to help the process of what's going on but also in terms of the transitions of those children and those learners?

Eurig Towns: Yes, we will work with the receiving school, so they can understand the needs of the pupils and they can then set them up ready for that transition. That might include additional transition days. We might work more with the school prior to them starting so they get to know the pupil and their needs. If there is funding attached to that pupil, then the funding will go with that pupil.

Teacher: A lot of our children with ALN have discussed transferring to Ysgol Llanfyllin for transition purposes and secondary school, that might be more appropriate to their needs. There are a few parents with those thoughts at the moment.

Eurig Towns: It might be that some of the parents would like to go out and see some of the schools, it's a big decision for them if they need to make it. They want to make sure the next move for the pupils is the right one, they need to take that time. It's better to do that and go and visit the schools.

Barry Wilson: From your experience, when the uncertainty occurs, which there is now, does there tend to be a drift in pupil numbers before the decision is made and when the decisions is then made does the 7 pupils suddenly become 3 in the final term?

Marianne Evans: In the last consultation the numbers stayed the same in the schools, sometimes there have been a few cases where pupils have chosen to go early but that hardly happens. The school body stays the same from the beginning of the process to the end mostly.

Teacher: We've lost 4 children since the announcement of the consultation.

Marianne Evans: It could be different here as you're in a very small school, others we are talking about were schools with 36 pupils. We have a similar situation in Mid Powys where a Primary School which had around 30 pupils at the beginning of the year started losing pupils quite suddenly. Parents started taking their children out, not because of the school but more because there was no after school club. As the numbers then fell, the parents started to get concerned about friendship groups etc. It got to the point where they are now down to 19.

Eurig Towns: It fell to 19 within about 6 – 8 months.

Marianne Evans: It does sometimes happen, but in others where there have been proposals numbers have stayed the same through to the end.

Eurig Towns: In one school in the South, the parents said they were going to keep the pupils there because it's their school, they wanted to make sure that their experience was positive, and that when they did go it was positive.

Marianne Evans: In that school, most if not all of the pupils ended up transferring to the same school.

Are there any further questions? The Consultation finishes next week, so you can still send your thoughts and views over.

Sarah Astley: If there's anything else you can think of or anything you want to ask, or written comments you want to provide please send them onto us. After the meeting tonight we'll type up the notes and we'll send them onto Catherine. We will try and get them to you in the next couple of weeks.

Barry Wilson: Will the Staff here hear the decisions beforehand, are they going to be reading it on social media? Or will they be told before it goes public?

Sarah Astley: The next thing that will go out will be the Cabinet papers, they will be published with the consultation report, which will include a recommendation. We'll make sure you know what the recommendation is before the papers are published.

Marianne Evans: Once the papers are published, that's when we can send you the link. We'll tell you what the recommendation is, so you're ready.

Headteacher: Once the decision has been made, would it be possible for somebody to ring the school to let us know what the decision is? It would make a difference, it's still not easy to hear.

Barry Wilson: When they consider a recommendation, we all know nothing is 100% but in what percentage does the recommendation tend to be agreed, is it 80% chance?

Eurig Towns: That's a hard one as previously there was a proposal that went forward, the case was strong but it was decided not to go forward with the proposal.

Barry Wilson: So the recommendation isn't guaranteed?

Eurig Towns: Not guaranteed no.

Marianne Evans: We will be considering all views and preparing a consultation report then the recommendations are put forward, however we won't know what the recommendation is until we've done all of the work.

Sarah Astley: Once there is a recommendation, normally the recommendation is supported by Cabinet, but not always, there have been situations where the

recommendation has not been supported. In this case, the recommendation this time will be about proceeding with the process, so the recommendation will be either to carry on with the process through publishing a statutory notice, or not to carry on. So whatever the recommendation is, it's still not going to be a final recommendation or decision. It's going to be a recommendation to carry on or not to carry on. The following cabinet decision would then be the final decision, if the process was to carry on.

Headteacher: So the final decision is not going to be made until the Spring?

Sarah Astley: Yes that is correct.

Marianne Evans: Thank you very much for the meeting, your comments, your views and I think we've had some very important things come through which we will be taking into account.

Consultation meeting with Governors of Llangedwyn C. in W. School

16th November 2023

Present

Governors:

Chris Richards, Chair of Governors

Alison Alexander, Governor

Catherine Hart, Headteacher

Jo Moller, Governor

Mark Hamer, Governor

Officers:

Lynette Lovell, Director of Education

Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation

Eurig Towns, Service Manager for School Improvement

Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education

Mari Thomas, Deputy Head of Finance (via Teams)

Fracis Hydes, Finance Manager (via Teams)

Lynette Lovell welcomed all to the meeting. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

It was explained that there would be a brief presentation with an opportunity for discussion, comments, and questions to the officers afterwards. It was explained that the meeting would be recorded for minuting purposes but the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been completed and agreed.

