

Proposal to review Primary Education Provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas

Consultation Report



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Executive Summary

The Consultation Period

On the 11th January 2021 Carmarthenshire County Council published a proposal to:

- Review Primary Education Provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas.

The consultation period commenced on 11th January 2021 in line with the publication of the proposal and closed on 16th July 2021 with a total of 420 responses received (excluding the responses received from Estyn and the pupils' consultation events) in response to the formal consultation.

Responses Received			
Online Survey	E-mail	Letter	Total
324	41	55	420

It must be noted that of the 420 observations received, all were received prior to the end of the consultation period.

Consultation Events

Due to the ongoing implications of the Coronavirus pandemic we were advised to postpone all events where there was interaction between staff, parents and the wider community and as a result virtual drop-in sessions were held via Microsoft Teams.

Informal

Virtual informal drop-in sessions were held prior to the beginning of the formal consultation period with relevant stakeholders.

Formal

A virtual formal drop-in session was held on **26 January 2021 at 4:30pm for a period of two hours**. The formal consultation drop-in session was attended by 21 stakeholders.

Responses Received

The responses received have been categorised into the following themes:

Supportive

- Theme 1 - No reason
- Theme 2 - Support for the proposal
- Theme 3 - Future education of pupils
- Theme 4 - Safe routes and parking
- Theme 5 - Not supportive of change in nature of provision
- Theme 6 - Childcare provision
- Theme 7 - Fairness of early years provision
- Theme 8 - Proposed new school site
- Theme 9 - Community facilities
- Theme 10 - Transitional arrangements
- Theme 11 - Inclusion
- Theme 12 - Redundant school sites
- Theme 13 - New school capacity
- Theme 14 - Consulting during a pandemic
- Theme 15 - Support for small schools
- Theme 16 - Supportive of change in nature of provision
- Theme 17 - Re-location of Ysgol Llandybie

Unsure (respondents did not answer yes or no)

- Theme 1 - No reason
- Theme 2 - Status quo

Concerns

- Theme 1 - Community impact
- Theme 2 - Small school preference
- Theme 3 - Status quo
- Theme 4 - Consulting during a pandemic
- Theme 5 - Impact on pupils' travel time and distance
- Theme 6 - Future choice for a small school
- Theme 7 - Success of Ysgol Blaenau's Cylch Meithrin and the impact of closure
- Theme 8 - No reason
- Theme 9 - Concerns with large schools/classes
- Theme 10 – Quality of Consultation Document and misinformation
- Theme 11 – Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
- Theme 12 – Change in nature of provision
- Theme 13 - Condition and suitability of Ysgol Blaenau
- Theme 14 – Impact on the Welsh language
- Theme 15 - New school name
- Theme 16 – Financial pressure
- Theme 17 – Redundant school sites
- Theme 18 – Sustainable leadership
- Theme 19 - Impact of the proposal on current pupils

- Theme 20 - Impact of the proposal/rumours
- Theme 21 - Proposed new school site
- Theme 22 - Impact of the proposal on the village and residents of Llandybie
- Theme 23 - Timing of implementation
- Theme 24 - New school design

Overall Summary

Supportive	36%	Not supportive	63.5%	Unsure	0.5%
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Workshops

Following the closure of the consultation period on the 16 July 2021, a workshop was held to analyse the observations received.

Other Submissions Received

Business Plan

In addition to observations received a Business Plan for Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau was submitted during the formal Consultation Period. The full business plan can be seen at appendix A.

Video

A video was received in lieu of consultees/stakeholders' ability to gather and protest due to the timing of the consultation during a global pandemic and has been passed on to the Cabinet (previously known as the Executive Board).

Petition and Facebook Page Statistics

An online petition "Stop the Closure of Ysgol Blaenau" had received 552 signatures by 10:30pm on 21/02/21.

A Facebook Page "Ysgol Blaenau - SOS - Save our School" also had 428 likes, a post reach of 11,600 and 5,443 post engagements within the week commencing 15/02/21.

Next Steps

The Consultation Report will be presented to the Cabinet who may decide to publish the proposal as consulted upon with appropriate modifications, to abandon the proposals and retain the status quo or to significantly recast the proposal and reconsult.

Should the Cabinet decide to proceed to publish a Statutory Notice, this will be published in due course.

Summary of Observations received and Local Authority Responses

Point Number	Point Raised	Local Authority Response	Number of responses raising this point	% of responses raising this point
Supportive Comments Raised				
1.	No reason Some respondents did not provide a reason for their support.		93	22%
2.	Support for the proposal Respondents recognised the need for investment and the benefits of a new and modern school fit for learning in the 21 st Century.	<p>One of the strategic aims of the Modernising Education Programme is to develop infrastructure at all schools that is equipped for learning in the 21st century, facilitating the realisation of core objectives for raising educational standards and sustaining them at high levels of performance.</p> <p>Schools designed to meet current demands are expected to provide a broad and balanced curriculum through high quality and inspirational teaching all of which will be possible through the realisation of this proposal, should it be accepted.</p>	31	7%
3.	Future education of pupils Respondents acknowledged that the proposal would support the development of an education model fit for the future. Respondents	If the proposal is accepted, its implementation will support the development of a schools' network that is educationally effective, resource efficient and sustainable for the long term. Most importantly, it will ensure a sustainable model of learning provision	7	2%

	recognised how investment would improve education facilities for pupils.	which meets the needs and aspirations of all children now and in the future.		
4.	<p>Safe routes & parking</p> <p>Respondents noted the need to ensure safe routes to school and sufficient parking.</p>	<p>As part of the planning process a full Transport Assessment will be carried out which considers both the current situation and proposed development, this includes assessment of all travel types (motorised vehicles, pedestrian and cycling etc.) including parking provision.</p> <p>The number of parking spaces is regulated by guidance issued by the local planning authority and highways requirements; therefore the number of spaces will be a result of these requirements. The number of spaces will be suitable for all staff, visitors and parents etc. for times when pupils are collected and dropped off. The number of spaces will also allow for events such as parents evenings or Christmas concerts etc.</p>	4	1%
5.	<p>Not supportive of change in nature of provision</p> <p>Respondents did not feel that changing Ysgol Llandybie to Welsh Medium was beneficial to pupils or the right decision. Respondents noted that the school should remain transitional.</p>	<p>This proposal seeks to improve further the opportunity for children attending the school to secure continually improving outcomes. Carmarthenshire County Council has a statutory responsibility under Part 4 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for its area with the explicit aim of improving planning of the provision of education through the medium of</p>	4	1%

		<p>Welsh, from improving the standards of that education and of the teaching of Welsh.</p> <p>In April 2014 the County Council formally adopted a comprehensive strategy for the development of the Welsh language in Carmarthenshire, endorsing the recommendations of a politically balanced group of elected members that had examined in depth the status of the Welsh language in the county in the wake of the 2011 census of the population. The strategy required action on 73 points, 21 of which applied to the education service.</p> <p>The language strategy received cross-party support from elected members when it was adopted at a meeting of the full County Council. On 25th June 2018, the Local Authority launched Carmarthenshire's most recent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The WESP has been subject to public consultation during its preparation and subsequent review. Its contents have, therefore, been subject to a test of public opinion in line with statutory requirements. It has also been approved by the Welsh Government in accordance with the requirements of the Act.</p> <p>The proposal is adhering to the recommendations as set out in Carmarthenshire's WESP.</p> <p>It is important to note that the WESP requires all primary schools in Carmarthenshire, including English medium schools, to move along the</p>		
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		<p>language continuum, progressively expanding the proportion of education that is delivered through the medium of Welsh, with a view to ensuring that in time all children leaving primary school are fully bilingual. The change in language designation of Llandybie would ensure the said aim being more deliverable whilst also ensuring that Blaenau school pupils could transfer on the basis of no detriment to their existing learning arrangements.</p> <p>The pace at which schools will be able to expand bilingualism and Welsh medium education will depend upon local circumstances but the expectation for progress applies to all schools. The school has been identified as having the potential to move quickly along the language continuum and has been in the 'Transitional' designation for a number of years now. (Transitional – a school identified to progress to Welsh medium).</p>		
6.	<p>Childcare provision Respondents noted the need to ensure suitable childcare and wrap around care provision is available at the new school. Respondents also highlighted the need to consider the presence of a Cylch Meithrin in the proposal.</p>	<p>The future location of the Cylch Meithrin at Ysgol Blaenau would be considered as part of the proposal. The new school development would include space for childcare provision.</p> <p>If the proposal is implemented Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie's catchment area would be redesignated to include that of the former Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau catchment area, therefore the community of Blaenau would have access to the childcare provision within the new school development.</p>	2	0.5%

7.	<p>Fairness of Early Years provision Respondents noted the need to have consistency in access to early years provision across the County.</p>	<p>There is a combination of 3-11 and 4-11 primary schools in the county and a review is currently being undertaken on nursery provision, with a report expected to be submitted to elected members in the next 6 months for consideration. If all schools in the county were 3-11 then there would be a risk of non-maintained providers becoming unsustainable. It is important that the authority considers how their policies would impact on private providers.</p>	2	0.5%
8.	<p>Proposed new school site Respondents questioned the suitability of the proposed new school site.</p>	<p>A detailed site selection exercise was undertaken by colleagues in Environment which identified a potential of 7 sites for the new school development. The Recreation Ground scored highly as a potential site following the site selection exercise.</p> <p>Flooding - using the bund and with careful consideration of the existing levels (without removing the flood protection embankment/bund) the new access road has been designed to be wholly within the council owned land, no additional land will be required. A vehicular access to the farmland, and existing pedestrian route will remain. There will be some works on the boundary but this would be subject to party wall notices but at this time would not require the purchase of any additional land.</p>	2	0.5%

9.	Community facilities Respondents noted the need to ensure the new school included facilities which could be shared with the community.	The new school development will be designed to facilitate community use. The proposed investment would benefit both communities from the use of shared facilities outside of school hours.	1	0.2%
10.	Transitional arrangements Respondents questioned whether there would be enough space and resources for both schools during the interim and until the new school is ready for occupation.	The transitional arrangements for the proposal have been carefully planned to minimise disruption and any detrimental impact on learners. During the transitional period pupils will remain on their existing school sites under the management of Ysgol Llandybie until the new build is ready for occupation to accommodate all pupils from Ysgol Blaenau and Ysgol Llandybie.	1	0.2%
11.	Inclusion Respondents noted the need to include Blaenau in the planning and not to leave it to Llandybie Governors alone.	The Local Authority will encourage both schools to work together for the benefit of all pupils. Similarly, both the community of Blaenau and Llandybie will be encouraged to participate in the new school development planning/design consultation process.	1	0.2%
12.	Redundant school sites Respondents questioned what would happen to the former school sites.	Should the proposal be adopted, any redundant property will be transferred to the Regeneration Division for the procedures outlined in the Future Use/Disposal of Redundant Land and Buildings arising from the Modernising Education Programme policy to be actioned. This policy has been developed to allow the community to be offered the	1	0.2%

		<p>asset in the first instance before placing the site on the open market.</p> <p>Any capital receipts received as a result of the proposal would be re-invested into the Modernising Education Programme.</p>		
13.	<p>New school capacity Respondents noted the need to ensure that the increased capacity did not disadvantage pupils.</p>	<p>The new school capacity will be accommodated through sufficient space for the number of pupils; providing a suitable and stimulating learning environment with an ample supply of good learning resources well matched to pupil's needs.</p>	1	0.2%
14.	<p>Consulting during a pandemic Respondents did not believe that consulting during a pandemic was appropriate. Respondents believed that without face to face meetings the consultation process is flawed.</p>	<p>The consultation was prepared and conducted in line with the requirements of Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018).</p> <p>The School Organisation Code (2018) does not require proposers 'to hold consultation meetings although there will be circumstances where proposers will consider that meeting with certain groups of consultees will assist greatly in the dissemination of information and provide a suitable platform for the consultees to make their views known.'</p> <p>Due to the ongoing implications of the coronavirus pandemic during the consultation period the Local Authority provided consultees with the opportunity to attend virtual drop-in sessions in place of face to face meetings. This provided consultees with an</p>	1	0.2%

		<p>opportunity to ask questions, express their views and to discuss the proposal with Local Authority officers. Whilst it is accepted that not all stakeholders would have the means to access a virtual drop-in session all consultees were provided with the opportunity to submit their views or ask questions via letter, telephone or email.</p> <p>Whilst the benefits of face to face meetings are understandable, in response to the pandemic the local authority adapted its engagement methods in order to ensure that the consultation was as accessible as possible to all. Many of these tools have proved even more successful than traditional face to face meetings and previous methods used in historic consultations. The Local Authority will continue to adapt its communication methods to meet stakeholder needs.</p>		
15.	<p>Support for small schools Respondents noted that small schools should remain open.</p>	Comments noted.	1	0.2%
16.	<p>Supportive of change in nature of provision Respondents noted that they were happy with the proposal to change the nature of provision at Ysgol Llandybie to Welsh medium.</p>	<p>The support is noted. It is the belief of the Local Authority, based upon international evidence and local experience, that children benefit from a truly bilingual education, which provides wider skills development, such as: cognitive ability, task understanding and flexibility, enhanced powers of concentration, etc. and that all children should receive these opportunities. Being bilingual or multilingual also broadens individuals' cultural experiences and can enhance career prospects.</p>	1	0.2%

		<p>Evidence demonstrates that true bilingualism can only be achieved in the local context through children receiving a bilingual education.</p> <p>The Local Authority acknowledges that bilingualism will increasingly over time become an employment skill. For example, all public organisations in Wales are subject to new statutory Welsh language standards and progressively over time will need to recruit increasing numbers of Welsh speakers to deliver services. Possessing Welsh language skills will increasingly over time give individuals a competitive advantage when seeking employment.</p>		
17.	<p>Re-location of Ysgol Llandybie Respondents were pleased with the plans to re-locate Ysgol Llandybie from its current site to a new site as it would minimise school drop off/pick up disruption for current residents.</p>	<p>The support is noted.</p>	1	0.2%
Unsure (respondents did not answer yes or no)				
1.	<p>Status quo Respondents noted that a new school for Ysgol Llandybie should be progressed, but Ysgol Blaenau should not close.</p>	<p>As part of its statutory obligation to keep the number and type of school places under review, the County Council has adopted a wide-ranging programme designed to improve school buildings and enhance opportunities for learning. The strategy reflects the vision and policies established by the County</p>	1	0.2%

