

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL	10 December 2009
TITLE	School re-organisation in Tywyn
PURPOSE	To outline proposals for the re-organisation of Tywyn primary schools, set out the rationale and seek the Council's approval to proceed to a period of statutory consultation on the proposals
RECOMMENDATION	That the Council approve the proposals and authorize periods of statutory consultation on the relevant proposals
REPORT BY	Iwan T. Jones, Corporate Director
PORTFOLIO LEADER	Cllr. Liz Saville Roberts

NOTE:

The contents of this report follows a period of discussion held in the Tywyn catchment-area. The proposals reflect Gwynedd Council's requirements in compliance with the Council's schools re-organization strategy. The Assembly Government has published clear guidelines regarding the statutory process that has to be followed when altering a school's status. It is confirmed that the statutory consultation period on these proposals will not commence until the Council approves a statutory consultation.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Gwynedd Schools Re-organization Improvement Working Group was established in June 2008.
- 1.2 15 meetings were held where a range of evidence was discussed, including presentations by:
- Welsh Assembly Government
 - ESTYN/Wales Audit Office
 - Welsh Language Society
 - Schools Alliance and Supporters
 - Headteachers representing small, medium and large sized schools in Gwynedd
 - National Association for Small Schools
- 1.3 In Spring 2009, the Improvement Working-group published its *Primary Education of the Best quality for Children in Gwynedd* strategy.
- 1.4 It was agreed that education needed to be reviewed throughout the county per catchment-area. Clear steps were set for conducting the process.
- 1.5 It contained a list of aims and criteria that should be borne in mind when holding the reviews:
- Class sized
 - Pupil population and numbers
 - A child's learning environment

- The Community
- Financial Resources
- The Welsh language
- Geographical factors
- Exceptional circumstances
- Circular 23/02

1.6 A range of specific criteria were developed around the above-mentioned factors. Measuring the criteria against situations in individual catchment-areas, Tywyn was identified as the initial catchment-area for review.

1.7 **The strategy was unanimously accepted by the Council on 2 April 2009.**

2. Tywyn Catchment-area Review

2.1 Communication Methods

2.1.1 Several forums were established to seek views as the Education Portfolio Holder developed her proposals, and these forums included:

- Catchment-area Review Panel
- Meetings with staff, governors and parents of every school
- A session for children and young people
- More widely based communication
- County Advisory Panel

2.1.2 It was also ensured that there was written information available for everybody who expressed an interest.

2.2 Tywyn Catchment-area Review Panel

2.2.1 Tywyn Catchment-area Review Panel was established during Spring 2009. The first Panel meeting was held on 21 May 2009. 4 further meetings were held on 18 June, 6 July, 10 September and 24 September 2009.

2.2.2 An invitation was extended to a delegation – headteacher, chair of governors, and parent governor – from each of the eight primary schools in the catchment-area. An invitation was also extended to the headteacher and chair of governors of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn and the 6 local councillors. **5 meetings were attended by 32 permanent members who represented the catchment-area.**

2.2.3 The Panel received and discussed a range of evidence, including a package of statistics about the area that was agreed upon by the entire Panel as a full and fair reflection. When preparing the statistical information, school representatives were asked to present their comments, challenge the contents of the papers and request any additional information as required. At the end of the second meeting of the Catchment-area Review Panel held on 18 June 2009, **the Catchment-area Review Panel members agreed that the statistical information presented fully and accurately reflected the situation within the catchment-area and that further requests from the catchment-area had been fully responded to.**

2.2.4 Information was also presented on:

- the financial context
- information on national developments including Welsh Assembly guidance on establishing patterns of co-operation between schools

2.2.5 The panel presented 9 possible individual options for re-organizing the area's schools at the meeting held on 18 June 2009. The County Advisory Panel added 4 other options (see below). An analysis was received of the educational, managerial and financial implications of every proposal at the Panel meeting held on 6 July 2009, and a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the options was held at Catchment-area Review Panel meetings held on 6 July and 10 September 2009. The options are listed below:

- no change
- co-operation between Penybryn (Tywyn) and Aberdyfi schools
- establish Ysgol Aberdyfi as a Foundation Phase centre for Tywyn and Aberdyfi communities with Ysgol Penybryn providing Key Stage 2 education
- co-operation between Aberdyfi, Pennal and Dyffryn Dulas (Corris) schools
- co-operation between Pennal and Dyffryn Dulas (Corris) schools
- co-operation between Bryncreug, Abergynolwyn, Llwyngwriil and Llanegryn schools
- a new area school to serve the communities of Bryncreug, Abergynolwyn, Llwyngwriil and Llanegryn
- co-operation between Llwyngwriil and Fairbourne schools
- establish 3 federal schools in the catchment-area with the others remaining as foundation phase schools
- close Llwyngwriil, Llanegryn and Abergynolwyn schools and adapt the site at Bryncreug to receive pupils from the three schools
- close Ysgol Aberdyfi and offer a place to children from the catchment-area at Ysgol Tywyn
- establish a primary school (3-11 year olds) for the catchment-area at Tywyn, closing every primary school except for Dyffryn Dulas (Corris)
- establish a lifelong school (3-16) for the catchment-area at Tywyn, closing every primary school except for Dyffryn Dulas (Corris).

2.3 Meetings with individual schools

2.3.1 The Education Portfolio Holder and the representative of the County Advisory Panel (Cllr. Simon Glyn) visited every school in the catchment-area at the start of the process. The purpose of the visit was to meet headteachers and observe and gain an understanding of the situations of individual schools.

2.3.2 Following the initial meeting of the Catchment-area Review Panel, the 6 local councillors in the catchment-area agreed that they too should visit every school. This was done prior to the second Catchment-area Review Panel meeting.

2.3.3 Two cycles of meetings were held with individual schools during the process, between 1-5 June 2009 and 14-21 September 2009. The initial cycle was restricted to staff and chair of governors, whilst staff, governors and parents received an open invitation to attend separate meetings during the second cycle.

2.3.4 **Therefore, 32 individual meetings were held across 12 full days with representatives from individual schools, as well as a visit from the Portfolio Holder and County Advisory Panel representative.**

2.3.5 The second cycle of meetings held between 14-21 September 2009, provided an opportunity for schools to receive information about the Catchment-area Review Panel's discussions and suggest ideas on the individual options and catchment-area models under consideration.

2.4 Children and young people

2.4.1 During the initial Catchment-area Review Panel meeting held on 21 May 2009, it was suggested that the views of children and young people should be sought as the process proceeded. This was agreed to by the representatives of every school at the Catchment-area Review Panel.

2.4.2 At the beginning of September 2009, therefore, individual schools were informed that the session for children and young people would be held at Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn on 14 September 2009. Schools were asked to organise a delegation of School Council members, and it was agreed that 3-4 children from every school should be included.

2.4.3 The headteacher of every school were invited to accompany the children when travelling to the session and a programme of the activities and the questions that it was intended to ask children and young people was sent to the headteacher. Headteachers had an opportunity to question the arrangements and suggest amendments. No further comments were received from headteachers prior to the session.

2.4.4 The session was facilitated on 14 September 2009 by the Council's specializing officers.

2.4.5 A range of activities were held in order to discover children and young people's views on several subjects, including:

- Class sizes
- Age range within a class
- Children's language medium outside the classroom
- Travel distance to the school

2.4.6 When concluding the session, children and young people were asked to suggest the kind of facilities that they would like to see at a school.

2.4.7 A full 13 page report was produced on the session. In general, children showed loyalty to their schools and teachers whilst also identifying several resources that they would like to see at their schools. The report was disseminated with the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee papers on 8 October and again with the Council Board papers on 3 November 2009. The report is also available on the Council's web-site.

2.5 County Advisory Panel

- 2.5.1 When unanimously approving the strategy, the Council authorised the Improvement Working Group members to continue as a forum to support the Education Portfolio Holder as she led reviews throughout the catchment-areas. This was done using the title *County Advisory Panel*. **A representative from every group on Gwynedd Council were invited.**
- 2.5.2 4 County Advisory Panel meetings were held to discuss developments at Tywyn on 22 April, 24 June, 1 September and 14 September 2009.
- 2.5.3 The Panel suggested several options for re-organizing the area's schools, alongside an analysis of models proposed by the Catchment-area Review Panel.
- 2.5.4 Every political grouping was represented on the County Panel. A Panel member resigned before the meeting held on 1 September 2009.
- 2.5.5 **The majority of the County Advisory Panel approved the Portfolio Leader's proposals..**