Marianne Evans gave a PowerPoint presentation which outlined the background to the current proposal and explained that in October 2023, Powys County Council's Cabinet gave approval to proceed with a proposal to close Llangedwyn C. in W. School. The consultation commenced on 12 October 2023, and it will continue until the 23 November 2023.

The proposal is:

- To close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School.

Governors were then given the opportunity to ask any questions or to make any comments in relation to the matter.

Chair of Governors: We spent a lot of time at our governors meeting last night agreeing our our written response, it won't be any different to what we will say tonight.

Governor: Is the timeline you shared in the presentation included in the consultation document?

Marianne Evans: Yes, it is, and it could go either way depending on the level of responses, but that is the general timeline.

Governor: I would prefer if it we can email over our written response, rather than fill out the form. I will summarise the key point tonight.

The first thing I would like to say is, we are really disappointed to be in this position, it's really sad for us. Collectively the Governors have got dozens if not hundreds of years of experience and it is a really difficult place for us to be. We have discovered that the school has been here for nearly 200 years and we believe it's a wonderful school. It provides an excellent start for Children's lives.

We recognise the strengths of the federation, we insitiagted the federation ourselves and we believe that strengthened both schools and the pupils have benefited from that. So we've been proactive and the issue is clearly pupil numbers. We strongly feel that the current transformation programme and the previous transformation in 2020 has had a significant impact on numbers, because it reduces parents' confidence when they hear at least twice that the school may be closed and if they have been around long enough for three times and if they've been around even longer maybe four or five times. We believe that has had a major impact on the school numbers. It didn't help that the previous transformation started and then fizzled out, so we think that is a major factor.

We also think that the second blow is the funding formula, it feels as if it was designed to punish small schools, to move to a per child formula so you're almost in a spiral, when we look at our potential deficit, it's just unsustainable. It's nearly £200,000 and that is not a result of poor management.

I would argue that our governing bodies, in the past and since we federated, have got an excellent track record of managing the very little money we get. But clearly a cost per pupil of £12,000 per head and potential deficit of £180 – £190,000 is unsustainable. We feel the funding deficit and the reduction in numbers have combined. These also lead to safeguarding issues. The low numbers of staff we can afford, means that we're at the point of a single point of failure, in other words if we lose a single member of staff we have to consider closing the school that cannot be acceptable.

We understand about the Welsh Curriculum, we have some views, we still have those views about what you might call a small school of 91, but clearly the number of children here presents all sorts of challenges for the Headteacher.

What we have found as well is that two potential closures, reducing pupil number and budgets that aren't manageable have had a massive impact on the wellbeing of our staff. I have been the wellbeing governor and I have seen it first-hand.

I would like to say thank you for your level of engagement with us this time as the time before it was outrageous. You will recall that at the time I wrote to the Authority and we received an apology, but the engagement this time in fairness to the authority has been much more effective, but there's still been a massive impact.

We are trying to manage that, and would look to the authority for support. We also understand that pupil numbers are at the point that this school can be closed without the transformation process as we're under 10, we can understand that. There are a few things we would like you to consider, and we would like some assurance that these can be taken to Cabinet.

The school has a reputation for supporting the most vulnerable children. What are the authority's proposals around ALN as schools get bigger and bigger? There's evidence that small schools can support the most vulnerable children, they provide a nurturing, family environment. If there are no schools like that left what are the other proposals to support those children? We think it's a risk for those children to go to bigger and bigger schools. What proposals does the authority have to deal with that?

If you are going to close the school and Ysgol Bro Cynllaith there would be no English language primary education in the valley given that the intention is to move Llanrhaeadr along the language continuum. That is a risk, and we'd like to see what your proposals are. We've done everything we can in terms of federating these schools. We welcome the fact you've recognised the need to retain some of the Church in Wales places that are currently here, they won't all be retained but some will. Previously, in 2020 the Authority proposed to remove them all.

But the background is the capacity and if we move the children today, there is no space for them at Llanfechain. We would like to see an assurance in the recommendation to Cabinet that additional accommodation would be provided in Llanfechain. We would also like to see the transition managed properly in terms of admissions; we want an assurance that no-one will be rejected.

The other big one for us is your proposal is to eventually build a new school in the Llansantffraid/Llanfechain area, but at best that's 5 years away. Your own reports say Llanfechain has a £500,000 maintenance backlog. If you've been to the school, parts of the school haven't been painted since I started as a governor, apart from the bits that have been painted by parents. We would like assurance in the recommendation to Cabinet that the authority will develop a funded maintenance programme to get Llanfechain back to a reasonable standard. You are saying you want it to stay open, to provide Church in Wales places, however we would like to see a commitment to see some funding given to make sure Llanfechain has enough capacity. We also know that parents from other schools want to bring their children

to Llanfechain, we know that Llansantffraid is over capacity, so we would like to see a commitment to extra capacity and get the building to a better standard.