		Council which embrace the requirement to deliver services, to clear standards – covering both cost and quality – by the most economic and effective means. If implemented, this proposal will realise this ambition and provide the communities of Blaenau and Llandybie with 21 st Century teaching and learning provision.		
2.	No reason Respondents did not provide a reason for their response.		1	0.2%
Concerns Raised				
1.	Community impact Respondents showed concern for the negative impact of the school closure on the community. Respondents noted that the school had a rich history and is valued by the community and families.	<p>The Local Authority recognises that a key disadvantage of accepting the proposal includes losing the presence of a school in the community of Blaenau. However, the Local Authority is of the opinion that the proposal will improve the community of Blaenau's access to 21st century teaching, learning and community facilities through shared use.</p> <p>The principal purpose of a school is to educate the pupils to the best standards possible and it is not reasonable to expect schools to carry wider burden of the impact on the community. Ultimately, economic and social factors are non-educational issues and they cannot be allowed to compromise the education of children.</p>	120	29%

<p>2.</p>	<p>Small school preference Respondents noted a preference for small schools and the benefits of this type of provision e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed age classes • Small class sizes • Pupil Teacher Ratio • Familiarity between staff and pupils 	<p>The Local Authority recognises that parents may have a preference for the type of education that they wish for their child to receive.</p> <p>‘Parents can state a preference for a school, which is not the designated catchment area school. Subject to the limit on the number of pupils who can be admitted into the school not being exceeded and the correct procedures being followed, then admission will be granted.’ Admission to School: Information for Parents 2021 - 2022 booklet.</p> <p>Due regard must be given to the potential social and educational benefits available to children through learning and working in partnership with a wider range of peers and staff.</p> <p>Pupils can learn from opportunities of collaboration and building relationships in all class types, be it mixed or single aged groups.</p> <p>A lot of research has been carried out into the impact of class sizes, much of which is contradictory. Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education and Skills at the OECD says: “Everywhere, teachers, parents and policy-makers favour small classes as the key to better and more personalised education and yet, Pisa results show no relationship between class size and learning outcomes, neither within nor across countries.”</p>	<p>110</p>	<p>26%</p>
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<p>3.</p>	<p>Status quo Respondents noted that both schools should remain independent and Ysgol Blaenau should not close. Respondents praised the school and the excellent education provision provided at Ysgol Blaenau and that it should not close.</p>	<p>As part of its statutory obligation to keep the number and type of school places under review, the County Council has adopted a wide-ranging programme designed to improve school buildings and enhance opportunities for learning. The strategy reflects the vision and policies established by the County Council which embrace the requirement to deliver services, to clear standards – covering both cost and quality – by the most economic and effective means. If implemented, this proposal will realise this ambition and provide the communities of Blaenau and Llandybie with 21st Century teaching and learning provision.</p>	<p>102</p>	<p>24%</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Consulting during a pandemic Respondents did not believe that consulting during a pandemic was appropriate. They did not feel that requirements imposed by social distancing allowed for a full and transparent consultation. Respondents noted the detrimental impact of consulting during a pandemic on stakeholders' mental health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>The Local Authority appreciates that the last 21 months have been extremely difficult for families.</p> <p>The Local Authority would like to assure stakeholders that the consultation was prepared and conducted in line with the requirements of Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018) and guidance on 'Changes to the School Organisation Code in response to the coronavirus outbreak' published on the 8th January 2021, which allowed for school consultations to continue during this time. This guidance included temporary changes to certain requirements of the School Organisation Code and provided Local Authorities with advice for</p>	<p>99</p>	<p>24%</p>

		<p>consulting on school organisation proposals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.</p> <p>Subsequently, on the 16th February 2021 Welsh government published further guidance on consulting on school organisation proposals during the Coronavirus pandemic. In response to this guidance, following a meeting of the Executive Board on the 22nd February 2021 a decision was made to extend the consultation period for the proposal until 1st March 2021.</p> <p>The consultation period was extended further on the 1st March to the 16th July 2021, in response to the Executive Board's consideration of a notice of motion submitted to County Council on 10th February 2021.</p> <p>Due to the ongoing implications of the coronavirus pandemic during the consultation period the Local Authority provided consultees with the opportunity to attend virtual drop-in sessions in place of face to face meetings. This provided consultees with an opportunity to ask questions, express their views and to discuss the proposal with Local Authority officers. Whilst it is accepted that not all stakeholders would have the means to access a virtual drop-in session all stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to submit their views or ask questions via letter, telephone or email.</p>		
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		<p>Whilst the benefits of face to face meetings are recognised, in response to the pandemic the local authority adapted its engagement methods in order to ensure that the consultation was as accessible as possible to all. Many of these tools have proved even more successful than traditional face to face meetings and previous methods used in historic consultations. The Local Authority will continue to adapt its communication methods to meet stakeholder needs.</p>		
5.	<p>Impact on pupils travel time and distance Respondents noted that the proposal would have a detrimental impact on pupils' ability to walk to school and current family transport arrangements. Concerns were raised for the safety of pupils walking from the current Ysgol Blaenau catchment area to the proposed new school site and the implication of increased travel on the Carbon Footprint. Respondents noted that this goes against CCC Policy.</p>	<p>The Local Authority acknowledges that the implementation of the proposal may impact on pupils and families' current transport and travel arrangements. If the proposal is implemented. The distance from Ysgol Blaenau to the proposed preferred new school site is approximately 1.3 miles. Transport would be provided in accordance with the Council's School Transport Policy.</p>	94	22%

<p>6.</p>	<p>Future choice for a small school Respondents believed that by closing Ysgol Blaenau the future choice of parents for a small school is taken away.</p>	<p>The Local Authority recognises that parents may have a preference for the type of education that they wish for their child to receive.</p> <p>‘Parents can state a preference for a school, which is not the designated catchment area school. Subject to the limit on the number of pupils who can be admitted into the school not being exceeded and the correct procedures being followed, then admission will be granted.’ Admission to School: Information for Parents 2021 - 2022 booklet.</p> <p>More information on the Local Authority’s admissions policy can be found in Carmarthenshire County Council’s Admission to School: Information for Parents 2021-2022 booklet.</p>	<p>88</p>	<p>21%</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Success of the Cylch Meithrin at Ysgol Blaenau and impact of closure Respondents noted that the Cylch Meithrin is very successful and could support the increase in pupil numbers at the school. Respondents also raised concerns that the Cylch Meithrin would lose it’s home and the community would lose a valuable service if the proposal to discontinue Ysgol Blaenau was implemented.</p>	<p>The Local Authority recognises the importance of the Cylch Meithrin for children’s education and development.</p> <p>Whilst the Local Authority acknowledges that the Cylch Meithrin could support pupil numbers. The future sustainability of Ysgol Blaenau has been considered for several reasons inclusive of pupil numbers and projections, school budget, building/resources condition and suitability and the proposal to provide a new school for Ysgol Llandybie which allows the pupils of Blaenau the</p>	<p>81</p>	<p>19%</p>

		<p>opportunity to benefit from this. Therefore, the discontinuation of Ysgol Blaenau does not rely solely on pupil numbers.</p> <p>The future location of the Cylch Meithrin at Ysgol Blaenau would be considered as part of the proposal. The new school development would include space for childcare provision.</p> <p>If the proposal is implemented Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie's catchment area would be redesignated to include that of the former Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau catchment area, therefore the community of Blaenau would have access to the childcare provision within the new school development.</p>		
8.	<p>No reason Some respondents did not provide a reason for their objection.</p>		63	15%
9.	<p>Concerns with large schools/classes Respondents noted concerns that pupils would not cope/flourish in a large school and believed that large classes were not good for pupils' education.</p>	<p>Pupils can develop and flourish in all class types. High quality education is currently being provided in very large schools.</p> <p>An Estyn inspection for a new 315 place + 45 nursery place replacement school building in Carmarthenshire quotes that the school provides a 'homely and inclusive environment' which 'contributes to pupils' sense of pride in their work and belonging to their school. They are happy to</p>	28	7%

		<p>attend, behave very well and develop positive attitudes to learning.'</p> <p>The School Admissions (Infant Class Sizes) (Wales) Regulations 2013, impose a limit on class sizes for infant classes i.e. year groups Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.</p> <p>The limit imposed is the maximum of 30 pupils in an infant class at any time while an ordinary teaching session is conducted by a single school teacher (or, where the session is conducted by more than one school teacher, a maximum of 30 pupils for every teacher).</p> <p>All Carmarthenshire County Council Schools are therefore bound legally to keep Infant class sizes to a limit of 30 pupils.</p> <p>Whilst there is no legislation limiting Key Stage 2 classes to 30 or fewer, Welsh Government has a target of ensuring children aged 7 to 11 are taught in classes of no more than 30 children per school teacher.</p> <p>The capacity of schools is determined by applying the Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales methodology. This method provides a robust and consistent method of assessing the capacity of schools and subsequently capacity of class sizes. This methodology uses a formula to provide a realistic and consistent assessment of the capacity of all primary schools.</p>		
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		<p>The Local Authority aims to have suitably sized classes with no more than two-year groups per class and which do not span the key stages of the curriculum.</p> <p>There are also many advantages to schools with greater numbers of pupils including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economies of scale – e.g. more efficient and effective use of financial resources • Greater opportunity to socialise with a wider range of pupils and better chance to be able to choose their friends and/or have a wider circle of friends • Better chance of being able to participate in a wider variety of sports and cultural teams, with the added incentive of ‘friendly’ competition • More chance of being able to work with pupils of similar ability 		
10.	<p>Quality of Consultation Document and misinformation</p> <p>Respondents felt that the Consultation Document was biased and included false/misleading information.</p> <p>Respondents did not believe that the Consultation document had considered the</p>	<p>The consultation document produced complies with the guidance as set out in the School Organisation Code (2018).</p> <p>All data and information contained within the Consultation Document is accurate and is based upon the Pupil Level Annual School Census Data (PLASC). All data contained within the Consultation</p>	9	2%

	<p>principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act policy.</p> <p>Respondents criticised the quality and depth of information received from officers in response to queries raised.</p>	<p>Document is stipulated as a requirement within the School Organisation Code (2018).</p> <p>Whilst the local authority notes the comments made. It must be reiterated that all answers provided in response to queries raised via drop-in sessions or alternative methods were based on factual and accurate information.</p>		
11.	<p>Additional Learning Needs (ALN)</p> <p>Respondents believed that pupils with ALN would struggle with the change and queried how pupils would be supported. Respondents believe that small schools are better for pupils requiring one to one teaching.</p>	<p>Carmarthenshire County Council's policy is that all its schools should be inclusive, with children with additional learning needs being educated in a mainstream setting alongside their peers wherever possible. School and classroom size should not be a factor when schools deliver a person-centred approach to children's learning supported by personalized learning packages with individually targeted interventions, strategies and opportunities and the support required for delivery.</p>	8	2%
12.	<p>Change in nature of provision</p> <p>Respondents questioned the need to change Ysgol Llandybie's nature of provision, from transitional to Welsh medium.</p>	<p>This proposal seeks to improve further the opportunity for children attending the school to secure continually improving outcomes. Carmarthenshire County Council has a statutory responsibility under Part 4 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for its area with the explicit aim of improving planning of the provision of education through the medium of</p>	6	1%

		<p>Welsh, from improving the standards of that education and of the teaching of Welsh. This will ensure that more pupils will have the opportunity to become fully bilingual by the age of 11.</p> <p>In April 2014 the County Council formally adopted a comprehensive strategy for the development of the Welsh language in Carmarthenshire, endorsing the recommendations of a politically balanced group of elected members that had examined in depth the status of the Welsh language in the county in the wake of the 2011 census of the population. The strategy required action on 73 points, 21 of which applied to the education service.</p> <p>The language strategy received cross-party support from elected members when it was adopted at a meeting of the full County Council. On 25th June 2018, the Local Authority launched Carmarthenshire's most recent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The WESP has been subject to public consultation during its preparation and subsequent review. Its contents have, therefore, been subject to a test of public opinion in line with statutory requirements. It has also been approved by the Welsh Government in accordance with the requirements of the Act.</p> <p>The proposal is adhering to the recommendations as set out in Carmarthenshire's WESP.</p>		
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		<p>It is important to note that the WESP requires all primary schools in Carmarthenshire, including English medium schools, to move along the language continuum, progressively expanding the proportion of education that is delivered through the medium of Welsh, with a view to ensuring that in time all children leaving primary school are fully bilingual.</p> <p>The pace at which schools will be able to expand bilingualism and Welsh medium education will depend upon local circumstances but the expectation for progress applies to all schools. The school has been identified as having the potential to move quickly along the language continuum.</p> <p>The Curriculum Bill also lays the foundation for the new curriculum in that Welsh is a mandated element of a school curriculum or setting for children or pupils from 3 years and English will be mandated from 7years</p> <p>The question of the advantages both educationally and cognitively of immersion teaching are not in question. In the words of Prof. Colin Baker</p> <p><i>“Language among young children is caught rather than taught. The process is not learning but acquisition”</i></p> <p>The Cymraeg 2050 strategy also states clearly that full Welsh immersion education is the most reliable</p>		
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		way to create individuals with the skills and confidence to use the language in their daily lives.		
13.	<p>Condition & suitability of current Ysgol Blaenau</p> <p>Respondents questioned how the Local Authority's lack of investment had allowed Ysgol Blaenau's building condition and suitability to deteriorate to a position where closure is viewed as the preferred option.</p>	<p>School Governing Bodies have a responsibility in respect of school's maintenance in addition to the Local Authority's responsibility.</p> <p>Works that are CAPITAL in nature are the responsibility of the Local Authority and any other works required would be REVENUE in nature and therefore the responsibility of the school.</p> <p>The budget for CAPITAL major maintenance work in schools is under severe pressure and urgent works are prioritised on an annual basis across the schools estate.</p> <p>The Executive Board approved a revised Modernising Education Programme and 21st Century Schools Band B on the 18th December 2017 where approval was given to pursue grant funding (from Welsh Government) for a total of 19 individual projects at a total value of £129.5m which included a scheme for Ysgol Llandybie. Due to the challenges faced at Ysgol Blaenau it would be unlikely to attract WG funding as it would not be considered strategic enough, considering that a new school for Ysgol Llandybie was proposed for the area.</p>	5	1%

