

# MEP Strategy Consultation Report



[sirgar.llyw.cymru](http://sirgar.llyw.cymru)  
[carmarthenshire.gov.wales](http://carmarthenshire.gov.wales)

Cyngor Sir Gâr  
**Carmarthenshire**  
County Council



## Executive Summary

Carmarthenshire's Modernising Education Programme (MEP) was approved by the County Council in November 2004 as a strategic investment and rationalisation plan to transform school provision across Carmarthenshire. The aim is to transform the network of nursery, primary and secondary schools serving the county into a strategically and operationally effective resource that meets current and future need for a school based and community focused education. Since its inception, the Modernising Education Programme has drawn widespread recognition for its strategic vision, transformational planning and impressive record of delivery.

In 2010, the County Council resolved that the MEP be reviewed every two years or otherwise as required to ensure consistency with the timeframe of the national 21st Century Schools Programme (Renamed Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (SCfLP)).

This has been a central feature of the MEP since its inception that it needs to retain flexibility at its core to ensure that the programme remains current and responsive to changes in the education policy framework and the needs of constantly developing society and communities. This is truer than ever in the current climate/post pandemic.

As such, the Local Authority undertook a review of the MEP, in line with the requirement to submit a strategic outline programme for the new rolling programme to Welsh Government. Consequently, a new MEP Strategy was developed to direct the future delivery of the new Modernising Education Programme. It is guided by a set of strategic objectives and underpinned by the department's purpose pieces and educational principles to ensure cohesion with the 8 Education Priorities for 2022-2025 and the Education Sir Gar 2022-2032 strategy. The MEP strategy includes a set of viability and investment criteria to ensure an appropriate and transparent method of developing school organisation and investment proposals.

A public consultation was held to gather the views of stakeholders including but not limited to headteachers, school staff members, governing bodies, parents/guardians, residents, local members, community councils and other stakeholders.

### The Consultation Period

The consultation period on the draft MEP Strategy commenced on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and closed on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 with a total of 83 responses received.

Responses Received		
Online Survey	E-mail	Total
81	2	83

## Responses

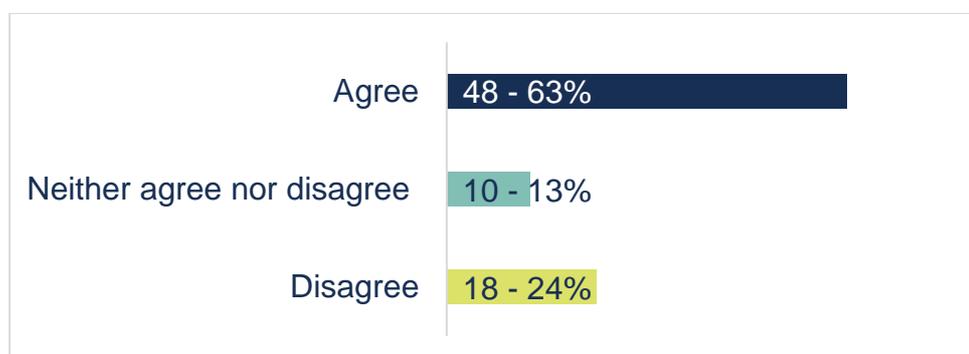
### Overall Summary

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
To what extent do you agree with the strategic objectives?	21% (16)	42% (32)	13% (10)	11% (8)	13% (10)
To what extent do you agree with Carmarthenshire's Primary Educational Principles?	21% (16)	45% (34)	7% (5)	12% (9)	1% (11)
To what extent do you agree with the viability criteria?	17% (13)	33% (25)	20% (15)	15% (11)	15% (11)
To what extent do you agree with the investment criteria?	18% (13)	46% (34)	15% (11)	10% (7)	12% (9)

### Online Survey

A total of 81 responses were received to the Online Survey. The responses to the individual online survey questions are provided below.

#### 1) To what extent do you agree with the strategic objectives?



#### 2) Please provide any comments below regarding the strategic objectives.

A summary of the comments given by respondents **in agreement** (strongly agree/agree) with the strategic objective is noted below.