2.6 Written communication

- 2.6.1 **Four newsletters were prepared for dissemination to every school following every meeting except for one of the Catchment-area Review Panel. Hard copies were sent to the schools to circulate to every parent, the newsletter was e-mailed to every school and the newsletters were published on the Council web-site. The fourth summarized the proposals that would be submitted to the Council.**
- 2.6.2 All the Catchment-area Review Panel's papers were published on the Council web-site.
- 2.6.3 Contact details were provided of those officers who were involved with the work, on the web-site

2.7 Status of the process

- 2.7.1 Note that the activities thus far undertaken form part of the information gathering process when drawing up initial proposals.
- 2.7.2 Circular 021/2009 *School Organization proposals* was published on 18 September 2009. The previous circular (23/02 *School Organization Proposals*) was used when drawing up the proposals. The new Circular is relevant to statutory proposals published from January 2010 onwards and are therefore relevant to these proposals.
- 2.7.3 **It is therefore confirmed that the activities that were undertaken when drawing up these proposals are not part of the statutory provision review process in the Tywyn catchment-area. The discussions thus far are additional to that which is expected by the Assembly Government.**

3. Tywyn Catchment-area Proposals

- 3.1. On 24 September 2009, the Education Portfolio Holder presented her proposals for the re-organization of Tywyn catchment-area schools to the Catchment-area Review Panel, namely:
- **A new Area school in the Brynchrug or Llanegryn catchment-area** to open during the school year 2013-14. This involves the **closure of Abergynolwyn, Brynchrug, Llwyngwrl and Llanegryn schools** once the new school is ready. Due to the concern raised by certain schools about the period between the announcement of the proposals and the opening date of the new school, a commitment was given that the Council would support the schools to remain open in the meantime. However, in exceptional circumstances - e.g. extremely low pupil numbers, difficulties in recruitment of headteachers and staff – arose in the meantime, the Council will need to hold discussions with the specific schools.
 - **Close Ysgol Aberdyfi by September 2011**, offering a place for children within the catchment-area at Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn
 - **Promote co-operation between Pennal and Dyffryn Dulas, Corris schools.**
- 3.2. The proposals were approved by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (8 October 2009) and the Council Board (3 November 2009).
- 3.3. A summary of the underlying rationale behind the proposals is provided here. A full analysis of the rationale for each of the 3 proposals is provided in Appendix A. It lists the matters for attention under 3 main headings, namely:
- The proposals rationale
 - On site information to the proposed area school
 - List of frequently asked questions

4. Rationale of the proposals for the Tywyn Catchment-area

4.1 Class Size

- 4.1.1 The average size of classes in the catchment-area is currently 18.5, ranging from 7 to 23.
- 4.1.2 A study of a range of evidence outlines the overall view – confirmed in the Government's policy - that classes of over 30 pupils are unacceptable for children under 7 and undesirable for those between 7-11 years old.
- 4.1.3 In addition, recent research suggests that classes can be too small. Peter Blatchford noted in his publication "The Class Size Debate: Is Small Better" (2003) "*...it may also be worth considering that class sizes can be too small*" reporting that teachers had suggested "*...the dynamics of the group could become flat and some children could dominate*".
- 4.1.4 The strategy adopted by the Council on 2 April 2009 specifies an ambition to secure class sizes of between 12-25
- 4.1.5 If all the recommendations are implemented, the class sizes within the catchment-area will on average slightly exceed 21, ranging from one school to another by 18 to 23.