14.	<p>Impact on the Welsh language</p> <p>Respondents noted that the closure of Ysgol Blaenau would have a detrimental impact on the Welsh language. Ysgol Blaenau is the only small Welsh medium school within the area. Respondents noted that the closure of Ysgol Blaenau may result in pupils choosing an alternative English medium small school.</p>	<p>As part of the proposal, it is the Local Authority's intention that all current pupils remain at the school and continue to receive their education through the current Welsh medium language arrangements.</p> <p>If the proposal is implemented, it is the Local Authority's intention that Ysgol Blaenau pupils transfer to the new school development, where pupils would be able to continue their Welsh medium education journey.</p> <p>The language status of all schools will be reviewed as part of the WESP – and as more schools journey along the language continuum. This review will apply to small English medium schools as well as all other schools.</p>	4	1%
15.	<p>New school name</p> <p>Respondents noted the importance of ensuring that the new school had a new name to include Ysgol Blaenau.</p>	<p>Whilst the Local Authority supports the idea of the new school having a name which reflects both schools/communities. It does not have the power to enforce this. The name of the new school will be a decision for the school's Governing Body.</p>	3	0.7%
16.	<p>Financial pressure</p> <p>Respondents believed that the proposal was being implemented for financial reasons and to avoid investing in Ysgol Blaenau.</p>	<p>The decision to proceed with a proposal to discontinue Ysgol Blaenau was made based on a number of individual factors inclusive of pupil numbers and projections, school budget, building/resources condition and suitability and the proposal to provide a new school for Ysgol</p>	3	0.7%

		<p>Llandybie which allows the pupils of Blaenau the opportunity to benefit from this.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Executive Board approved a revised Modernising Education Programme and 21st Century Schools Band A and Future Programme on the 18th December 2017 where approval was given to pursue grant funding (from Welsh Government) for a total of 19 individual projects at a total value of £129.5m which included a scheme for Ysgol Llandybie.</p>		
17.	<p>Redundant school sites Respondents questioned what would happen to the old school buildings and believed that they would be left to deteriorate following closure.</p>	<p>Should the proposal be adopted, any redundant property will be transferred to the Regeneration Division for the procedures outlined in the Future Use/Disposal of Redundant Land and Buildings arising from the Modernising Education Programme policy to be actioned. This policy has been developed to allow the community to be offered the asset in the first instance before placing the site on the open market.</p> <p>Any capital receipts received as a result of the proposal would be re-invested into the Modernising Education Programme.</p>	3	0.7%
18.	<p>Sustainable leadership Respondents questioned the lack of permanent leadership with no teaching commitment</p>	<p>Funding of schools is based on pupil numbers in line with Carmarthenshire's fair funding policy. Larger schools will naturally have greater budgets with opportunities for headteachers to focus on</p>	2	0.5%

	at Ysgol Blaenau to manage the school.	leaderships and strategic development including monitoring and improving learning.		
19.	Impact of the proposal on current pupils Respondents noted the need to consider the impact of the proposal on the current pupils of Ysgol Blaenau.	The Local Authority recognises that school re-organisation proposals can create a period of uncertainty for pupils. However, the Local Authority is confident that teachers and school support staff would provide appropriate support to pupils during this time to minimise any detrimental impact on their wellbeing. Moreover, should the proposal be implemented, pupils would be supported in their transition to ensure a positive experience.	2	0.5%
20.	Impact of the proposal/rumours Respondents noted the negative effects of the consultation and previous rumours on the sustainability of Ysgol Blaenau.	Whilst the Local Authority recognises the detrimental impact of such rumours - openness and transparency are a key dimension of effective consultation in order for parents to consider what is best for their child in the long term.	1	0.2%
21.	Proposed new school site Concerns were raised in relation to the loss of the recreation ground that the new school is proposed to be built on.	On 15th December 2014 Carmarthenshire County Council's Executive Board unanimously agreed a package to offer Town and Community Councils and various Organisations the opportunity to take over the running of various facilities/assets within their areas. Councillors believed that the transfer of these assets could give local people greater control of their area and their community. The Board also set a	1	0.2%

		<p>final transfer deadline of 31st March 2018 for the transfers and confirmed that the future of any assets not transferred would need to be considered further, including the option of ceasing to maintain them.</p> <p>A period of consultation was carried out whereby expressions of interest were sought from Individuals, Community and Voluntary Sector Groups and Town and Community Councils.</p> <p>On 26th February 2018, in considering the asset transfer options of the remaining parks, playgrounds and amenity areas, the Executive Board decided that those assets that have not received an expression of interest before 1st April 2018 would be classed as surplus to requirements and Carmarthenshire County Council would cease to maintain.</p> <p>Following the consultation period no expression of interest was received for the recreation ground in Llandybie which is why the land is now being considered for the new school development.</p>		
22.	<p>Impact of the proposal on the village and residents of Llandybie</p> <p>Respondents noted concerns on increased traffic in the village of Llandybie as a result of the proposal and the</p>	<p>As part of the planning process a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) will be undertaken to ascertain the effect of the new school development on the surrounding infrastructure. The TIA is a technical</p>	1	0.2%

	<p>potential noise and disruption during the construction period.</p>	<p>analysis of traffic problems and safety issues relating to a new development. The outcome of the assessment will determine what measures will be put in place to ensure that highway improvements if required are put in place.</p> <p>Unfortunately, construction sites do create noise however in order to ensure that there is minimum disruption to tenants in accordance with the Health and Safety regulations the Council set limits for noise levels. In addition the Council will set times for the start and finish of works so that generally no works are carried out before 8.00am or after 6.00pm with no works on Sundays, Bank Holidays* or after 12.00noon on Saturday*. (*Without prior permission of the Council). In addition, if we know there are specific requirements i.e night workers although we cannot stop work we do ask the contactor to liaise with resident and agree options for carrying out noisy activities</p>		
23	<p>Timing of implementation Respondents questioned the transitional arrangements regarding the discontinuation of Ysgol Blaenau.</p>	<p>The timing of implementation of the proposal has been planned to ensure limited disruption and a smooth transition for pupils of both Ysgol Blaenau and Ysgol Llandybie.</p> <p>If the proposal is implemented, on discontinuation of Ysgol Blaenau, the school will be managed by Ysgol Llandybie headteacher and governing body. This will allow the staff and pupils of both schools to adjust to</p>	1	0.2%

		new ways of working prior to their transition to the new school building.		
24.	<p>New school design Respondents questioned the new school management, design and facilities, in particular;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities available • Traffic Management • Capacity • Community Use • Childcare • Staffing • Funding • Environmental Impact 	<p>If the proposal is implemented, more detail on the design and facilities of the new school development would be made available to stakeholders as the scheme progresses through its development stages.</p> <p>Stakeholders would be provided with the opportunity to view and make comment on the plans of the new school development during the Pre-Application Consultation. This would include any highway/traffic management proposals which form part of the scheme.</p> <p>The new school will be designed to accommodate the required number of pupils and would be suitably funded, resourced and staffed.</p> <p>Funding would be provided in accordance with the County Council's funding formula.</p>	1	0.2%

Estyn's Observations regarding the Proposal

This report has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer and other additional information such as data from Welsh Government and the views of the Regional Consortia, which deliver school improvement services to the schools within the proposal.

Introduction

This proposal is presented by Carmarthenshire County Council as part of the process of announcing its vision for the future of all the County's primary and secondary schools. This includes consulting on reviewing primary education provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas.

Summary/ Conclusion

The proposer has provided useful information which explains the rationale behind this proposal. It aligns with the School Organisation Policy. It also responds to the 21st Century Schools Modernisation Programme. This proposal is to review primary education provision in the Blaenau and Llandybie areas. This plan will relocate Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie to a new site with investment to provide more capacity in a new-build school with facilities for the 21st century and excellent outdoor spaces. As part of this plan, the proposal is to increase the number of places in the school to 315, and provision for 45 nursery places.

The favoured proposal is to close Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau and include its catchment area within the existing catchment area of Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie. This proposal aims to increase Welsh language provision in the Llandybie area by formalising the schools' progress along the Welsh language continuum. If this proposal is implemented, the school will change from being a transitional school to a Welsh medium school. This supports the targets outlined in Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-2020 which was approved by the Local Authority, and supports the Welsh Government's aim of 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers'. It also supports the County's new Welsh Language Targets set by the Welsh Government for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans over 10 years, as well as aligning with the new School Designations in future.

Since launching the consultation, a Project Officer has contacted the Headteacher, staff and parents of Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau and Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe about the proposal.

Estyn is of opinion that the proposal is likely to maintain or improve the current standards in terms of education, provision and leadership and management.

Description and benefits

The rationale for this proposal is methodical with clearly stated considerations. The evidence is based on valid facts and considerations.

The proposer has identified the expected advantages and disadvantages compared with the current situation. They have considered:

1. No change – both schools will continue to operate as independent schools
2. A formal federation between Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe and Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau
3. To continue with the current situation for Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau / New build school for Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe
4. To close Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau and include its catchment area within the existing catchment of Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe

Carmarthenshire officers have conducted an evaluation of the current situation based on standards, wellbeing, teaching and learning experiences, care, support and guidance and leadership and management. As a result of this activity, the fourth proposal is the preferred option.

The advantages of this proposal, namely the fourth of the above proposals, outlines important issues which include maintaining and raising educational standards, improving pupils' learning experiences, as well as improving staff and pupils' wellbeing. It is also noted that a new building and facilities would ensure effective co-operation between staff and external partnerships.

Overall, considerations are firmly in favour of this proposal. Another core factor in this proposal is the fact that it complements the Council's vision and objectives for Welsh-medium education, in line with that identified in Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), 2017–2020. By changing the nature of provision at Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe to Welsh-medium provision from 1 September 2021, this proposal will provide more opportunities to gain access to Welsh-medium education in the Llandybïe area. This proposal is supported by the fact that there has been a continuous increase during the past 5 years in the number of pupils choosing to attend the Welsh-medium stream, and a reduction in the number of pupils choosing to attend the school's English stream. This will ensure linguistic continuity from the nursery sector along the key stages through to the secondary phase, so that all pupils develop fluency and confidence in both Welsh and English.

The disadvantages of accepting this proposal include important issues such as losing a school's presence in the community of Blaenau when pupils move to a new school building, as well as increased travel time for some pupils. However, the current building's poor condition, a significant reduction in the number of pupils over a period of time, challenging financial pressures, the challenges of providing a comprehensive

curriculum as the pupils are in mixed-age classes, are also considerations in favour of accepting the proposal. In addition, there is no permanent headteacher in Ysgol Blaenau at present.

The proposer has outlined challenges in continuing with the current situation of both schools. The strengths of this proposal outweigh the weaknesses consistently in nearly all of the considerations.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposer has given due consideration to the proposal in terms of the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management.

The proposer suggests there would not be much change for pupils during the transitional period, as they will remain on their existing school sites under the management of Ysgol Llandybie until the new building is ready for occupation to accommodate all pupils from Ysgol Blaenau and Ysgol Llandybie. As a result of the School Modernisation Programme, this proposal aims to provide modern facilities to all pupils, in order to support the new curriculum and digital learning. It is also intended that establishing the school in a new build will provide better community facilities which can be used by the communities of Blaenau and Llandybie.

The positive impact on the standard of teaching and learning provided to pupils through merging both schools is another good feature identified by this proposal. As Ysgol Llandybie has recently appointed a new headteacher, the focus has been on ensuring that there is a robust and collaborative vision throughout the school, focussing on raising standards and meeting the particular needs of pupils well. In addition, the process of sharing ideas and good practices has had a positive impact on ensuring a consistent approach to teaching throughout the school, by reducing variation suitably in the school.

This proposal will clearly have a dual impact on the local community. Firstly, if it is approved, the proposal will allow more opportunities for pupils to gain access to places in Welsh-medium education in the Llandybie area, in line with national and local policies. Secondly, if the proposal is approved, it will improve the Blaenau community's access to teaching, learning and community facilities which are suitable for the 21st Century.

It is suggested that the proposal complies fully with the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan for 2017-2020. This proposal supports the Council's vision and objectives for Welsh-medium education, in line with that noted in Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), 2017–2020. It supports Carmarthenshire's vision to provide a service which will ensure access to learning opportunities of a high quality to all pupils, young people and adults, and therefore enables them to fulfil their full potential within the context of the county's unique bilingual nature. It is noted that the proposal will give more opportunities to gain access to Welsh-medium education in the Llandybie area, ensuring linguistic continuity from the nursery sector along the key stages through to the secondary phase, so that all pupils develop fluency and confidence in both Welsh and English.

It is suggested that there would be no negative impact on pupils from other primary schools in the surrounding catchment area. It is also noted that there will be no change to the existing arrangements in terms of pupils transitioning to secondary education.

As part of this process, attention is given to the implications in terms of staffing in line with the County Council's Procedures and Staff Relocation Policy relating to school re-organisation, and it refers to the fact that these will be implemented if necessary. The Authority will support the school's staff to gain other suitable employment, if possible, through relocation processes, if necessary. In addition, it is highlighted that the Authority will provide linguistic support to teaching staff and support staff on a suitable level and according to individual needs to ensure that all members of staff have the necessary skills to deliver the curriculum in Welsh.