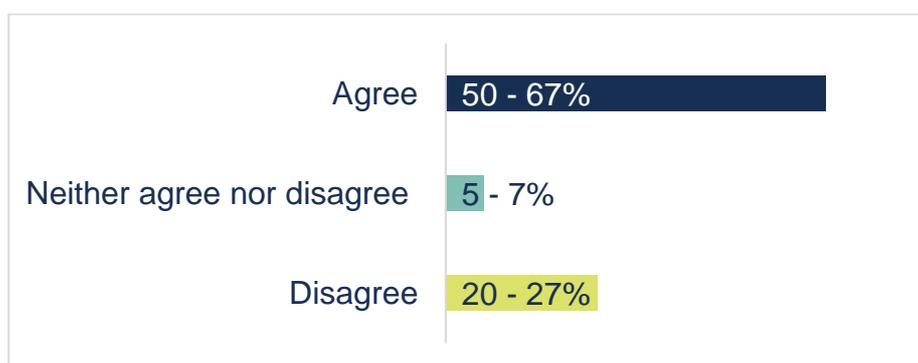
- Did not believe that the objectives were being practiced or progress was too slow.
- Many schools not fit for purpose, significant maintenance costs impacting upon budgets which impacts ALN provision, multiple year groups being taught in a class.
- Prefer more regular updates with a section on lessons learned.
- Robust Strategic plan required to reduce the number of schools in Carmarthenshire to provide equitable education to pupils across all schools.
- Too many priorities.
- Funding should be used to improve education provision for all, requiring larger schools.

- Need better communication between parents, primary schools, and secondary schools.
- The idea of more outside accessed learning needs to be strengthened as it would help many children who struggle with normal classroom settings to thrive with their learning.
- Quality of school buildings and equipment needs to be better.
- Admirable if they can be funded.
- The footprint is unsustainable and needs to be tackled decisively to reduce the impact on overall education finances.
- How are programme backlogs impacting schools in 2019-2026 Band B queue being addressed?

A summary of the comments given by respondents *in disagreement* (disagree/strongly disagree) with the strategic objective is noted below.

- Welsh language prioritised over education.
- An attempt to hide the lack of investment.
- Reduction in the number of schools in Carmarthenshire will harm communities.
- The strategic objectives focus on buildings and do not consider alternative methods of delivering education – digital infrastructure, workforce training for new modes; Federation, multi-site delivery; coordinated education provision and community development.
- Requires an evaluation of the value of schools to communities and to the Welsh language in communities.
- Response to the presumption against the closure of rural schools required.
- Starting age of 3 years old would reduce surplus places and improve financial stability.
- Old school buildings should be maintained and repurposed, with sites for new builds used for housing developments.
- Carbon footprint figures often do not take into account the impact of allowing old buildings to fall into disrepair.
- Strategic objectives are reasonable/promising but when combined with the Primary Education Principles, schools that do not meet the Principles but meet the strategic objectives are put at risk.
- Integrating capital investment with a rationalisation programme will harm rural schools, placing a threat on the Welsh language and communities.

### 3) To what extent do you agree with Carmarthenshire’s Primary Education Principles?



#### 4) Please provide any comments below regarding Carmarthenshire's Primary Education Principles.

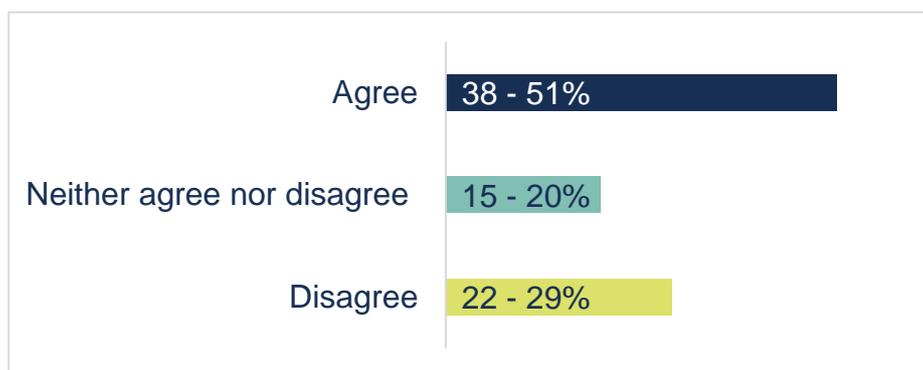
A summary of the comments given by respondents *in agreement* (strongly agree/agree) with Carmarthenshire's Primary Education Principles is noted below.