4.2 Pupil Numbers

- 4.2.1 A reduction of 30% has occurred in the number of primary school children in the catchment-area since 1975. According to statistics provided by individual schools and checked and confirmed during Catchment-area Review Panel discussions, a further reduction of 10% is expected over the next 5 years.
- 4.2.2 Educational standards have a core role in the proposals. Despite a general assumption that educational standards at small schools exceed those of larger schools, there is no evidence to support it. Indeed, ESTYN's report *Small Primary Schools in Wales (2003)* notes that there is no substantial difference between educational standards in large and small schools, but "*...the smallest the school is, the more difficult the task often is for the teacher to match the work to suit all the pupils' learning needs. The report goes on to state "...it can be more difficult for teachers in small schools to match work to pupils' needs, as pupils in each class may differentiate greatly in terms of age and phases of development. This is particularly the case in the smallest schools (with up to 30 pupils), where 28% of work is unsatisfactory compared to 8% of unsatisfactory work in schools which have more than 210 pupils*".
- 4.2.3 There are currently in the catchment-area, 6 schools with two teachers, with one of them likely to be a one teacher school by September 2010. They all provide education for fewer than 40 pupils.
- 4.2.4 If the proposals were to be fully implemented, the catchment-area would have (based on an allocation for 2009-10), a school with slightly above 9 teachers, a school with slightly above 4 teachers and an arrangement where there is co-operation that will include a total of 5 teachers.

4.3 The Child's Learning Environment

- 4.3.1 The strategy that was unanimously approved by the Council in April 2009 specifies that teaching conditions have a core role in providing education of the highest quality.
- 4.3.2 ESTYN's report "An evaluation of schools performance prior to and after moving into substantially renovated new buildings or property" (2007) confirms the above view. The report mentions that schools which have moved to new buildings or where substantial renovations have been made to their buildings have seen an improvement in pupils' achievement and attainment (especially at certain schools in communities which have a high level of social and economic deprivation), that Estyn inspections of individual schools show that the quality of teaching has improved, an improvement in staff morale, that attendance has been maintained and behaviour has improved and that new buildings provide greater choice and better provision in terms of education at the school and in before and after school activities.
- 4.3.3 The Assets Management Plan estimates that approximately £1.5m needs to be spent on renovating and adapting the 8 schools in the catchment-area. If 5 of them were closed, there would be a reduction in cost to approximately £600,000, representing a saving of approximately £900,000.

4.3.4 The proposal for the Tywyn catchment-area envisages the construction of a new school either in the Brynchrug or Llanegryn area and the renovation of buildings at Penybryn, Dyffryn Dulas and Pennal. As part of the application to the Government for a grant to support the building of the area school, an application is submitted for additional capital to up-grade facilities in the remaining schools in the catchment-area.

4.4 Leadership

4.4.1 There are currently 23 teachers working in the Tywyn area, with 8 of them being headteachers. If the new arrangements were to be enforced now, at least 18 teachers would be employed in the area, with 4 being headteachers. The exact nature of the co-operation between Dyffryn Dulas and Pennal schools is a matter for further discussion, but may imply that one headteacher will take charge of both schools in due course.

4.4.2 The new arrangements would release resources equivalent to 5.5 additional teachers to be distributed across the Gwynedd primary sector.

4.5 The Community

4.5.1 An analysis was published of the use made by the community of every school, and schools contribution to their communities, in the statistics pack. Resources were also listed (e.g. community centres, post offices, leisure centres).

4.5.2 Government guidelines (Circular 021/2009 Schools Organization Proposals) on schools re-organization notes the community expectations. Although the guidelines were not available when the catchment-area review was held, several factors included in the new circular were taken into account.

4.5.3 When preparing the proposals, information was gathered and disseminated about community and language factors. Circular 021/2009 mentions those factors that require consideration when preparing the proposals. Information on those factors which were considered in the statistical analysis of the catchment-area is available on the Council's web-site.

4.6 Financial Resources

4.6.1 A total of £1,596,616 (without including SEN units and devolving integration) is allocated to the 8 primary schools in the Tywyn catchment-area in 2009/10. This equates to £3,703 per pupil, although the range between schools is between £2,894 and £7,822.

4.6.1 Total allocation of the new catchment-area arrangements – based on current allocation and having taken additional transport needs estimated as £79,000 into account – would be £1,295,871. As regards revenue costs, establishing the new arrangements would save £221,745 a year, which represents 14% of today's catchment-area revenue budget.

4.6.2 6 of the 8 schools in the area receive £90,184 in addition to the usual allocation through the minimum staffing protection policy which guarantees at least a headteacher and a teacher at every school and a headteacher and assistant in

schools with fewer than 15 pupils. If the proposal was to be implemented, only one school – Ysgol Pennal – would receive additional funding as a consequence of the policy. This currently equates to £3,921 a year.