It appears that this proposal of merging would produce annual revenue savings for the Council. Establishing one primary school would secure one budget which would be run by one headteacher and governing body. This would enable the school to operate more effectively compared with the existing arrangements. Due to the increase in the numbers of surplus school places, this has placed the school in a difficult financial situation.

It is suggested that the Council should consider a proposed site for the new school as part of the 21st Century Schools Modernisation Programme. The preferred location for the proposed site has been identified. It is emphasised that the proposals noted in this document are subject to the County Council's approval and future capital investment is subject to the Welsh Government's approval. A consultation is needed on relocating Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe in order to meet the School Organisation Code (2018). By relocating Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe to a new school site, the ambition of increasing the number of places to 315 + 45 nursery places from September 2024 is emphasised, when it is proposed that the school will move to its new building. The plans are referred to in the transitional period from 1 September 2021 of using both sites (Ysgol Gynradd Llandybïe and the former Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau), and increasing the number of places to 287 + 50 nursery places. This suggests that the transitional period will take place step by step, and smoothly.

In terms of transport, it is claimed this will be provided in line with the Council's School Transport Policy. It is noted that the intention is to design a new school for Llandybïe to include safe spaces to drop-off and pick-up pupils. If this proposal is approved, safe pathways to the school will be considered as part of the Transport Impact Assessment for the school's new building.

Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau was inspected by Estyn in January 2016, and its performance was judged to be 'Adequate' and its capacity for improvement was also 'Adequate.' As a result of the school's progress based on the recommendations, the school was removed from the 'Estyn monitoring' category in May 2017. Ysgol Llandybïe was inspected by Estyn in September 2013. Its capacity for improvement was judged to be 'Good'.

Local Authority Response to Estyn's Observations

As can be seen from Estyn's observations they are of the opinion that the proposal is likely to maintain or improve the current standards in terms of education, provision and leadership and management. Their observations include supporting statements as noted below.

Statements of support for this proposal by Estyn

The proposer has provided useful information which explains the rationale behind this proposal. It aligns with the School Organisation Policy. It also responds to the 21st Century Schools Modernisation Programme.

The proposal supports the targets outlined in Carmarthenshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-2020 which was approved by the Local Authority, and supports the Welsh Government's aim of 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers'. It also supports the County's new Welsh Language Targets set by the Welsh Government for Welsh in Education Strategic Plans over 10 years, as well as aligning with the new School Designations in future.

The proposer has outlined challenges in continuing with the current situation of both schools. The strengths of this proposal outweigh the weaknesses consistently in nearly all of the considerations.

Consultation with the Pupils

Children and Young People Consultation Document

A Children and Young People's version of the Consultation Document was provided to the school to distribute to all pupils.

In addition to the pupil consultation events noted below, pupils' observations including pictures and drawings were received through the generic consultation and have been included in the summary of responses received and Local Authority related responses which can be found on pages 5 – 32 of this document. Copies of the photos and drawings submitted by pupils can be found at appendix B.

Pupil Consultation Events

School: Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau

Date: 11/02/2021

Consultation undertaken by: Educational Support Adviser (ESA)

Interviewed: 8 pupils (conducted on-line due to coronavirus)

Observations noted during the Pupil Consultation Event:

Do you know that there could be some changes to your school?

- We are going to mix with Llandybie school.
- Pupils have not seen images of new build.

What changes have you heard about?

ESA to go through the proposal in detail with pupils.

How do you feel about the 'proposal'/changes?

- 1 not looking forward _ 'I like this school I've been in it since 5 and I don't want to change.'
- 1 other pupil feels the same.
- It could be awkward meeting back up with someone who has moved to Llandybie from Blaenau – they might have changed over the years.
- Blaenau is small _ I like this.

Is there anything you are looking forward to/worried about?

- More friends there x2.
- Seeing old friends again.

How can we help with your worries? (If appropriate)

What do you like about your school?

- Like all friends and teachers really nice to me.
- Know where everything is – in a new schools wouldn't know where everything is.
- Small and you know everyone.

Is there anything you dislike?

- Since Pandemic – can't touch anyone and it's all different.

Is there anything you'd like it to have?

- Exercise room
- More toys
- More room to run around outside
- New football pitch - full size
- PE room – all necessary equipment for exercise and sport
- Workout room
- Bikes outside
- Healthier food in dinner hall
- I wish for a pony
- Trampoline and dogs. Bulldogs
- Jugs?
- Hospital / first aid room
- Tech and science room
- Grass area

School: Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie

Date: 11/02/2021

Consultation undertaken by: Educational Support Adviser (ESA)

Interviewed: 7 pupils (conducted on-line due to coronavirus)

Observations noted during the Pupil Consultation Event:

Do you know that there could be some changes to your school?

- Yes
- Pupils had seen images of a recent new build within the LA.

What changes have you heard about?

Pupils were aware of the fact that Blaenau pupils could be joining them at a new build.

Seen plan

Their understanding of how many new pupils would join Llandybie cohort was a little uncertain – ‘I don’t want lots more pupils joining us’

How do you feel about the ‘proposal’/changes?

Initial comments included:

It’s big,

Nice colour,

Like a mansion

It has 2 storeys

It’s like Bro Dinefwr

Excited about seeing it

Is there anything you are looking forward to/worried about?

- Looking forward at having a bigger yard as we can have more people there to play with.
- One questioned whether there would be bad behaved pupils there (poeni a fyddai plant drwg yno).

How can we help with your worries? (If appropriate)

- Pupils wanted to know what was going to happen to their current school.
- Will their current clubs be available for them in the new school e.g. mindcraft?

What do you like about your school?

- Clubs

Is there anything you dislike?

- One child doesn't like the existing fence between the younger and older pupils.
- Lack of green space.
- Too much work!
- Don't want hard homework!

Is there anything you'd like it to have?

Pupils shared that they would like the following in the new school:

- Swimming pool
- Swings (they have a park on the existing site but it hasn't got swings!)
- Grassed area – they wouldn't get badly hurt if they fell on grass when playing
- A bigger yard
- A 'chill out' area – with sofas
- Apple macs
- Computer suite/room
- One table each
- More clubs
- More resources and facilities e.g. for rugby
- School to start later in the day
- Fish
- Science room
- Library
- A bigger dining hall and a clean one!

Alternative Options

During the formal consultation period stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to submit alternative options for consideration. The alternative options (not already considered in the consultation document) received are noted below and will be presented to the Cabinet for consideration.

Cost works required to upgrade Ysgol Blaenau/Invest in the current Ysgol Blaenau school building	
Advantages	Disadvantages
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Does not address declining pupil numbers and high surplus places
Small School remains an option for parents	Not financially viable for the long term
No statutory process required	Pupils continue to be taught in multi-age classes
Would address the poor building condition	Lack of sustainable leadership
Would provide pupils with a 21 st Century building and facilities.	There is currently no scheme allocated for Ysgol Blaenau within the Band B Modernising Education Programme
	Dependent on business case approval to secure funding. Potential for Welsh Government rejection of Business Case due to scope of the project not meeting strategic needs

Close both schools, open a new school on two sites utilising the sites of the former Ysgol Blaenau and Ysgol Llandybie	
Advantages	Disadvantages
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Does not address current challenges at Ysgol Blaenau or Ysgol Llandybie
Small School remains an option for parents	Challenge in closing a popular sustainable school
No additional land required	Increased maintenance costs for new school on split sites
Would address Ysgol Blaenau's deficit budget	Continued deterioration of building fabric of current school sites

Change the age range of all schools to 3-11	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Continuity of provision across the county	Risk of non-maintained providers being unsustainable
Effective transition from nursery provision to primary provision	Lack of adequate space in all schools to incorporate nursery provision
Full time childcare/education provision from an early age	Costly model of provision if there is no uptake

Change the age range of Ysgol Blaenau to 3-11	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Seamless transition from nursery into primary school	Reduction in the demand for places at the Cylch Meithrin/childminders/privately-run nurseries who currently offer this provision
Opportunity for employment at Ysgol Blaenau	Unemployment due to the lack of demand at the establishments who currently offer this provision
Would attract pupils at an earlier age avoiding them having to attend an alternative school	Costly model of provision if there is no uptake
	More pupils at the school would result in the Cylch Meithrin having to vacate the premises

Establish Additional Learning Needs provision at the Ysgol Blaenau site alongside the proposed new school development.	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Additional Learning Needs provision provided in close proximity to mainstream setting	Statutory process required to discontinue Ysgol Blaenau
	Statutory process required to establish Additional Learning Needs provision
	Additional funding required to staff and resource the new provision
	Ysgol Blaenau building condition and suitability not suitable
	Impact on the County's wider Additional Learning Needs Provision

Change Ysgol Blaenau to a nursery	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Effective use of redundant school building	Blaenau lose the presence of a primary school in the community

	Reduction in the demand for places at the Cylch Meithrin/childminders/ privately-run nurseries who currently offer this provision
	Unemployment due to the lack of demand at the establishments who currently offer this provision
	Costly model of provision if there is no uptake

Increase wrap around provision to include a daily after school club to be consistent with other neighbouring schools	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Provides parents with greater childcare options/flexibility	Requires additional staffing
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Sufficient space required
Small School remains an option for parents	Does not address Ysgol Blaenau's current challenges
No statutory process required	Pupils continue to be taught in a condition C building
May attract pupils	Pupils continue to be taught in multi-age classes
	Lack of sustainable leadership remains an issue
	Not financially viable for the long term

Utilise surplus capacity for community purposes at Ysgol Blaenau	
Advantages	Disadvantages
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Sufficient space required
Small School remains an option for parents	Demand for provision is not evident
No statutory process required	Does not address Ysgol Blaenau's current challenges
Reduces surplus space	Pupils continue to be taught in a condition C building
	Pupils continue to be taught in multi age classes
	Lack of sustainable leadership remains an issue
	Not financially viable for the long term

Federate Ysgol Blaenau with a neighbouring primary school	
Advantages	Disadvantages
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Requires a school to be available and willing to enter into a Federation

Opportunity to share management, governing body responsibility and curriculum expertise	Requires a legal process
Deliver greater value for money	Will not address deficit budget at Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau
Allows schools to pool resources and staff	Does not address declining pupil numbers and high surplus places at Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau
Extend the breadth and quality of education provision	Pupils continue to be taught in condition C buildings
Respond to pupils' wider needs	Does not provide pupils with modern 21 st century facilities
Widen opportunities for staff professional development	Managing headteacher time across two schools
Small School remains an option for parents	Requires the rationalisation of both governing bodies
	More work for governors in the first year of Federation

Obtain 21st Century Schools funding for Ysgol Blaenau and Ysgol Llandybie.	
Advantages	Disadvantages
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Does not address Ysgol Blaenau's declining pupil numbers and high surplus places, deficit budget or lack of sustainable leadership
Small School remains an option for parents	There is currently no scheme allocated for Ysgol Blaenau within the Band B Modernising Education Programme
No statutory process required	Dependent on business case approval to secure funding. Potential for Welsh Government rejection of Business Case due to scope of the project not meeting strategic needs
Would address the poor building condition of both schools	
Would provide pupils with 21 st Century buildings and facilities	

Obtain funding to enhance the community aspect of Ysgol Blaenau	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Improved community facilities at Ysgol Blaenau	No capital or revenue available to support this type of provision
	Demand for provision not evident
	Does not address Ysgol Blaenau's current challenges

	Pupils continue to be taught in a condition C building
	Pupils continue to be taught in mixed age classes
	Lack of sustainable leadership remains an issue
	Not financially viable for the long term

Keep Ysgol Llandybie transitional providing the option of English medium education.	
Advantages	Disadvantages
No language provision change for stakeholders	Does not support Welsh Government aim of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050
No statutory process required	Does not meet the aims of the County's WESP
	Does not increase Welsh Medium education provision

Provide Ysgol Blaenau with additional funding and resources.	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Opportunity for full time headteacher to manage the school	Not financially viable for the long term
School remains in the community of Blaenau	Schools are funded based on pupil numbers in accordance with the fair funding model
Small School remains an option for parents	
No statutory process required	

Invest in the current Ysgol Llandybie school and site.	
Advantages	Disadvantages
No additional land required	Restrictive site for required capacity
	Period of disruption for staff and pupils during refurbishment/construction period
	Does not include provision for Ysgol Blaenau

Appendix A

Business Plan



carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council





Ysgol Gynradd
Blaenau

Dyfodol gydag Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau

A Future with Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau

“Yr Ysgol o Ddewis.”



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Foreword

Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau is a small Welsh medium primary school that provides good standards of education and offers parents of the surrounding area an alternative provision for education. The School offers pupils an alternative learning environment of small mixed age classes where children benefit from a more personal relationship with staff and pupils. This learning environment has statistically proven advantages, which parents of Ysgol Blaenau value and have specifically chosen for their children. A school closure will take this choice away from parents.

Ysgol Blaenau stands proudly in the village and we cannot underestimate the devastating impact that a potential closure would have on the community, residents and most importantly pupils. The villages of Blaenau and Caerbryn would simply become a 'through' road between Penygroes and Llandybie. There will be nothing left and the small Welsh community would become forgotten.

The threat of school closure has hung over the village for long enough. We are asking Carmarthenshire County Council to give certainty to the community and to the families of Ysgol Blaenau that, during a time, when the emphasis on 'pulling together' has never been stronger or more important than it is now, that they will seriously consider the plan that we are submitting and the proposals that are within it.

In recent years and under the 2016 to 2021 administration of the Welsh Government, it was reported that the Welsh Government would introduce changes to the School Organisation Code that guides local authorities' decisions about schools. Within this document, then education minister Kirsty Williams stated that

“Small and rural schools play an important role in our national mission in raising standards and extending opportunities for all of our young people”

She went on to say that all schools should get a fair hearing when their future is being considered, and that Local authorities carry out rigorous consultation and conscientiously consider **ALL** viable alternatives to closure, including linking up with other schools, known as federation.