- Support increased provision for Welsh but must maintain choice for parents to provide children with English education in a bilingual context.
- Sustainable leadership (non-teaching headteachers) is necessary for effective school management, but is this feasible with current budgetary constraints?
- Should the principles include the requirement for modern buildings that are efficient to run?
- Quicker identification and adjustments for ALN pupils.
- Collaboration in clusters to mitigate isolation of headteachers and/or governing bodies.
- The WESP is central and important in aiding the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- Permanent headteachers for schools regardless of size is required for effective leadership.
- Clarification on the LA's definition of Inclusion and its relation to Special Schools.
- Reducing the impact of poverty, ALN provision, and community focus should be weighted higher than language.
- Education principles are well-intentioned. The present state in education demands urgent and decisive action to meet all pupils needs.

A summary of the comments given by respondents *in disagreement* (disagree/strongly disagree) with Carmarthenshire's Primary Education Principles is noted below.

- Insufficient spaces at behaviour provisions to cater to increase in ALN pupils in the county.
- Removing heads from classrooms may remove opportunities for bonding with staff and pupils. It may also encourage non-education professionals to become headteachers.
- The plan of eliminating multi-year classrooms is a threat to smaller schools.
- Multi-year classrooms may create problems due to differences in age.
- Principles pose a threat to schools identified as Rural by WG.
- Concerns principles will impact on smaller Welsh schools and will have a detrimental effect on the Welsh Language and communities.
- Concerns over the principle of limiting teaching classes to a maximum of two age groups, mixed-age classes offer significant educational benefits and should be supported where feasible.
- Using pupil numbers and financial viability as metrics for school sustainability is flawed, especially given differences in school intake ages and historical financial management.

## 5) To what extent do you agree with the viability criteria?



## 6) Please provide any comments below regarding the viability criteria.

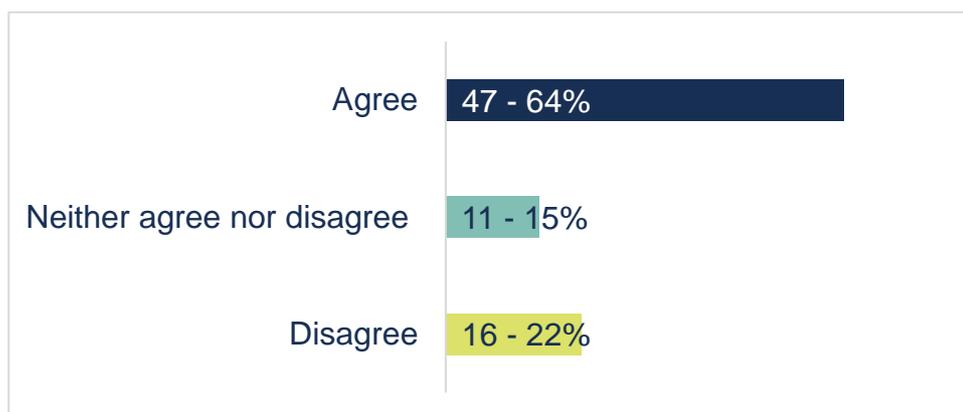
A summary of the comments given by respondents *in agreement* (strongly agree/agree) with the viability criteria is noted below.

- Pupil numbers, trends, and projections should come before quality standards and leadership.
- DDA and outdoor spaces should be considered under School Building Suitability.
- Historical value and heritage of old schools in their communities should be considered.
- Improvement of buildings and equipment needed for pupils to provide equal opportunities for all.
- A school's role in Welsh in the community should be considered.

A summary of the comments given by respondents *in disagreement* (disagree/strongly disagree) with the viability criteria is noted below.

- Early communication with governors and headteachers when schools are in special measures is important.
- Pupil wellbeing should be a priority.
- Concerns on increasing class sizes. There should be a cap on class sizes.
- Money shortages mean these criteria cannot be implemented.
- A 2 year group limit to classrooms is not always practical and may result in diminished experiences for pupils. Pupils can benefit from being in smaller schools
- The baseline position of some schools is at a disadvantage compared to others due to lower levels of investment. Quality of outcomes should be prioritised over the building.
- MEP as a programme continues to use the same approach as it has for the past 20 years, setting criteria that biases against smaller schools to allow justification for closure.
- Different intake years (3-11 vs 4-11) create a misaligned and unfair analysis when considering viability criteria.
- Puts smaller schools at risk.
- A lack of clarity means criteria could be applied in different ways . Collaborative discussions required.

