

MEETING	Gwynedd Council Cabinet
DATE	19 May 2020
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams
OFFICER	Gwern ap Rhisiart
TITLE OF ITEM	Ysgol Llanaelhaearn

1. DECISION SOUGHT

The Cabinet is asked to confirm the final proposal given by statutory notice, to close Ysgol Llanaelhaearn on 31 August 2020 and provide a place for pupils at Ysgol Bro Plenydd, Y Ffôr from 1 September 2020, in accordance with Section 53 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the requirements of the School Organisation Code 11/2018.

2. REASON WHY DECISION IS NEEDED

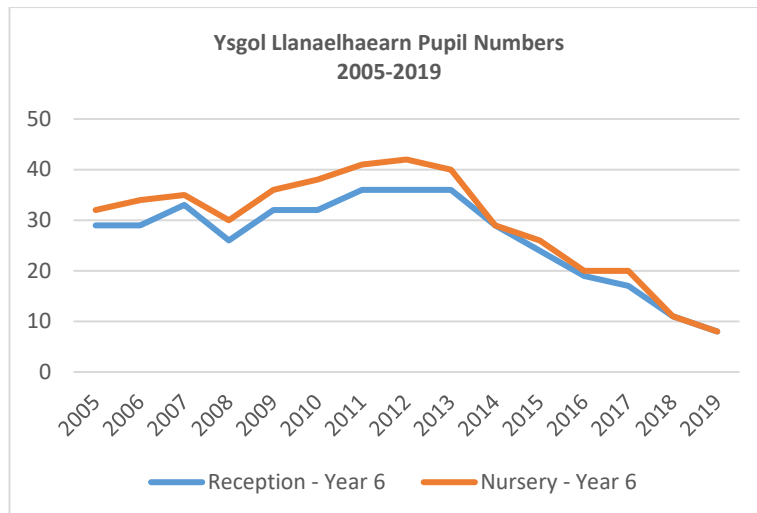
2.1 The purpose of this report is to report to the Cabinet following the objection period for the proposal to close Ysgol Llanaelhaearn on 31 August 2020 and provide a place for pupils at Ysgol Bro Plenydd, Y Ffôr from 1 September 2020. The Statutory Notice was published on the 5th March 2020, commencing a 28 day objection period. The objection period ended on 3rd April 2020, and no objections were received.

3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 A report was submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 4 June 2019, where it was resolved to, *'grant permission to the Education Department to hold formal meetings with the governing body and other relevant stakeholders to discuss a range of potential options for the school's future'*, as a result of concern over a significant drop in numbers attending school.

3.2 Following these meetings, a report was submitted to a Cabinet meeting on 5 November 2019 where the decision was approved to *'begin a period of statutory consultation, in accordance with Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation 2 (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposed proposal to close Ysgol Llanaelhaearn on 31 August 2020 and to provide places for pupils at Ysgol Bro Plenydd, Y Ffôr, on 1 September 2020'*.

3.3 This report outlined the main challenges facing the school, namely that there has been a recent substantial drop in numbers attending the school which has led to a critical situation with 8 pupils on the register in the September 2019 census (see below). These 8 pupils are taught in two classes. In addition, projections show a further fall over the next 5 years.



3.4 As a result of the low numbers, it is acknowledged that the school is in a vulnerable position and under increasing budgetary pressures. The latest official data demonstrates that:

- school numbers are of concern. In September 2019, eight pupils were registered at the school.
- classroom sizes are small - with one class of 3 pupils and one class of 5.
- projections indicate seven pupils in 2020, five pupils in 2021, and five pupils in 2022.
- 42 primary age children live in the Llanaelhaearn catchment area, 34 of whom attend other schools.
- Ysgol Llanaelhaearn receives an additional sum to the usual allocation via the minimum staffing protection policy. For the 2020/21 financial year this additional sum amounts to £55,055. At present, the School shares a Headteacher with two other schools, and employs a full-time teacher and assistant. The current budget does not allow for this arrangement to continue.
- per pupil cost for Ysgol Llanaelhaearn during the 2020/21 financial year is £17,051, compared with the county-wide average per pupil cost of £4,198 for the same period.
- there are 83% surplus places (39 Reception to Year 6, and six surplus places in Nursery).