We acknowledge that the school faces challenges and as governors, parents, residents and friends of Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau we are keen to move forward - with the support of the Local Education Authority- to implement a positive action plan to address the challenges and to ensure a successful future for Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau.

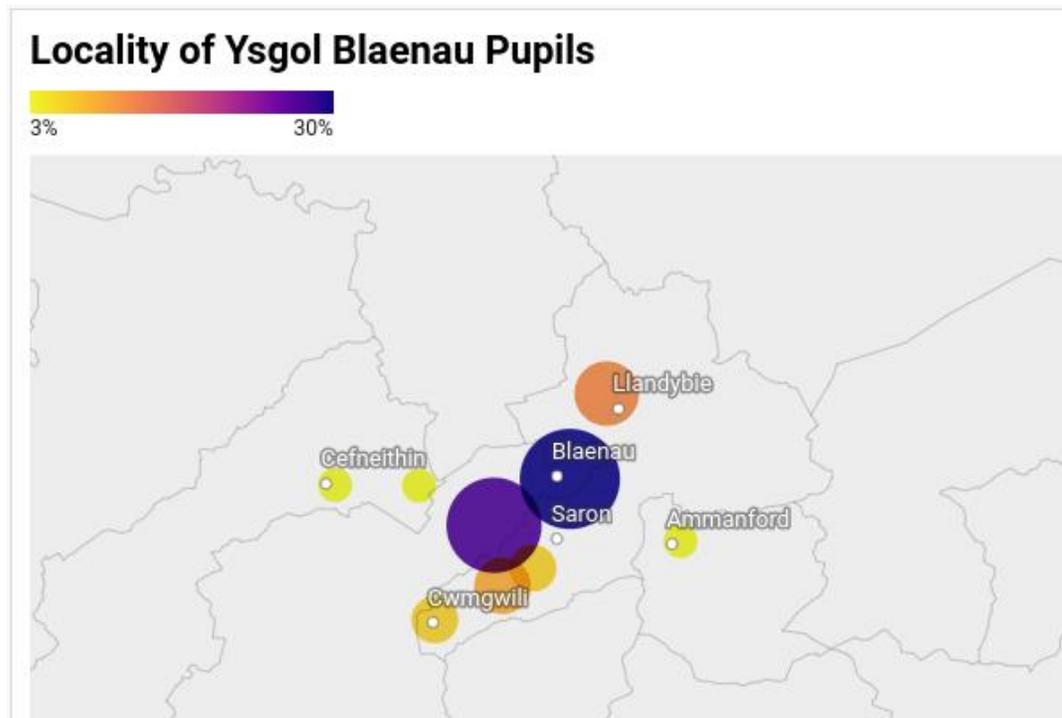
Ofsted reported in 2008 that:

‘Small schools have a positive ethos that fosters a family atmosphere, good standards of behaviour and close links with parents and the community.’

This is a sentiment that is still held today and which makes smaller schools an attractive option.

Our business plan presents realistic and achievable objectives which will enable us to remain open and to continue to serve generations of families in years to come. It will continue to provide parents in the surrounding area with an alternative educational environment, one which has been chosen by 70% of parents whose children attend Ysgol Blaenau from outside of the catchment area.

The map below demonstrates where pupils live and travel from to attend Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau - the school of choice for many parents.



We believe that Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau has a purpose and justifies its place in this area of the county. It has a reason to exist.

further Estyn audits since.

Welsh Language

The school is a strong Welsh Medium school. The Welsh language is naturally used in the school by its pupils during their day to day learning and socialising. It is also the language used at the heart of the Community in Caerbryn and Blaenau. In fact, when surveyed the Welsh-medium aspect was one of the most common reasons for parents choosing the school along with it being small.

The new school proposal states that Ysgol Llandybie will be transitioning to a Welsh Medium category school. We do have some concern over the quality of Welsh that will be taught and that the proposal will dilute the Welsh language in the area. Currently not all teachers in Ysgol Llandybie are fluent Welsh speakers and all teachers have been guaranteed to keep their jobs following the build of the new school. There is a concern that the Welsh language education of the children will not be in-line with the current standards of Welsh teaching that pupils receive in Ysgol Blaenau. This is not sufficient or in line with the Welsh Government's One million Welsh speakers policy.

According to research from the University of Cambridge Language Assessment, it takes 200 guided hours for a motivated learner to advance from one level to the next. The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for Languages groups language learners into six concrete proficiency levels from "Basic" "Proficient." So even if a teacher is currently considered to speak Welsh at an independent level they will need at least 600 guided hours to become a proficient Welsh user and able to teach efficiently through the Welsh language. For a teacher who has a very basic understanding of Welsh then 1200 guided hours will be necessary.

When we contacted Ffred Ffransis, Cymdeithas yr Iaith regarding the concerns over the impact on the quality of Welsh teaching, we had the following in response.

"Effaith ar y Gymraeg:

Mae'n wir fod y Côt Trefniadaeth Ysgolion, wrth fynnu bod Asesiad Effaith ar y Gymraeg, ac ar Gymunedau, yn datgan na ddylai hyn fod yn faich drom ar Awdurdodau (yng nghyd-destun peidio â mynny comisiynu adroddiad allannol), ond disgwylir rhyw ymdrech at asesiad gwrthrychol o'r holl ffeithiau perthnasol ! Mae llawer o ystyriaethau perthnasol nas cyfeirir o gwbl atynt yn y pwt o adroddiad.

(a) Mae Ysgol Blaenau yn ysgol gyfrwng-Cymraeg lle mae Ysgol Llandybie ar hyn o bryd yn ysgol ddwy ffrwd. Dymunwn bob llwyddiant i Ysgol Llandybie ar ei symudiad

ar hyd y continwmm ieithyddol, **ond risg (o safbwynt y Gymraeg)** yw penderfyniad ymlaen llaw i gofrestru disgyblion ysgol Gymraeg fel Blaenau mewn ysgol arall na fydd ar y pryd wedi cychwyn ei thymor cyntaf fel ysgol Gymraeg

(b) **Nid oes unrhyw gydnabyddiaeth yn yr adroddiad fod perygl colli disgyblion i addysg Gymraeg o ganlyniad i gau Ysgol Blaenau.** Ar hyn o bryd y mae'r 34 o blant mewn addysg gyfrwng Cymraeg oherwydd eu bod naill ai'n byw yn Blaenau, gyda chysylltiad â'r ardal neu oherwydd fod eu rhieni wedi dewis ysgol ddigon bach ar eu cyfer. O golli'r adnodd hwn, nid oes raid i rieni anfon eu plant i Ysgol Llandybie. Gallent ddewis anfon plant at un o'r ddwy ysgol ddwy ffrwd yn Rhydaman, yn enwedig os bydd anghenion arbennig, neu at ysgol drawsnewidiol Betws neu at yr ysgol fach agosaf yn Llanedi sy'n bennaf saesneg ei chyfrwng. **Mewn gair, does dim modd ennill yr un disgybl i addysg Gymraeg o gau Ysgol Blaenau, ond mae perygl colli nifer arwyddocaol o ddisgyblion presennol a'r dyfodol.**

(c) **Yr ysgol yw canolfan Gymraeg cymuned bentrefol Blaenau** ac yn yr adeilad hwn y mae Mudiad Meithrin a'r Urdd yn cynnal gweithgareddau. Heb fod ysgol yn yr adeilad, ni allent fforddio cynnal yr adeilad at weithgareddau o'r fath."

The Proposal

We have considered the modernising education team’s consultation document and while we appreciate there is a rationale for the need for change for Ysgol Blaenau’s future we offer this Business Plan as a solution. This is the best option for the pupils and the wider community of the school.

Council’s Rationale for Change

‘Primary Education Footprint Principles from Carmarthenshire County Council’

To facilitate the future transformation of the schools’ network, a set of principles have been developed and act as a benchmark for what every primary school in Carmarthenshire should have as a minimum.

<u>Carmarthenshire County Council Principles</u>	<u>Current Position of Ysgol Blaenau</u>
<p>Have sustainable leadership, with leaders who are free to lead and manage, with no Headteacher having a permanent teaching commitment</p>	<p>In forming a federation, we will share a Headteacher with another school meaning our current Acting head will be able to focus on providing a high level of teaching to her class.</p>
<p>Have no more than 2-year groups per teaching class- Not have teaching classes that span the key stages of the curriculum, e.g. the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2</p>	<p>We appreciate that there are a few disadvantages for mixed classes, but the advantages far outweigh the negatives and in fact reflect the four purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales.</p> <p>Children spend longer periods with the same teacher, allowing the teacher to develop a deeper understanding of a child’s strengths and needs, making them better equipped to support the child’s learning. The teacher focuses on teaching each child according to his or her own strengths. Children are not labelled according to their ability, and children learn at their own rate. Children develop a sense of family with their</p>

	<p>classmates. They become a "family of learners" who support and care for each other. Something that is at the heart of Ysgol Blaenau.</p> <p>Older children have the opportunity to serve as mentors and to take leadership roles. Acting as role models to their younger peers building their self-esteem. Children are more likely to cooperate than compete. The spirit of cooperation and caring makes it possible for children to help each other as individuals, not see each other as competitors.</p> <p>Older children model more sophisticated approaches to problem solving, and younger children are able to accomplish tasks they could not do without the assistance of older children. This dynamic increases the older child's level of independence and competence. Children are invited to take charge of their learning, by making choices at centres and with project work. This sense of "ownership" and self-direction is the foundation for lifelong learning.</p>
<p>Have sufficient pupil numbers to sustain the above structural arrangements</p>	<p>In speaking to parents of children in the Cylch at Blaenau the main reason given for not sending their children to Ysgol Blaenau was the intake age. If this was lowered, we would have a higher percentage of pupils attending the school.</p>
<p>Be financially viable under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding framework and able to operate for the long-term without a budget deficit</p>	<p>Please see our figures on how we plan to operate the school without an annual budget deficit.</p>

<p>Have outdoor teaching facilities as required for the Foundation Phase and to support other areas of learning and physical well-being</p>	<p>Ysgol Blaenau benefits from a large outdoor play area, a climbing wall, plenty of space to explore and to take part in team sports. We also have access to a large field opposite the school which is used for Sports Days and to exercise. The school is also currently working with parents and the community to enhance the outdoor facilities further.</p>
<p>Be fully inclusive and accessible for all</p>	<p>Ysgol Blaenau has undergone work which provides a fully inclusive and accessible educational setting and community hub for pupils, staff and members of the local community.</p>
<p>Be equipped with modern facilities to support digital learning</p>	<p>The recent pandemic has proven that we can adapt and thrive in 'restrictive' and remote circumstances, digital learning became the new normal. Pupils were able to access laptops from Ysgol Blaenau. Online and engaging remote classes were provided throughout. Technology is ever changing and Ysgol Blaenau is focused on ensuring that pupils are able to access the technology needed. To do this we will continually look at available grants and resources.</p>

<p>Have a high-quality learning environment to support the wellbeing of all learners and to enhance learner progress and their achievements across a wide range of skills and curriculum areas</p>	<p>Extract from Ysgol Blaenau's Estyn report to show we meet this principle. <i>'The school is an inclusive and homely community. As a result, nearly all pupils are happy at school. A strong feature at the school is the familial ethos that encourages pupils to take care of, and responsibility for, their fellow pupils, and in doing so it engenders an attitude of respect and self-confidence. There are effective procedures in place to ensure that no pupils suffer because of disadvantage and all pupils have an equal right to all areas of learning and provision.'</i></p>
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The following are the four purposes from "A Curriculum for Wales"

- Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives.
- Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society
- Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work.
- Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.

Ysgol Blaenau's Ethos already reflect these four purposes and is fully set for the future curriculum.

Action Plan

- Formal Federation
- Lower age of intake
- Provide after school provision on all evenings
- Reassurance from CCC
- Agreed achievable targets
- Keep Blaenau open in the future as a Federated School

Formal Federation

We are asking the council to consider Ysgol Blaenau for a federation with Ysgol Llandybie or an alternative suitable school. Within the consultation a federation is mentioned as a way of ensuring sustainable headship for Ysgol Blaenau.

A federation is the ideal opportunity for Ysgol Blaenau's pupils to benefit from all the advantages a small school can offer and where many pupils thrive, but which also enables access to a wider pool of human and material resources to aid in their education and personal growth.

A formal federation would give the school staff more opportunities to collaborate and work with a larger group of other teaching professionals where they would feel more supported and have more opportunity to develop professionally, gain new ideas and share best practice.

Ysgol Blaenau also retains its own identity as it has done for over a century.

Addressing Pupil Numbers

Lower Age of Intake

One identified reason that people do not choose Ysgol Blaenau for their children's education is that they are able to access education two terms earlier in other settings. Schools which have a nursery admission age of the term after they turn three are more attractive to working parents as once the child is enrolled in a school they are also able to take advantage of breakfast clubs and after school clubs meaning child care is accounted for while they work.

There are 22 children currently enrolled in the Cylch Meithrin, 7 of these are 3 years old and the other 15 are 2 years old. We argue that the lower pupil numbers of 3 year olds at Cylch is due to the free provision which parents have available to them at other local schools which provide nursery provision.

We propose lowering our school starting age to offer nursery provision. If nursery provision was only offered in the mornings or afternoons (or as many schools do to limit pupil numbers in class at one time - first term afternoons, second term mornings) the existing Cylch Meithrin on the school site could provide the wrap-around care required for those children. This will attract more of the Cylch Meithrin parents to enrol their children in Ysgol Blaenau as they will be offered the same opportunity for earlier education as elsewhere but in an environment where the child is already comfortable and also with the reassurance that the child is still being nurtured by the staff of the

Cylch Meithrin.