The conclusion is we've run out of road in Llangedwyn, it's unsustainable. We reluctantly accept the fact that despite all of our efforts from all of the parents, pupils and governors over the years, we've reached the end of the road that we have to accept the options being proposed, with the caveats that you have to commit to the things we have asked for. We will be submitting our written response shortly.

Marianne Evans: I have made a note of your points and we will start to address a few things. First of all, thank you for your response. We understand how difficult this is for you. We also understand how difficult it is for your staff, pupils and parents. Part of the process is to make sure your staff are cared for and supported. We had HR in the staff meeting, and offers have been made for them to come up and do one to one sessions, in terms of staff I think that will help.

Eurig Towns: The offer of support from staff is from now, it's not dependent on the outcome of the consultation.

Headteacher: HR agreed they were going to come before Christmas.

Governor: Thank you for that, as that is not the support we had in 2020 and we felt battered. We feel battered this time but in a different way.

Marianne Evans: In terms of yourselves as governors, you're volunteers doing a really difficult job in difficult circumstances, so we do appreciate the level of commitment you provide to the two schools, to the federation. We worked with you to establish the federation, we can see that it has been successful in terms of working together. Pupil numbers are an issue, sadly. You mentioned the funding formula, we recognise that there is an issue.

Governor: We know it quite well, we know what the impact is. We know that the funding formula is a result of the Welsh Government policy. Our view was it feels like it was designed to impact small schools. It has had this effect of impacting small schools and you get into this spiral.

Marianne Evans: In terms of the operational difficulties of managing such a small school and sorting staffing and making it safe, yes small schools can manage if they're up to a level. If they then fall below that level, it becomes a dangerous situation.

Governor: The numbers go down, the budget deficit goes up. If we need to put another teacher in, we can't afford it, so we're in a difficult situation. We can't just spend the money as there's a big deficit, so we are in an impossible situation.

Lynette Lovell: You mentioned well-being, we are really aware of the well-being of staff across the board. What we do have this time is we do employ some totally independent from the local authority, who was a headteacher in Powys years ago. She works alongside us, but independently, particularly with the headteacher.

Headteacher: She has been in touch.

Lynette Lovell: She will be available anytime that you want her to visit, talk, we can put that in place.

Headteacher: I think also it's not just the well-being of the staff, it's also having a huge impact on the pupils and parents as nothing is happening in isolation. That's a real concern for me as I can see people struggling everywhere and I can't stop it. It is a difficulty with the process, but it is having a big impact.

Marianne Evans: It's had an impact on you as the head. You are the Head of Llanfechain as well, so there's a difficult dynamic to manage within that. Let us know if there is anything we can do to help you.

Governor: Obviously we are a federated governing body and potentially one of the schools is going to close, we need to understand the mechanism of what would happen. What would be the make up of the governing body? If the federation ceases when does it cease? Do you have a shadow governing body?

Marianne Evans: I am going to jump to the point you made around ALN and the ALN strategy for pupils moving to larger schools.

Lynette Lovell: In terms of the ALN strategy, in the New Year we'll be looking at our ALN strategy and providing nurture and shaping the way we provide that nurture in schools. Already in some of our larger schools we have nurture groups and classes, family liaison officers. I was school improvement officer here a number of years ago, when I came here the numbers were in the 50s, you had children with needs travelling into the school.

Governor: I think the issue is many of our parents associate small schools with good provision. If there are no small schools left then parents associate that with there isn't any nurturing care. You've got a big challenge on your hands to convince parents that you can achieve that in a bigger school. People drive past other schools to come to smaller schools.

Lynette Lovell: It is a challenge, but I think it can happen because we see it happening in lots of our schools where the larger schools provide care, support and nurture which is really strong. Scrutiny Committee have asked for member development on ALN and the act. I think there is work to do in our messaging about ALN provision and nurture provision which isn't always necessarily in the smaller schools but in the larger schools.

Governor: What we're looking for is a reflection of that in the recommendation to Cabinet, a recognition of the strength of this small school in that respect, and something in the report to cabinet that we recognise that and that there are plans to deal with it.

Lynette Lovell: I think that will be a really good point for us to bring out in Cabinet. Your local member will be able to attend, and can ask that publicly if you want them to ask that question.

Headteacher: I think also within this school and within Llanfechain we have staff that are highly qualified in nurture provision and it's about utilising their skills to support. I'm aware of learners changing schools and the impact that can have, so I think there should be support available for those more vulnerable learners with that transition with staff. To build up a nurturing relationship that is really beneficial takes time, and for some there is a risk that the person they have spent years building that trust with is just going to be taken away alongside moving schools. Those people could go, so that's the continuity of nurture that we want.