- 4.6.3 If the proposals are accepted, the Council will continue to work on a scheme to retain a percentage of any savings within the catchment-area for the duration of the re-organization process throughout the county, so as to reduce class sizes

4.7 The Welsh Language

- 4.7.1 An analysis of every school's language background was presented - based on information gathered when preparing a Language Assessment of every school in the county during spring 2008 – in the statistics pack. –Schools had an opportunity to challenge the evidence, and some did so. The analysis was agreed on following that.
- 4.7.2 When developing the proposals, consideration was given to the catchment-area to draw schools of a similar linguistic nature together.
- 4.7.3 If the Council approves this proposal, the Council will need to show that they have fulfilled the Language Impact Assessment when moving towards the statutory process. This will be done in accordance with the Assembly Government requirements in Circular 021/2009.

4.8 Geographical Factors

- 4.8.1 Limiting travel wherever possible has been the objective. The proposal submitted meets the strategy requirements with regards to travel, namely to limit travel to no more than 30 minutes one way.

5. Summary of the proposals

- 5.1 Noted above are a list of facts and indicators that outline the rationale for the proposals.
- 5.2 Through the new arrangements, all children in the catchment-area will receive an equal opportunity to be educated in reasonably sized groups as well as opportunities to work together and play together with peer-groups more regularly.
- 5.3 Fewer headteachers will be required in the catchment-area and teachers will have an opportunity to share various specializations and offer that expertise to the pupils. The age range within classes will be less and will therefore facilitate teachers planning and teaching.
- 5.4 The proposals offer the best balance between providing effective education in efficient establishments when providing parents with an option. No child will have to travel more than 30 minutes to the primary school, once the proposals are implemented
- 5.5 The proposals take into account the needs of school buildings in the area and the LEA's aims when developing schools that are appropriate for the 21stC. The

composite catchment-area plan envisages the building of a completely new school with a further three schools being adapted to make them fit for purpose. It is intended to apply to the Government for capital funding in accordance with the 21st C Schools strategy.

- 5.6 Developing a robust and stable learning community is core to providing children with the best opportunities. Through stabilizing the situation, headteachers', teachers and support staff could be released to focus on developing a curriculum that provides children with the best opportunities.
- 5.7 The proposals envisage the development of a community based focus for every school in the area. "1st C schools need to provide services that draw the community and school together, promoting education for adults, before and after school clubs, and other community-based activities.
- 5.8 Creating stability would ensure a medium term future for the 4 primary schools in the area and enable community-based planning to take place around those schools.
- 5.9 If the proposals were to be fully implemented, substantial savings would be released, saving 14% of the revenue budget and over 60% of the maintenance budget as well as adjustment requirements.
- 5.10 Alternative options were considered for re-organization of schools within the catchment-area but in the Portfolio Holder's view, the submitted proposals provide the best possible balance between maintaining educational standards, ensuring that schools are financially viable, reduce staffing difficulties, maintain accessibility to schools and provide an opportunity to develop school buildings that meet 21stC requirements in accordance with the needs of this particular area.
- 5.11 A series of meetings have already been held with schools, headteachers, governors, staff, parents and children. If the Council approve these proposals, a period of statutory consultation will follow for those schools who face a statutory change and a further report on the findings of the process will be presented to the Council before taking the final decision.

6. Sites

- 6.1 In response to the County Advisory Panel's request, the Board's decision at its meeting held on 3rd November and the local communities aspirations for further information regarding the location of any new school, work on identifying appropriate sites for developing an Area School is already in progress.
- 6.2 This does not in any way prejudge the Council's decision on the proposed Scheme for the area or prejudices the outcome of any statutory consultation on the future of any specific school but rather prepares the way forward if the Council wished to move in that direction. The staffing resources for the work is funded from the recently allocated SCIF grant for the purpose.
- 6.3 The initial focus was on sites in the Llanegryn and Brynchrug area, due to the practicality of transporting pupils.