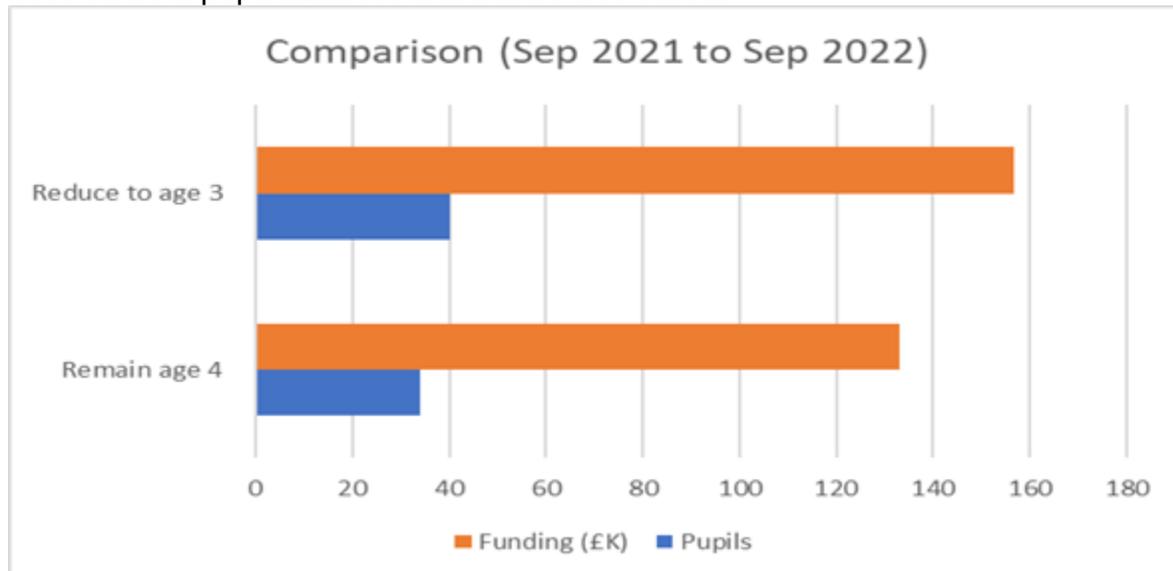
The Local Education Authority has been undertaking a piloting scheme in Swiss Valley Primary school in Llanelli for the last five years. This scheme has piloted lowering the admission age to accept three year olds the term after their third birthday. The school has reported on the successes of the scheme and are awaiting the formalisation of this process. The scheme was agreed on the principle to

‘bring it in to line with other schools in the area’

Ysgol Blaenau should be afforded the same and the reasoning that there is enough provision in the local area is not accepted. The same principles should apply to all schools across the county. As per our own consultation document:

*“The Public Sector Equality Duty ensures that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they can **positively contribute to a fairer society** through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day activities. The duty ensures that **equality considerations are built into the design of policies** and the delivery of services and that they are kept under review. This will achieve better outcomes for all.”*

We have looked at the impact that lowering the starting age at Ysgol Blaenau could have on both pupil numbers and deficit. See below:



It is evident that lowering the starting age at Ysgol Blaenau will have both a positive impact on pupil numbers and deficit.

The forecast from now (July 2021) to September 2022 if start age is reduced to 3 years old:

Pupils moved to secondary school	6
Pupils from Cylch to Blaenau school	12
Total Pupils in school	40

In summary, by reducing the starting age for Ysgol Blaenau pupils to 3 by September 21, the school would experience a 17% increase in pupil population / £23,400 additional funding in the first 12 months alone.

After School Provision

Working parents require wrap-around childcare provision during their working hours. Ysgol Blaenau already offers a popular breakfast club from 8.15 in the morning. Currently after school provision is provided on Thursdays and Fridays by “Clwb Hwyl” which runs until 17:30.

In order to bring the provision at Ysgol Blaenau in line with other schools in the area we propose offering after-school provision every evening. A number of parents with a background in childcare and education have offered to volunteer their time to help out with running after school clubs on nights that it is not currently offered. We understand that appropriate DBS checks and inductions would need to be carried out before these parents are permitted to volunteer within the school.

From September 2022 all after school clubs must have a staff member with a Playwork Level 3 CACHE qualification. Upon discussion with Coleg Sir Gar they have confirmed that they will be offering their next Playwork course in October 2021, which will be free for volunteers who wish to assist at an after school club. This will be hugely beneficial to

working parents by supporting them with childcare during their working hours.

Reassurances from the LEA

We require that Carmarthenshire County Council offer reassurance to parents of children within the school, and to potential parents of children who may be attending the school in the future, that the threat of closure is removed.

There has been a long-standing presumption of the impending closure surrounding Ysgol Blaenau. There have been various campaigns that have taken place dating back to the 1980's, where parents and governors of the school have fought to keep the school open. This has, naturally, prevented the school from pupil growth, parents will be reluctant to enrol their children into a school that may close, this would be disruptive and unfair on any small child. This will have removed the choice of parents who feel that a smaller school would be beneficial for their child.

The presumption of closure will also be demoralising for the excellent teachers that are employed and for the dedicated board of Governors who oversee the running of the school. It also falsely undermines the viability and credibility of the school. This can, of course, be rectified, and Carmarthenshire County Council has the opportunity here to show that smaller schools, with the right planning and drive, can be a part of future plans.

We are asking for positive promotion to be applied by the authority, which will also be in line with the ethos and core values of the governors, staff, parents and pupils. If the threat of closure is removed, then the school immediately becomes more attractive to new families. In order for the school to become viable financially and raise pupil numbers we need the council to view and advocate more positively about Ysgol Blaenau as a school and as an integral part of the local community.

Agreed Achievable Targets

Following LEA approval of this business plan we would like to meet with a representative to agree on Targets that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based in order to measure the success of our proposal following the key changes we require. They will be based upon the following:

- Raise Social Profile
- Increase Pupil Numbers
 - Lower Starting Age
 - After School Club Provision
- An Active Fundraising Group for School - PTA
- Enhance Community Aspects of School
- Lower Deficit Budget

Timescales

Strategy		
A summary of our strategic plan to strengthen the position and secure the future of Ysgol Blaenau		
Immediate Actions Needed	Proposed Start Date	Action By
Pilot Scheme to Reduce Starting age to 3	Pending Authorisation	LEA
Permanant Formal Federation (4 year trial with view of becoming permanant after)	Pending Authorisation	LEA
Improvements/Upgrades to the building	Pending Authorisation	LEA
Explore Funding opportunities	Immediate	Governers/Parents
Campaign - Public Exposure and re-assurance of security of Ysgol Blaenau	Immediate	LEA
Parent of Ysgol Blaenau to join Cylch committee	Jul-21	Parents
Reform PTFA (Frindiau Ysgol Blaenau)	Sep-21	Parents
12 Month Programme of events that are part of the community (inclusive of Cylch)	Sep-21	Parents
Increase afterschool club provisions to 5 days (Voluntary personnel immediate solution)	Sep-21	Governers/Parents

Lowering the starting age, providing after school club provision and positively promoting the school. This will give Ysgol Blaenau a fair opportunity to prove its sustainability and viability.

Four Year Forecast based on Implementation of Plan:

September 2021 -2022	
Total pupils by end of year	45
Nursery & Reception	15
Primary	30
Pupil Funding (same per head rate as previous year)	175890
Federation Funding	6000
Expenditure (2.5% increase on previous year)	192805
Balance	-10915
September 2022-2023	
Total pupils end of year	48
Nursery & Reception	20
Primary	28
Pupil Funding (same per head rate as previous year)	187384
Federation Funding	6000
Expenditure (2.5% increase on previous year)	197625
Balance	-4241
September 2023-2024	
Total pupils by end of year	53
Nursery & Reception	18
Primary	35
Pupil Funding (same per head rate as previous year)	207140
Federation Funding	6000
Expenditure (5% increase on previous year)	207506
Balance	5634
September 2024-2025	
Total pupils by end of year	63
Nursery & Reception	22
Primary	41
Pupil Funding (same per head rate as previous year)	246188
Federation Funding	6000
Expenditure (10% increase on previous year)	228256
Balance	23932

NB - This is a conservative forecast and results could be more favourable.

Budget Deficit

Under the consultation plan Ysgol Blaenau would have its deficit erased. Our developed plan will help us to sustainably reduce our deficit.

A large part of the current deficit mirrors that of other smaller schools in Carmarthenshire, years of austerity and chronic underfunding has hit smaller schools the hardest, Ysgol Blaenau is no exception.

Another issue identified are the children who register with the school after the month of January. In our case, pupil numbers are submitted in January, PLASC funding is only given to those pupils on the register at that time. This school year for instance, three additional pupils have moved to Ysgol Blaenau from other schools since January 2021 and we also had two new starters at Easter. Funding is not received for them until the following January, meaning we have not currently had funding for five of the children in the school. This contributes to the deficit growing.

Pupil deprivation grants; there are currently eight pupils eligible for free school meals we have not accounted for this additional funding within our budget forecast.

Raising pupil numbers is the only way to increase the grant given to the school. An obvious solution to this, is to lower pupil admission age to 3 years old and to remove the threat of closure so that pupils are not removed from the school.

In order to future proof the school building, we have estimated costs of work which needs to be done for further details, please see page 27 'The Building' in the Supporting Material.

Supporting Material

The following section contains an overview of the research and information we have collated in building this business plan and other research that supports the proposal to keep Ysgol Blaenau at the heart of the community in Blaenau.

Ysgol Blaenau - Heart of a Community

Ysgol Blaenau has stood in its prominent location in the village of Blaenau for over 110 years. It has seen multiple generations of the same families come through its doors to be educated. It has hosted numerous concerts, summer fayres, Christmas fayres, pupil discos, parents' evenings and seasonal events such as harvest festivals and St David's day celebrations. These events play a vital role in the lives of the children who attend Blaenau school along with their parents and grandparents alike. Further, it has become commonplace for members of the wider community who may not have the same generic 'link' to the school to attend and support the events. Their link to the school is a link to their wonderful community, of which the school is its one and only remaining hub. The school captures the vision and ethos of the community as a whole and plays an active part in enabling the community to remain strong, close-knit and interdependent.

The school building itself stands tall and central on the village 'square'; its location prominent for those attending, visiting or even passing by. Whilst its dominant appearance is obvious to all, what may be less apparent is the overriding part it plays in the community. It is, put simply, the heart of this community.

Across the road from the school, there is a small children's park that is equipped with a selection of swings, slides and climbing frames, in recent years there has been financial investment made to the park so that local children can enjoy and socialise. Most days after school, you will find the school children and their parents meeting in the park for play time, this is despite the children having been together all day in school and being of mixed ages. You will hear the children of Ysgol Blaenau refer to this park as '*The school park*' or '*Parc yr Ysgol*'.

Beyond the park are the community fields and rugby pitch, again an area which was given to the community for leisure activities and enjoyment. Ysgol Blaenau has benefited from the green space that this piece of land offers and is often used for sports activities and other recreational activities such as fundraising events. Fundraising events such as summer BBQ's (mabolgampau) have historically been very successful, both as a fundraiser as well as for bringing the local community together. This has also been used as an opportunity to celebrate and say farewell to the Year 6 children who will not be returning following the Summer break.

Next door to the park is the local rugby club, more recently also used as a restaurant. This building is currently undergoing refurbishment and upon reopening may provide

the community with an influx of new visitors, thus showcasing what our lovely village has to offer as well as what our wonderful Ysgol Blaenau has to offer. The local rugby team of Blaenau are currently trialling a reform and many of its current players and supporters are former pupils of Ysgol Blaenau.

We have spoken with team manager Steffan Thomas regarding working more closely together and he is keen to do this. The village has not had a junior side for around 22 years, and this is something he is keen to promote by working closely with the school through fundraisers as well as getting the older school children involved. As a former pupil, we asked Steffan how he would describe his experience at Ysgol Blaenau and his response was this:

“Amazing. Being able to be on first name terms with all pupils of all ages, parents and community members associated with the school. Having smaller classes meant more interaction with teachers and having a slight stammer when younger enabled me to have the confidence to speak up in class and the teachers and fellow pupils not allowing it to hold me back.”

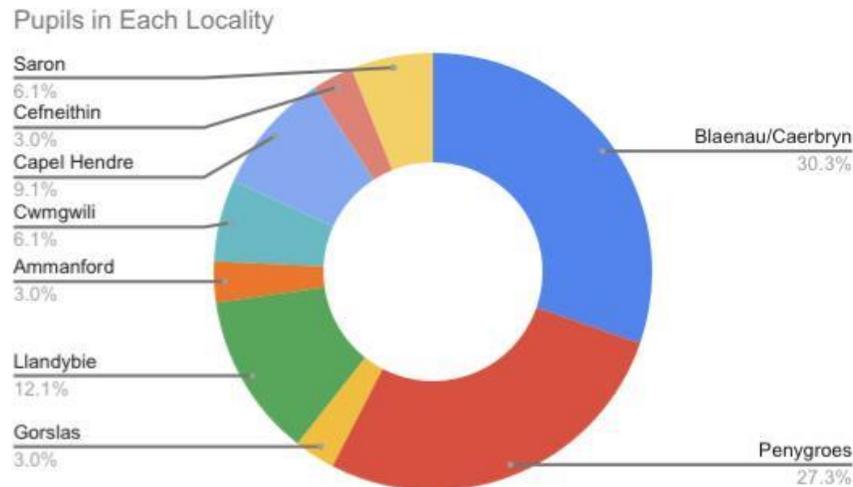
The School of Choice

Many parents have chosen Ysgol Blaenau as they want both a small intimate school and a good quality Welsh-Medium education for their pupils. 70% of pupils in Ysgol Blaenau travel from outside of the catchment area. Interestingly these parents are happy to travel for the benefits that they feel Ysgol Blaenau provides their children. On surveying the parents there is a strong feeling that their choices for their children’s education are being removed by the current preferred option of the County Council.