Marianne Evans: Your next question was about what happens to Ysgol Bro Cynllaith?

Governor: We were just wondering if that were to close, it's not in the paper but what we discussed as a governing body, say people wanted to take their children to an English medium school, what support would they have.

Marianne Evans: With Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, in the same way as Llangedwyn, the catchment review paper indicated a preferred way forward to close the school. However, we would have to do exactly the same process, bring proposal papers to Cabinet, so no decisions have been made around Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. We need to see what happens to Llangedwyn, as it all interlinks in this catchment. One thing that happens has a knock on effect on others. The border issue does come into play here, and the language issue. Things can't happen at once in a catchment like this, things have to happen in a sequence.

Jumping to admissions in Llanfechain, we are absolutely aware of the capacity. We know there have been difficulties around admissions in terms of some in-year transfers. If this is a Council proposal to close a school and we are naming a receiving school, we believe that the provision in the admission code for exceptional circumstances should apply. The admissions policy itself has a clause, which means that pupils can be admitted.

What we don't want is a situation where we're closing a school and parents have to go through the ordeal of the school closure and then find themselves in a situation where they're refused admission into the main receiving school.

Headteacher: That's what we've been told is the situation at the moment.

Marianne Evans: We will be looking into and managing that. In terms of the space, I hear what you're saying, and about the backlog maintenance in Llanfechain, we will be looking at that. We will bring the property team up to have a look what's needed in Llanfechain.

Governor: We are looking for recognition of that in the report, we need that commitment. We're looking for some acknowledgement that the issues we have raised will actually be in the Cabinet paper, for Cabinet to say 'yes we agree you need more capacity', and then send officers away to bring back proposals of how you are going to do that. If it's not in the Cabinet paper we know it won't happen.

Governor: Another question is the size of the maintenance backlog. I understand in May last year a review of the maintenance backlog across all schools in Powys started and we're not aware there's been any reviewing since.

Marianne Evans: It hasn't started yet, however there are two things going on. The Council are doing their own condition assessment of schools, looking at condition issues, whilst Welsh Government are doing their own survey of schools, looking at energy and carbon zero issues. There is going to be quite a lot of information coming out over the next year from both. The current backlog figure in Llanfechain is based on a formula calculation.

Governor: As a federation we know what the issues are and have been asking for a long time. It seems wrong we're going to accommodate extra pupils. I accept we can't put everything right, but there should be some sort of programme so that parents know that that school is going to start to feel like a nicer place to be, because it feels run down.

Headteacher: Some of the issues that have been raised are safeguarding issues. There's an urgency there.

Marianne Evans: We do hear what you're saying and we are going to take it into consideration.

Sarah Astley: In terms of the earlier queries regarding governance. This isn't a situation we've had previously, however should the decision be made to close, the federation governing body would cease to exist. We would then work with the governor support team to support you with this going forward.

Marianne Evans: Do you want to say anything regarding curriculum challenges?

Governor: The Headteacher keeps us very informed in terms of what's changing etc.

Lynette Lovell: I think your comment on the curriculum is very fair. When numbers are as low as this it does become more challenging.

Governor: Unfortunately 2-3 years ago, it became a sort of catchphrase with some politicians, that you can't do the national curriculum in a small school. We used to say yes you can, but when you get to a school of 7, that's the issue.

Headteacher: For me it's accepting that whilst you teach a lot of the content and cover this, what you can't do is develop four purposes. There just isn't the people to do it with.

Lynette Lovell: Yes, as you say, you don't have the people to do it and then a lot falls on the headteacher to be able to develop those things.

Headteacher: We do work through the federation, we draw expertise from other schools, but there's only so much you can do. This is all day every day and we want it to be the best experience, these children only have one chance.

Governor: If they haven't got the peers it becomes very difficult, it becomes hard to put the next steps in then.

Headteacher: Especially when you build challenge, because challenge comes from the teachers and it also comes from the other children.

Marianne Evans: Is there anything else you want to discuss?

Governor: It's a really sad time for us. I'm grateful for you coming up tonight and you've heard our views about the actions of the authority and how we think that's impacted on the numbers. A series of threats of closure can do nothing but damage to the reputation of the school. That's a product of what's happened. Then there's the funding formula which is the other thing which leads us to where we're just unsustainable.

Lynette Lovell: I think in terms of that you've been very clear tonight. You've given us very clear messages, we've got things to take in from the information you've given us. The consultation is still open until next week for parents to send in and whoever else wants too.

Marianne Evans: In terms of the pupil consultation, we've agreed that the Headteacher will speak with pupils on our behalf so that we can hear the learner voice, because of the concerns parents have raised about pupils meeting with us.

Lynette Lovell: Thank you all, it's been a really helpful meeting this evening. We will keep you informed as the process goes forward.