## 7) To what extent do you agree with the investment criteria?



## 8) Please provide any comments below regarding the investment criteria.

A summary of the comments given by respondents *in agreement* (strongly agree/agree) with the investment criteria is noted below.

- Will schools get a quality new build?
- How will budget cuts impact schools' ability to maintain new build?
- Can't be politically driven.
- Is there forward planning to ensure investment can continue beyond any WG funding?
- Investment should be prioritised for those schools with urgent needs. Particularly those schools requiring constant repair and maintenance. Those with Victorian era schools may also be challenged to maintain their buildings.
- Community councils must be involved.
- Net zero carbon and sustainability is positive.
- Smaller schools may be protected by investment to support parents wishing to send their children to smaller schools.
- Specialist ALN must be prioritised to ensure those pupils most in need have appropriate provision and accommodation.

A summary of the comments given by respondents *in disagreement* (disagree/strongly disagree) with the investment criteria is noted below.

- Money shortages will impact investment.
- Schools with fewer pupils are being/will be left behind.
- Investment in building stock to benefit larger groups creates an imbalance and does not ensure equitable provision for all pupils.
- Lack of investment in Church schools.
- Authority is assuming the results of consultations, influencing the decisions of parents and indirectly discouraging them from enrolling their children at certain schools.
- Small schools offer different opportunities and experiences to learners – some of which are not measured in academic achievement, kindness, understanding etc.

## 9) Please provide any other comments regarding the draft MEP Strategy.

A summary of any **other comments** given by respondents regarding the draft MEP Strategy is noted below.

- The proposal ensures that key aspects are considered to improve the provision of our learners
- Cabinet members must ensure they consider the programme as an LA strategic plan and disregard individual gains in their constituency, where applicable.
- Not all schools are equal due to variable building quality.
- 1-to-1 provision must be properly funded by CCC to minimise unintentional negative impact on classrooms.
- Disappointed the Ysgol Dewi Sant project has not progressed.
- Plan does not provide sufficient detail in implementing the strategy – investment, timescales etc.
- Victorian era buildings that have not been maintained will require significant capital investment to repairs and maintenance.
- Make nursery provision equitable across Carmarthenshire.
- Do not attack small schools.
- Some schools are too large and impact learner provision. QE High cited as an example.
- MEP is focused on building stock, school places, and finances; and does not consider education.
- No mention of staff welfare.
- Modern new schools will need to be ready before the closure of smaller schools.
- Larger schools cannot provide the same care to pupils as smaller schools, which are generally closer knit.
- There should be greater emphasis on changing the school sites into major PV Solar generation sites, not only roofs but, south facing walls, car park covers and exploit any options to generate income from our assets like electric car charging option for the public? Make it more of a commercial operation rather than continual increase and draining of tax payer funds.
- The objectives can hardly be argued with. Achieving them will depend on clear success criteria, rigorous monitoring/evaluation and willingness and willingness to respond to it.
- The survey does not conform to the School Organisation Code (2018).
- Schools need to be moved through the Welsh language continuum to provide more Welsh language education to pupils in Carmarthenshire.
- Insufficient evidence to prove that alternative provisions would be in place should it impact Welsh medium schools.
- Disappointing that the County is not looking to invest in schools with fewer than 100 pupils.
- Closure of small and rural schools may impact local communities negatively, and be detrimental to the future of the Welsh language.
- Wishing for a commitment to a new build for Heol Goffa.
- Danger that political ideologies and priorities may impact sensible decision making.
- Decision making should not be undertaken by full council, but be delegated to a smaller group.
- Decisions need to be made quickly to avoid budget crisis.

## **Email**

Two responses were received via email. Emails noted:

- Support for rural schools and the standard of education delivered and objection to the MEP strategy.
- Hope that a new (named) school development remained a priority for Carmarthenshire County Council.

## **Next Steps**

The Consultation Report will be presented to the Cabinet who will decide whether or not to approve the MEP strategy or to approve with modifications.