- 6.4 16 potential sites were identified at these locations and initial technical work has enabled us to draw up an initial shortlist consisting of 5 sites, 2 at Bryncreg and 3 at Llanegryn.
- 6.5 Following the Board's decision, more detailed technical work was done on these 5 sites including carrying out further research into aspects of planning, transport, flooding, the physical suitability of the land etc
- 6.6 This is a detailed process that needs to be completed at the start of any construction project which will then provide firm foundations for identifying the most suitable site in technical terms before starting on the detailed design process.
- 6.7 In parallel with this, we have also embarked on the task of discussing and negotiating land purchase terms with the various landowners. Obviously, final terms cannot be agreed until the technical work on the site has been completed.
- 6.8 Following the completion of this technical work, and after discussions to negotiate the purchase terms have been completed, it is intended to present a further report to the Council Board, recommending the purchase of a specific site for developing an Area school, if, of course, the Council adopts the Scheme.
- 6.9 It is envisaged that we will be in a position to present this report early in the new year.

7. Frequently asked questions

- 7.1 Since the publication of the Portfolio Holder's proposals on 24 September 2009, several letters and e-mails have been received outlining questions and/or disagreement about the proposals and the process.
- 7.2 Appendix B summarizes the principal points received thus far as "Frequently asked questions" and offering broadly-based answers.

8. Next steps

- 8.1 If the Council approves these proposals on 10 December 2010, it is a mandatory requirement that a statutory consultation period is held every individual school that faces closure or altered status, in accordance with Assembly Government guidelines as explained in the Circular 021/2009 *Schools Organization Proposals*.
- 8.2 The Circular clearly states the expectations when developing proposals.
- 8.3 The statutory consultation period will include
- Informal meetings with the school when preparing a statutory consultation document
 - Issuing a statutory consultation document
 - Formal meetings with staff, governors and parents to discuss the statutory consultation document

- Allocate a period of not less than 4 weeks for receipt of written comments and responses to the statutory consultation document
- At the end of the statutory consultation period, the individual involved with the consultation is expected to prepare a report for the Council's attention, summarizing the matters raised during the consultation and further comments. The Council will then have an opportunity to decide whether the process of closing or altering schools' status should proceed.
- If it is decided to proceed, statutory notices will be issued per school, clearly stating the aims for that school. The statutory notice will be circulated to the specific schools and other relevant establishments, copies of it will be placed in public places in the area and on the Council's web-site. Not less than a 2 month period will be allocated for presentation of formal written objections to the statutory notice.
- At the end of the period for issuing statutory notices, the matter will come before the Council Board for the intention to be confirmed. If the Board decides to proceed with the proposal, and that no formal objections have been received, the decision can be confirmed. If formal objections have been received, the matter will be transferred to the Minister for Education in the Welsh Assembly Government.

8.4 The Council is therefore requested to give approval to proceed towards the statutory consultation period in accordance with the above.

9. Recommendations

9.1 To approve the proposals to establish a **new Area School in the Brynchrug or Llanegryn** area during the school year 2013-14. This involves the **closure of Abergynolwyn, Brynchrug, Llwyngwrl and Llanegryn schools** once the new school is ready. It is intended to proceed towards a period of statutory consultation on the proposals – with the Council's permission – during Spring 2010.

9.2 To approve the proposal to **Close Ysgol Aberdyfi by September 2011**, providing places for children in the catchment-area at Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn. It is intended to proceed to a statutory consultation period on the proposals – with the Council's permission – during Spring 2010.

9.3 To approve the proposal to **promote co-operation between Pennal and Dyffryn Dulas, Corris Schools**. There are no statutory implications to this proposal.

Iwan T. Jones
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ITJ/ls/9.11.09

Rationale behind the proposals

1. Bryncreug/Abergynolwyn/Llanegryn/Llwyngwril Area School

1.1 Class Sizes

- 1.1.1 Class sizes at the four schools currently vary from 7 to 17. The strategy mentions that the aim should be to secure class sizes of between 12-25 pupils.
- 1.1.2 It is envisaged that there will be larger groups of children in the new area school – if 95 children attended the school, there would be 4 classes of 2 age-groups containing over 20 children.

1.2 Pupil numbers

- 1.2.1 Pupil numbers at the 4 schools jointly have reduced by 47% between 1975 and 2009, from 172 to 81.
- 1.2.2 There is concern about the medium-term future of education in the area. Projections for the individual schools suggest that there will be a critical situation by 2013 – the individual schools noted that Bryncreug would have 22 pupils, Abergynolwyn 14 pupils, Llanegryn 18 pupils and Llwyngwril 24 pupils, making a total of 78. In addition, Abergynolwyn envisages a possible pupil reduction to 8 by 2011 unless the children continue to start their education in the school's Nursery class.