3.5 Statutory Consultation

The consultation was held between 16 December 2019 and 29 January 2020 and 8 responses were received. One of the recurring issues raised during the consultation was transport arrangements following the closure of Ysgol Llanaelhaearn. Due to the school's current arrangement of sharing a headteacher with Ysgol Chwilog, pupils from Ysgol Llanaelhaearn have been attending Ysgol Chwilog on two afternoons a week for some time, and are already familiar with the teachers and other pupils. It emerged from the consultation responses that parents were likely to request that their children transfer to Ysgol Chwilog rather than attend the alternative school, Ysgol Bro Plenydd. As a result, special transport arrangements to specific schools will be considered during the transition period in order to minimise its effect on the existing pupils at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn.

3.6 Following the consultation, a report was prepared for Cabinet on 18 February 2020, and the Cabinet considered the consultation report and resolved to *accept the observations received during the statutory consultation period as well as agreeing to:*

- i. *Approve the proposal to close Ysgol Llanaelhaearn on 31 August 2020, and provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Bro Plenydd, Y Ffôr from 1 September 2020.*
- ii. *Approve the publication of statutory notices on the proposal in (i) above in accordance with the requirements of Section 48 of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.*
- iii. *Approve the transport arrangements for the transition period only, when free transport will be available for those pupils enrolled at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn currently, to Ysgol Bro Plenydd, Y Ffôr or Ysgol Chwilog specifically, if they live over two miles from the chosen school, or that they receive free transport because of the nature of the roads in accordance with Gwynedd Council's current transport policy.*

3.7 Objection Period

The Statutory Notice was published on 5 March 2020, commencing a 28 day objection period. Hard copies were placed on the doors and gates of Llanaelhaearn and Bro Plenydd schools. Stakeholders received an email informing them that the objection period had begun and hard copies were distributed to parents of pupils. The objection period ended on 3rd April 2020, and no objections were received. This report is presented for the Cabinet to consider the situation before reaching a final decision whether to confirm the proposal.

4. REASON AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE 'DECISION SOUGHT'

- 4.1** In line with the '*Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd*' Strategy a number of factors were considered in developing and evaluating options for the situation.
- 4.2** These issues were covered in detail in the report presented to Cabinet on 5th November 2019, and in the statutory consultation document thereafter. A summary of the impact of the proposal on these factors is demonstrated in Appendix 1, using the latest official data.
- 4.3** Having held the objection period through the issue of a statutory notice, and the fact that no objections were received, the Authority is of the view that implementing this proposal is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the proposal, which are noted in Section 3.3, as none of the other options considered during the process would address the key issues facing the school. In line with the School Organisation Code 11/2018, the following factors were considered in reaching this conclusion:

4.3.1 Quality and Standards in Education

According to the most recent Estyn reports, Ysgol Bro Plenydd would offer education of equal if not better quality than Ysgol Llanaelhaearn.

The alternative school offers education of at least equal standard, and provides pupils with more opportunities for collaborating and socialising with their peers, and enables the pupils to gain a range of curricular and extracurricular experiences.

Due to the existing low pupil to teacher ratio at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn, the children are making good progress. Delivering this proposal would give pupils opportunities to be educated in peer groups with a far smaller age range and would provide daily opportunities to improve the pupils' educational and social experience.

The needs of any vulnerable groups, including children with additional learning needs, would be assessed and implemented in line with the Authority's policy and procedures.

4.3.2 The need for places and the impact on accessibility of schools

Pupils will be educated in classes which are more appropriate in size in comparison to the current situation. Implementing the proposal would lead to better consistency in class sizes and reduce the age range within primary school classes in the area. With 23 surplus places (and seven surplus places for Nursery), Ysgol Bro Plenydd has sufficient capacity for the number of pupils from both schools currently and for the next three years.

Ysgol Bro Plenydd is a community, Welsh medium school, as is Ysgol Llanaelhaearn.