These parents are happy to travel for the benefits of a small school. There is an assumption that all parents will want to send their children to the new build school in Llandybie however this does not appear to be the case. If forced to put their children into a larger school the majority of parents have claimed that they would opt for the larger school which is more local to them, consider home-schooling or private education.

This will be devastating to all the pupils involved who have formed strong friendships with their peers through being in a close-knit school to then be spread across many local schools.

See below a graph which shows the areas that the pupils are travelling from presently:



Advantages of Small Schools

Mervyn Benford from the National Association of Small Schools has commented:

“We were invited to meet Estyn, as a result of which we learned that in a then (2008) report to the Assembly Estyn had no complaints about the academic performance generally of small schools. Of course, individual schools, of any size, can and do cause concern but your 2016 report shows a very rich model of local partnership which Estyn reported warmly of.”

Following our visit, we selected a random set of small schools with the recent Estyn report and I attach that summary. You will see nothing damning to justify a school your size being rationalised for the sake of neater bureaucracy. You need to emphasis to your political representative, ward councillor, AM and MP, that strand in our literature that argues convincingly from American experience that for marginal higher resources at the outcome small schools, long-term, deliver profit to taxpayers and governments.”

At present pupils are taught in two mixed age classes (infants and junior) with a teacher assigned to each and an additional part-time employed Teacher who covers PPE time to ensure consistency for the pupils. Staff of the school also consist of a highly experienced Teaching Assistant, caterer, cleaner and after school club staff. Teaching the same pupils over a number of years contributes to developing a deep understanding and knowledge of pupils' strengths and abilities, this underpinning knowledge enables teachers to support each individual child's learning. The routine that is then put in place, means that precious time does not have to be spent getting to know each new child at the beginning of term time, instead a relationship has already been established between the teacher and pupil and amongst pupils themselves, which would contribute to new starters feeling more at ease.

A smaller school offers a strengthened relationship between pupils, staff and peers. A culture is developed where children of all ages learn and socialise together, this should not be viewed as a negative. Older children will gain a sense of responsibility and confidence when being with younger children, and the younger children will equally gain confidence in their approach as they will be used to mixing with older ages.

Each pupil becomes known to every staff member, as does their family dynamic, this opens the lines of communication between staff and parents and enables positive relationships to develop.

Each and every child contributes to school plays and festivals. The relationship that develops between older and younger children extends to the local community, they mix socially not only in school, but outside of school too.

Additional Learning Needs

15% of pupils in the school have specific additional learning needs which their parents feel are well supported within the school.

Case Study - Child A

Child A has autism and really struggles with communication and making friends. He benefits hugely from being in a mixed-aged class with his younger brother. His parents say the size of the school was a big factor in why they chose Ysgol Blaenau for their children. In large group settings Child A has been known to become socially withdrawn and isolates himself from the other children. His parents say, "Blaenau is a great size for Child A, everyone knows him and supports him greatly." They continue to say "Blaenau has an extremely intimate environment. The head teacher has a real feel for how the classrooms operate and reacts quickly and organically to any necessary changes." Without Ysgol Blaenau there would not be a small school in the locality to suit Child A and his needs.

Case Study - Child B

Child B is a former pupil from Ysgol Blaenau and feels being educated in a small school was a huge advantage for her. She explained to us how she had severe hearing problems along with speech difficulties, the teaching staff at Ysgol Blaenau helped support her in getting a diagnosis and supported her through her primary education in every possible way. She says being in a small school "helped me in getting the issues resolved as much as possible before going on to secondary" Child B is currently completing a degree in Animal Science and proudly quotes "I can honestly say without Ysgol Blaenau and the teachers I wouldn't be where I am today".

Cylch Meithrin Plant Bach y Blaenau

Ysgol Blaenau is home to a very successful and thriving Cylch Meithrin, the meithrin also has its own safe outdoor space within the grounds of Ysgol Blaenau. The Cylch Meithrin has space for 25 pupils, it currently has 22 on its register and takes up to 16 children in each session. The Cylch operates from 9.10am - 2.50pm and currently offers full days or morning only sessions. The Cylch charges parents £10 for a morning and £20 for a full day. Working parents of three-year olds can also be eligible for up to 20 free hours under the Childcare Scheme.

Ysgol Blaenau is keen to strengthen its links with the Cylch Meithrin and to enhance its position as a 'feeder' preschool into the main primary school. The cylch which were previously based in Llandybie up until two years ago do not currently have any representatives of Blaenau on the committee. This is something which is very likely going to be changed within the next few weeks with the recruitment of an Ysgol Blaenau parent/ resident likely to take over as chair of the cylch and another two Ysgol Blaenau parents supporting as committee members. This will further strengthen the relationship between the school and the cylch to ensure a focus is put on trying to encourage the natural progression from cylch and into the school itself.

This will further be supported by lowering the starting age at Ysgol Blaenau, thus also allowing Blaenau the same equal opportunity as other provisions in the area who accept three-year olds. At present, the pupils of both the school and cylch enjoy the benefits of one site and prior to current restrictions were often seen collaborating which benefited all age ranges.



Sustainability

Consider green energy - research grants for green energy. Solar panels on the roof could be added while essential maintenance is ongoing.

Reconsider current heating system. Look at a more energy efficient boiler, consider biomass fuel or an alternative more environmentally friendly option, again we would look into grants for this.

Ecovision Systems state:

*“The Government offers subsidies in the form of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for **all heat produced and used on site**. This turns your heat requirements from a financial drain into a cash generator, through **regular payments that are based upon the amount of fuel you use**. Biomass installations qualify for the Non-Domestic RHI. These are paid quarterly for a period of 20 years. These subsidies will see your initial cost paid off in an average of 5-7 years and will provide further payments that run for until the end of the 20 year period, generating a **significant return on your investment**.”*

Ysgol Blaenau currently has a boiler room and oil-fired boiler which is in the basement of the school building. Ecovision Systems continue to say:

*“Renewable Energy solutions provide **substantial benefits for our climate**. Through the burning of fossil fuels, we are actively overloading our atmosphere with emissions such as carbon dioxide that contribute to global warming. These greenhouse gases result in **trapped heat, increasing the temperature of our planet**. This is harmful for our health, well-being and environment today, but also risks irreversible change in our planet's climate in the future. Renewable heating systems use **energy sources that are constantly replenished** which have the potential to **provide heat and hot water to your school indefinitely**.”*

Look at current lighting arrangements and consider how we can improve energy efficiency by changing light fittings to LED.

Refurbishment has a lower carbon footprint than rebuilding or demolishing. .

There comes a time in the life of every building where extensive refurbishment is required. For many a building this seems to bring with it thoughts of starting again – essentially to demolish and ‘rebuild’. The normal practice in modern times seems to be the preference to demolish and replace. Whereas conservationists naturally prefer to

retain existing structures so as to repair them and bring them back to their former glory. This latter approach retains the existing character and heritage of a building, and also has less of a carbon footprint impact than building something new and allowing an old building to decay or be demolished.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) placed importance on the need to invest in school buildings and not see it as a cost saving exercise.

*“Making upfront cost a primary consideration for schools may potentially cause a number of **long-term social and economic consequences** whose implications are yet to be fully understood.”*

They also note concern of the quality of new school buildings being built across the UK

*“New school designs are now 15% smaller per pupil than those previously built and have smaller corridors, assembly halls, canteens and no standalone atria. This could have a **direct impact on maintenance costs and student well-being.**”*

RIBA President Alun Jones says:

*“**Well-designed schools have the power to shape society – improving the attainment, behaviour, health and well-being of every child. It is crucial to focus on the delivery of good quality design, sustainability and safety.**”*

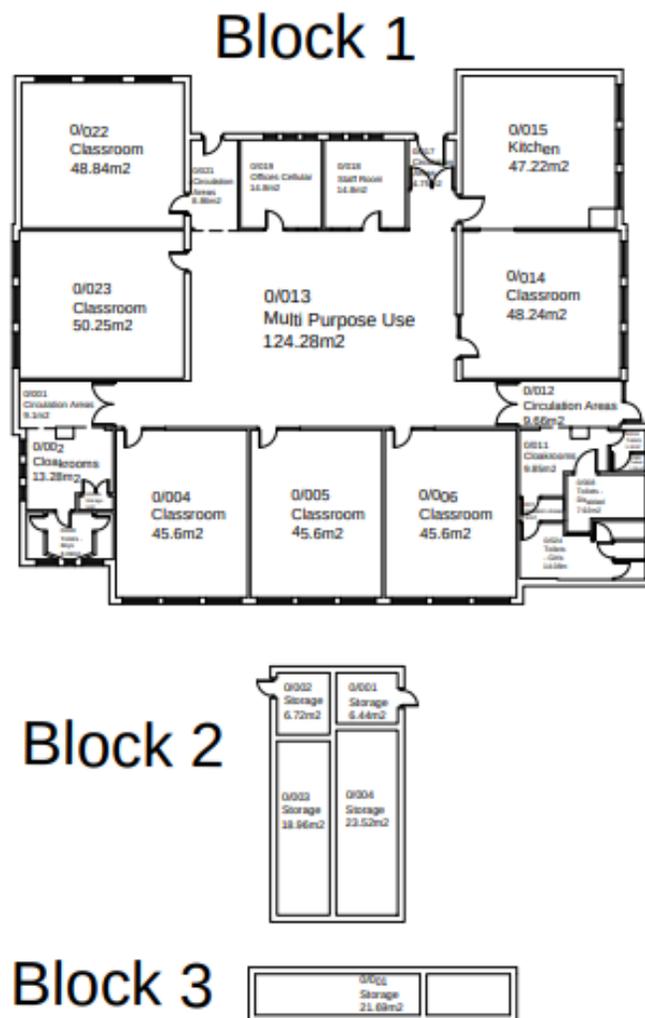
Investing in Ysgol Blaenau as it stands will have a huge positive long-term impact on the community and the well-being of both current and future pupils.

The Building

This is a list of works needed to the school and estimated costs.

Work needed	Estimated costs
Internal:	
Damp proofing and plastering throughout	£25,000
Ceilings replacing- Staff room and foundation phase foyer- 23m ²	£1330
Boys toilets need upgrading- two cubicles 8.39m ²	£15,000
Windows replacing in the dining room x 3	£3000
Block flooring replaced: Total: 214.92m ²	£11,000
Sand and Polish:	£2150 (£10 per square metre)
Lighting- new LED lighting and wiring	£2015
Radiator covers needed in all classes, hall and dining room- 9 radiators	£2775
Skirting board replacements in staff room and office- 30m ²	£450

External work needed:	
Boundary walls	£32,000 (Capital Spending Approved)
External wall - repointing	£50,000 (Awaiting Capital Approval)
Tower Scaffolding for the following: Roof – replace some slates Replace guttering Soffits and piping need sanding and painting	Tower Scaffolding- £125 p/week Guttering- £4500-5000 £5000
Replace flat roof- office/ staff room and boys' toilets- 38m2	£3000 - £3500
Main entrance gate sand and re paint	Parent Volunteers
Railing at front- sand and re paint	Parent Volunteers
Areas of tarmac need resurfacing	£5000



Above is a floor plan of the school. The building of Ysgol Blaenau currently has four classrooms within the school, a main hall, school kitchen and dining room (0/014 on plan).

In addition to this, Ysgol Blaenau hosts our Cylch Meithrin in a separate classroom (0/006 on plan).

The building of Ysgol Blaenau has served the community for 110 years and is itself a piece of living history. Although the school building is over 110 years old it is structurally sound with some need for some general building improvements. Past pupils talk about the school building and the memories it holds for them. Future generations feel more connected to their family histories knowing that they are learning in the same classrooms and playing on the same facilities as their ancestors.

There has been basic investment into Ysgol Blaenau over the last 15 Years. As with any older building the school does require further investment to ensure it is suitable for 21st century learning. The lack of improvement and money invested on the building has

not gone unnoticed by staff and parents who feel the council do not see the school's worth. The school building has been neglected under the assumption of closure over the last decade. From the research which we have completed, it would appear that there have not been any official building surveys conducted on the school in at least 20 years to determine the state of the building as well as the repairs which may be required.

Ysgol Llangadog recently benefited from a £4.5 million investment as part of the councils Modernising Education Programme and 21st century school's initiative, this saw the existing school building being totally remodelled. Ysgol Llangadog has since been praised by Education board members for the relationship which has developed between education and community, and specific mention of 'the pupils and staff benefiting from community facilities, such as the rugby field next door.' It is worth noting that this is something that Ysgol Blaenau have always had in place and have worked well with the community to ensure this.

Future Generations Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long term impact of their actions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

The Act put in place seven well-being goals, each of which public bodies must work towards:

- 1) *A prosperous Wales*
- 2) *A resilient Wales*
- 3) *A more equal Wales*
- 4) *A healthier Wales*
- 5) *A Wales of cohesive communities*
- 6) *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*
- 7) *A globally responsible Wales*

Our business plan will have a positive impact on both the prosperity and the resilience of the local community by providing both a community resource and also by helping to make Blaenau and the surrounding area an attractive location to live in for people with young families. Local businesses and suppliers could also potentially benefit by providing services to the school.

Equal access to education is a key aspect of equality and a local school accessible to all in the community makes a valuable contribution to providing this.

Small schools are the backbone of rural Welsh communities and have made an invaluable contribution to keeping Welsh culture and the Welsh language alive. Schools are an important point of contact for members of the community and help to create a sense of cohesion.

A strong sense of local community and local identity helps to foster the skills and attitudes needed to recognise the links and mutual interests of other communities in other parts of the world, as well as the recognition that more unites us than divides us.