1.3 The Child's Learning Environment

- 1.3.1 A new, standard and fit for purpose community school will improve the educational provision and reduce maintenance costs.
- 1.3.2 Across the 4 schools, it is envisaged that there is a maintenance post-accumulation of £170,000, that £40,000 needs to be spent on fire precautions, £61,000 to ensure that two schools meet DDA requirements, and £530,000 to make the buildings fit for purpose. The Assets Management Plan therefore envisages that over £800,000 needs to be spent on renovating and adapting the 4 school buildings.
- 1.3.3 The Government's capital programme to support the development of 21st Century Schools notes the desire to develop community schools that meet the requirements of this century. Approving this proposal will open up possibilities when seeking to receive capital grants from the Government.
- 1.3.4 The ESTYN report that evaluates schools before and after moving to new buildings (2007)c clearly states that new buildings can almost all contribute towards improving educational standards, provide more facilities for pupils, release headteachers to provide leadership, raise staff and pupils morale and maintain attendance.

1.4 Leadership

- 1.4.1 Of the 4 schools under consideration, two have acting heads, one a head who will be retiring within the next year, and one a permanent head.
- 1.4.2 Recent experiences in the area have suggested that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified and suitable applicants for headships.
- 1.4.3 Establishing a single area school will create a larger group of staff and provide greater freedom for a Headteacher to develop managerial and administrative skills, releasing class teachers to teach.

1.5 The Community

- 1.5.1 A summary of the community based facilities and community use of the schools' facilities is provided in the statistical analysis agreed by every school.
- 1.5.2 Three schools, namely Abergynolwyn and Brynchrug and Llanegryn support the proposal in principle. Llwyngwriol seem to have a more mixed view, and there is for instance, overall objection that contrasts to the support in principle of having an area school on condition that it is in the Llwyngwriol area.
- 1.5.3 There are existing educational links between the communities. The Brynchrug nursery group serves the communities of Abergynolwyn, Llanegryn and Llwyngwriol.
- 1.5.4 Over 10% of the population of the 4 catchment-areas are educated at schools other than these 4. It is likely that a new area school will be an attraction and keep children within the catchment-area.
- 1.5.5 When preparing the proposals, information was gathered and shared about community and language factors. The 021/2009 Circular mentions factors that require consideration when preparing proposals. Information on those factors that were considered in a statistical analysis of the catchment-area is available on the Council's web-site.

1.6 Financial Resources

- 1.6.1 The Education Department's minimum staffing protection policy is implemented at the four schools. The County will spend £416,300 during 2009-10 to maintain a minimum of a headteacher and teacher at every school which has more than 15 pupils and a head and assistant in schools with fewer than 15 pupils. £90,184 of this is spent in the Tywyn catchment-area, and £64,051 of this amount between the four schools. The school would not come within the minimum staffing protection policy.
- 1.6.2 The accumulated allocation for the 4 schools in 2009/10 is £527,299. If the proposal to establish an area school is approved, the budget for the new school, based on today's prices, would be £298,997, which is a saving of £228,302
- 1.6.3 Transport will need to be provided for pupils to the new school in accordance with the Council's transport policy. Based on today's prices, an additional cost

of £64,000 is envisaged. It will therefore reduce the expected saving to £164,302.

- 1.6.4 Each of the 4 schools currently carry more than 45% of empty places. Through building an area school with a capacity to meet the area's requirements and the Government's guidelines, it is predicted that the percentage of empty places will reduce to approximately 10%.

1.7 The Welsh Language

- 1.7.1 A summary of the schools language situation and the headteachers views for and developing the language at the schools has been prepared. The summary was published in the statistical document and every school agreed to include it.
- 1.7.2 If the Council approves this proposal, the Council will fulfil a Language Impact Assessment when proceeding towards the statutory process. This is achieved in accordance with Assembly Government requirements in Circular 021/2009.

1.8 Geographical Factors

- 1.8.1 The Portfolio Holder is eager to maintain rural education and provide a selection of locations for parents in the area. The Government's guidelines in terms of providing access to schools and the Gwynedd strategy's emphasis is on restricting one way travel for primary school children to no more than 30 minutes leading to the need to maintain more than one school in the catchment-area.