4.3.3 Resourcing of Education and other financial implications

Implementing the proposal would rationalise the per pupil cost in schools which would reduce the range in the per pupil cost for all Gwynedd children. It is estimated that realising the proposal would lead to a cost of £4,296 per pupil at Ysgol Bro Plenydd compared to the current £17,051 per pupil cost at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn. The county-wide average for the same period is £4,198 per pupil.

It is estimated that realising the proposal would lead to revenue savings of between £92,213 and £105,813 per annum having considered additional transport arrangements. The estimate of £105,813 in revenue savings is based on factoring in the transport costs for existing pupils at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn to their new school, whether that be Ysgol Chwilog or Ysgol Bro Plenydd. Similarly, the estimated revenue saving of £92,213 is based on a future scenario, where all primary age children in the Llanaelhaearn catchment would attend their new catchment school, Ysgol Bro Plenydd, and would be eligible for transport in accordance with the Authority's current transport policy.

Pupils would be educated at a school where the numbers and projections are more robust and sustainable for the future, reducing the rate of surplus places in the area's schools from 35% to 27% once the proposal has been implemented.

4.3.4 Specific factors when considering school closures

During the process of engaging and meeting with the school's relevant stakeholders, a number of possible options were considered for the school's future. All options were evaluated against the factors of the '*Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd*' Strategy. A full evaluation of these options was provided as an appendix to the report presented to Cabinet on 18 February 2020 and a summary of the comparison of the current situation with the likely situation should the proposal be implemented is included in Appendix 1 of this report.

4.3.5 Presumption against the closure of rural schools

A number of impact assessments have been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code 011/2018 including:

- *Assessment of likely Impact on different travel arrangements*
- *Assessment of likely impact on the community*
- *Assessment of likely impact on quality and standards of education*

These assessments were reviewed following the statutory consultation and these assessments are included as an annex to the report presented to Cabinet on 18 February 2020.

The assessment of the likely effect on different transport arrangements concludes that the option to close the school would mean that pupils from Ysgol Llanaelhaearn would need to travel further to school every day. As the alternative school is more than two miles from their homes, they would be entitled to free transport to the alternative school. Ysgol Bro Plenydd is located 3.6 miles from Ysgol Llanaelhaearn, and it is anticipated that the journey would take approximately 5 minutes each way in a car or by bus, which is within the reasonable distance expected for primary children to travel to their school in accordance with the expectation of the '*Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd Strategy*' of 30 minutes each way. Transport to the alternative school would be offered in line with Gwynedd Council transport policy.

In addition, the assessment of the likely impact on the community states that there would be some negative impact from closing the school. However, it notes that seven pupils who live in the Llanaelhaearn catchment area currently attend Ysgol Bro Plenydd. Therefore, a link between the school and the wider area already exists. The community assessment notes that the school is involved with the Llanaelhaearn community, even though the community does not currently use the school building. Discussions will be held about the potential of including the community of Llanaelhaearn in the community activities of Ysgol Bro Plenydd.

The conclusion of the assessment of the likely impact on the quality and standards of education is summarised in section 4.3.1 of this report.

Following the objection period, the Education Department continues to be of the opinion that no other option would address the key challenges facing the school, namely:

- low pupil numbers
- projections indicating a further fall in numbers over the next five years
- existing pupils are educated in classes which are small in numbers – with one class of three pupils and one class of five.

5. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the impact assessments carried out in accordance with specific 'presumption against closure of a rural school' guidelines a number of other impact assessments were undertaken and updated during the process. These assessments are included as an appendix to the report presented to Cabinet on 18 February 2020 and their conclusions are summarised below.

5.1 Equality Assessment

An equality assessment was held on the options, which focused on different equality elements such as race, sex, disability, language, religion or creed, and age. The equality assessment stated the importance of positively promoting equal opportunities in light of the proposal, and that measures should be in place to ensure unlawful discrimination and harassment does not occur. Arrangements are also in place to monitor and review the situation.