Equality Act (2010)

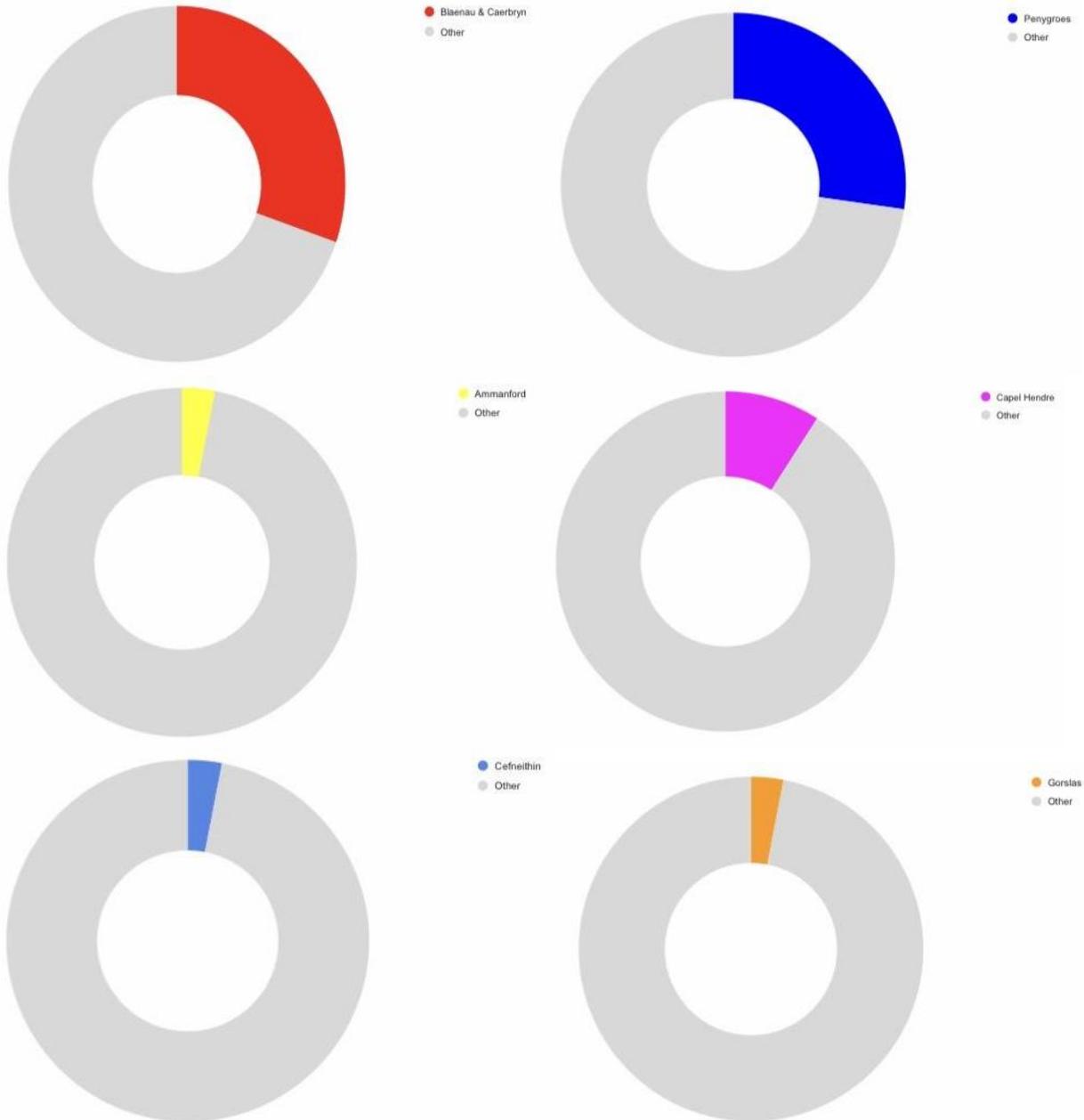
The Equality Act (2010) places a general duty on public authorities to consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day activities. To ensure the council are doing this they must carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. Within the consultation document the attached Equality Impact Assessment, which is a legal process that must be carried out to ensure the Council are acting in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, does not take into account or mention the fact that Ysgol Blaenau is closing. The assessment has not taken into account the pupils within Blaenau who will be directly impacted by the closure of the school. The Equality Impact Assessment within the consultation document was signed off as approved in October 2020 and claims that:

“The Project Officer has liaised with the Headteacher, Staff and Parents of Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau and Ysgol Gynradd Llandybie with regards to the proposal.”

This is not true and does present questions regarding the fairness and transparency of the consultation exercise. Parent Governors were informed on the 10th November 2020 and parents were informed via email on the 16th November 2020. Both these dates fall after October 2020 when it is stated within the consultation document that the parents had already been liaised with. If parents had been liaised with prior to this there would be greater understanding of the needs of the pupils who attend Ysgol Blaenau and the value the parents place on the small Welsh medium school.

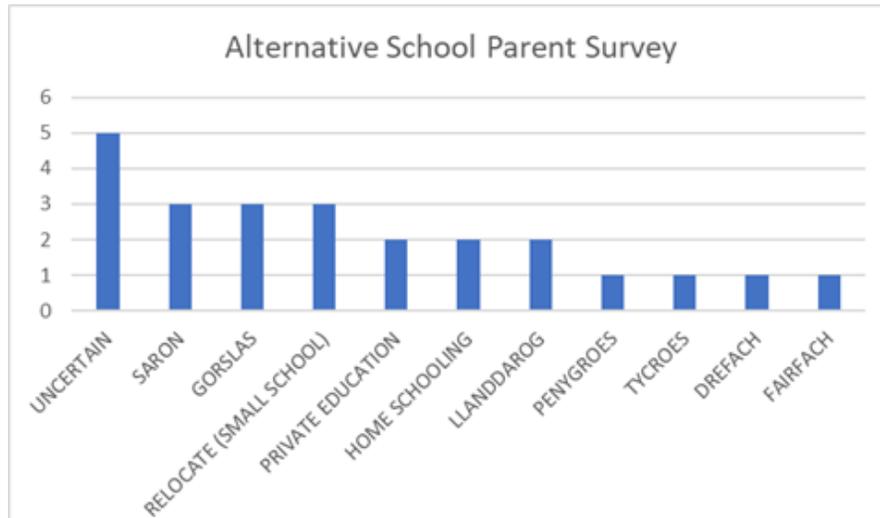
2) Where do you live and how long does it take you to travel to school?

The following charts demonstrate the percentage of pupils in each of the locality's pupils travel from. Commute times vary from a two-minute walk to a ten minute drive.





- 3) If Ysgol Blaenau was to close which school or schools would you consider for your child/children?



Ex-Pupils Survey

- 1) How would you describe your experience at Ysgol Blaenau?

Here are some snapshots of ex-pupils responses:

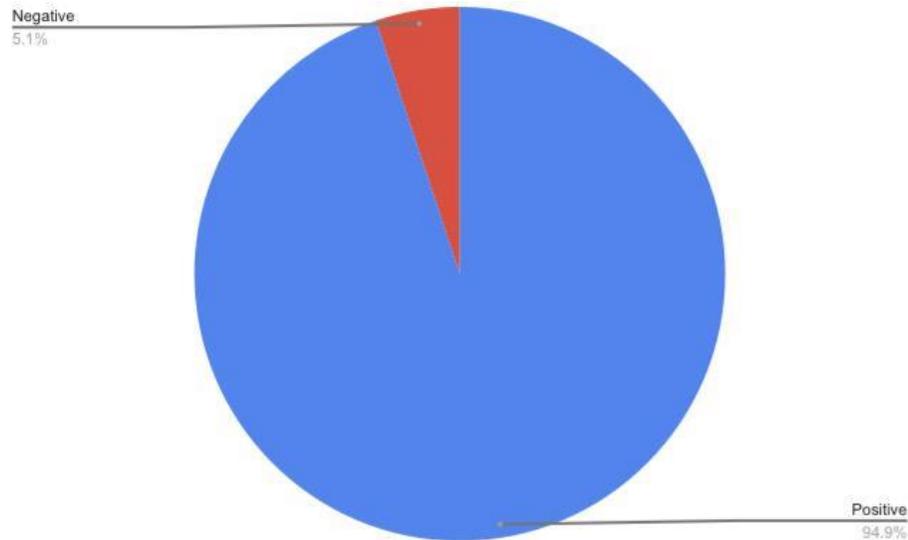
“I had a wonderful childhood at Blaenau school, I made many friends whom I still have today .. I walked to school everyday Rain or shine with my brother's. Having more individual time from the teacher was important as we all have our own learning styles so a smaller size classroom benefited me hugely. We always played sports and PE, had netball and rugby teams, with huge support from our village. We were encouraged to go on school trips and holidays at an outdoor pursuit centre near the coast, that gave me a chance to try something new and challenge myself, whilst being encouraged and motivated by our teachers from Blaenau. Blaenau school has playing fields across the road which where and still are used regularly, also a park which is a meeting place for children and parents after school to socialise and support each other, which is important for a small community. We would take walks into the village to local gardens to see the seasonal flowers and vegetables that were growing. The local residents supported and encouraged this, the interaction between the older and younger generation was invaluable, teaching respect and appreciation for each other”

“Amazing. Being able to be on first name terms with all pupils of all ages, parents, and community associated with the school. Having smaller classes meant more interaction with teachers, and having a slight stammer when younger enabled me to have the

confidence to speak up in class and the teachers and fellow pupils now allowed it to hold me back.”

“I loved my time at Blaenau school and remained friends with all of my classmates.”

We split the responses into positive and negative. The chart shows the percentage of these.



2) How would you say your education in a small school (Ysgol Blaenau) has helped you in later life?

Here are snapshots of some Ex-pupil's responses:

“It has given me the confidence to know my worth. I was treated with respect and listened to, this has filled me with courage to take on many challenges through my life and know that I deserve to be treated well and fairly. I am currently doing a degree in teaching as I want to provide children with the kind of education and experience I had in Ysgol Gynradd Blaenau.”

“I think it gave me an excellent base for gaining the confidence needed to get through life, it also helped me meet lovely friends & a good support network within the community.”

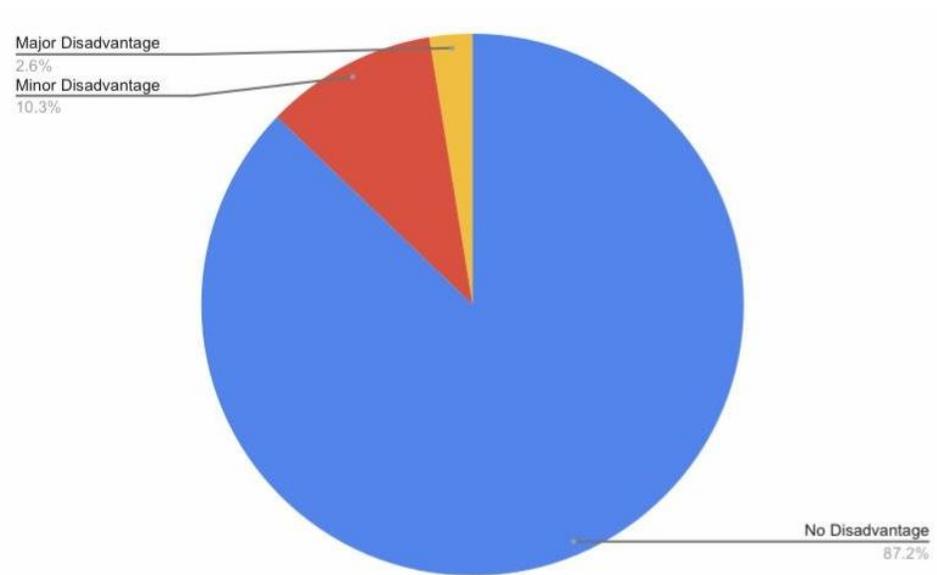
“Ensured I embrace community no matter where I have lived and allowed me to have the mindset of never forget your roots.”

3) Do you feel being in a small school was a disadvantage at all? If so, how?

Most Ex-Pupils said they did not feel at all disadvantaged by being in a smaller school.

A few pupils identified minor disadvantages such as less sporting teams to join and less variety of trips.

One Ex-pupil said they felt very disadvantaged by being in a smaller school but did not elaborate on reasons for this.



4) Name and when you attended school?

Ex-pupils who responded to our survey attended the school in the times ranging between 1948-2018.

Online Community Support

We have received support online through our Facebook page which currently has 480 follows. Our online petition regarding the closure of Ysgol Blaenau has now reached 600 signatures.



Appendix B

Pupil Submissions

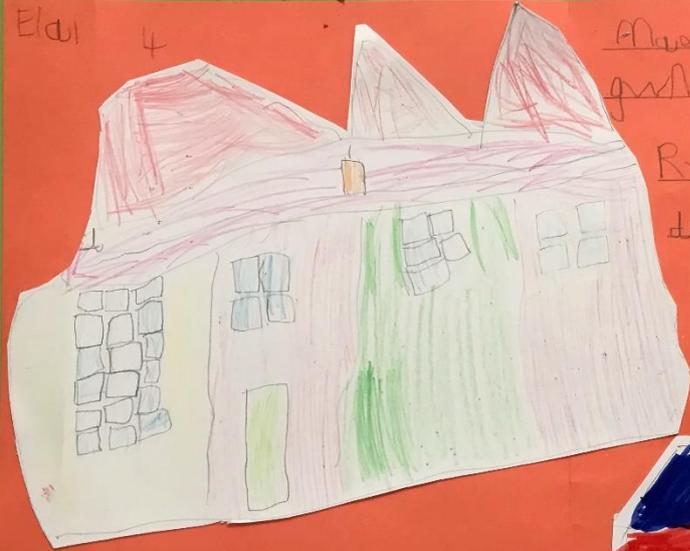


carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council



Elad 4



Mae ysgol Blaerhau yn
gwneud i mi hapus

Rwy'n hoffi fod yn
debarthi gyda ffurindiau
fod ceffwr

Mae Mrs Thomas a Mrs
Allison yn dysgu fi ac yn
e drych wrt i fi



Ysgol Blaerhau

Happy

I love to

Play

Learn

Safe

Big family

Fantastic



Best
Friends.