5.2 Language Impact Assessment

The Language Impact Assessment does not anticipate a negative impact on the Welsh language from the proposal, mainly because:

- i. The alternative school provides a Welsh medium education, also provided for pupils at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn.
- ii. Statistics from the 2011 census for the Llanaelhaearn ward indicates that 74% of the population is Welsh speaking, and 80% of the population of the Abererch ward speaks Welsh. Ysgol Bro Plenydd's catchment area is within the Abererch ward (Office for National Statistics).
- iii. PLASC January 2019 statistics show that 54% of pupils at Ysgol Llanaelhaearn speak Welsh fluently at home compared to 83% of pupils at Ysgol Bro Plenydd.

5.3 Well-being Assessment (Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015)

The Education Department has a role in promoting the well-being objectives of the Act amongst pupils in the county through its activities and projects. The Act sets a duty on public bodies in Wales to improve economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. As part of the duty, the Council has published well-being objectives which outline the way it will improve well-being in the "2018-2023 Gwynedd Plan".

Following consideration and an assessment in line with the requirements of the Well-being Act, it is concluded that the proposal meets the seven well-being objectives within the Act, together with the Council's well-being objectives. This proposal will allow us to respond to and address the children's needs today, and strengthen their future well-being. The proposal will ensure that the children of the area are educated on a site that is suitable and in a naturally Welsh-speaking community, thus increasing the opportunities to socialise and collaborate with others, and to give them an equal opportunity to thrive amongst their peers

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1** This recommendation follows consideration of a range of options. These options were fully evaluated when comparing main advantages and disadvantages against specific factors. The *'Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd' strategy*, the School Organisation Code, the conclusions of the impact assessments and other relevant factors were used in evaluating the options.
- 6.2** As no objections were received during the objection period, and the fact that no alternative option was identified which would address the main challenges facing the school, it is recommended that Cabinet approves the decision sought which is to confirm the proposal given by statutory notice to close Ysgol Llanaelhaearn on 31 August 2020, in accordance with Section 53 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the requirements of the School Organisation Code 11/2018.

7. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

7.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision, these are the next steps in the process together with an outline timetable;

June 2020	Decision referred to Welsh Ministers: In accordance with section 54 of the 2013 Act, within 28 days of the Cabinet's decision, the following bodies can refer the proposal to Welsh Ministers for a decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Another Local Authority affected by the proposals;ii. The appropriate religious body for any school affected;iii. The governing body of a voluntary or established school subject to proposals;iv. A trust holding property on behalf of a voluntary or established school subject to proposals;v. A further education establishment affected by the proposals.
31 August 2020	Implementation of the proposal: Ysgol Llanaelhaearn officially closes, subject to the Cabinet's decision.

8. VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

The report describes the steps followed in the process and in particular the implementation of the statutory objection period the report notes that no objections to the proposal were received following publication. This follows publication of the notice on the site, website as well as directly contacting the stakeholders listed in the School Organisation Code which represent a wide range including parents, governors and statutory bodies at a local and National level. I'm satisfied that the recommendation is appropriate.

Head of Finance:

I confirm that the financial figures in part 3.4 (d) and (e) and part 4.3.3 of the report, together with the financial figures contained in the 'Financial Resources' section of Appendix 1, are both true and correct costs, or are fair estimates (where appropriate) having considered the cost of transport.

There are clear reasons to support the proposal to close Ysgol Llanaelhaearn on 31 August 2020, including financial reasons such as an annual saving of between £92,213 and £105,813 in revenue costs, and the current cost of Ysgol Llanaelhaearn at £17,051 per pupil, compared with county's average £4,198. Therefore, I support the recommendation.

Local Member:

The Local Member did not wish to comment.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Summary of the impact of the proposal on the factors of the '*Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd*' Strategy

Appendix 2: Equality Impact and the Well-being of Future Generations Act Assessments

Appendix 3: [Copy of Statutory Notice](#)

Appendix 4: [Consultation Document](#)

Appendix 5: [Cabinet Report 18 February 2020](#)

Appendix 6: [Cabinet Report 5 November 2019](#)

Appendix 7: [Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd Strategy](#)