2. Closure of Ysgol Aberdyfi and providing a place for the catchment-area's pupils at Ysgol Penybryn

2.1 Class sizes

- 2.1.1 Class sizes at Aberdyfi are currently 10. Class sizes at Ysgol Penybryn are currently on average slightly below 25. although there are variations. The strategy notes that the aim should be to secure classes of between 12-25 pupils.
- 2.1.2 Through the closure of Ysgol Aberdyfi and transferring the catchment-area's pupils to Ysgol Penybryn, it is envisaged that there will sufficient additional finance to follow the pupils to maintain 1.5 teacher or a teacher and assistant.
- 2.1.3 Closing the school and moving the children to Penybryn would involve providing opportunities for children at Aberdyfi to learn in larger groups with their peers.

2.2 Pupil numbers

- 2.2.1 Pupil numbers at both schools jointly have reduced by 30% between 1975 and 2009. The population of Ysgol Aberdyfi has reduced from 66 to 20 during this period, representing a reduction of 70%, whilst the population at Ysgol Penybryn has reduced from 248 to 199 (20%).
- 2.2.2 Ysgol Aberdyfi envisages an increase in pupil numbers over the next few years by 20 to around 24. Ysgol Penybryn envisages a slight reduction from 199 to 194.

2.3 Child's Learning Environment

- 2.3.1 Both schools are in good condition and require little attention in this regard.
- 2.3.2 Ysgol Aberdyfi is in good condition. However, the Assets Management Plan estimates that there is a maintenance post-accumulation of £37,000, that £9,500 needs to be spent on fire precautions, and £57,000 to make the building fit for purpose. The Assets Management Plan therefore predicts that over £100,000 needs to be spent on renovating and adapting the school building.
- 2.3.3 Ysgol Penybryn is also in good condition. There is a maintenance post accumulation of £44,500, £9,500 needs to be spent on fire precautions and £95,000 to make the building fit for purpose. Substantial expenditure is also required on meeting DDA requirements of approximately £77,953. This amounts to expenditure requirements of approximately £225,000.
- 2.3.4 The Government's capital programme to support developing *21st C schools* notes the desire to develop community schools that are fit for purpose to meet the needs of this century. Approving this proposal will open up possibilities when applying for capital grants from the Government.
- 2.3.5 Ysgol Penybryn received a very good inspection report in 2004. The school will face another inspection during 2010. Ysgol Aberdyfi was placed under special measures in 2005, and the school came out of measures in 2008. It is therefore felt that pupils will receive at least as good an education at Ysgol Penybryn.

2.4 Leadership

- 2.4.1 A permanent new headteacher was appointed to Ysgol Penybryn in 2009. There has been an acting head at Ysgol Aberdyfi for seven years.
- 2.4.2 Recent experiences in the area have suggested that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified and suitable applicants to fill the post of headteacher,.

2.5 The Community

- 2.5.1 A summary was provided of community facilities and use made by the community of the school's facilities in the statistical analysis agreed by every school.
- 2.5.2 Few community activities are held at Ysgol Aberdyfi according to the statement issued by the school in June 2008. Cylch Ti a Fi and a weekly fitness club are held on the school premises. There are no other activities.
- 2.5.3 Ysgol Penybryn support the proposal. It is not supported at Aberdyfi, where the preferred option is the establishment of co-operation arrangements with Pennal, Pennal and Dyffryn Dulas, Corris, or with Ysgol Penybryn.
- 2.5.4 There has in the past been a cluster arrangement between Aberdyfi and Pennal with the head at Pennal taking charge of Aberdyfi. There was still frustration that Pennal had suffered from the arrangements and the cluster failed.

- 2.5.5 Neither Pennal nor Penybryn wish to work with Aberdyfi. Corris have stated that they feel that the distance of the village from Aberdyfi makes a co-operation arrangement impractical.
- 2.5.6 There is not currently a nursery provision at Ysgol Penybryn. As part of the proposal, the Council will open discussions with the local communities with the aim of establishing a nursery class at Ysgol Penybryn by September 2011.
- 2.5.7 The two schools estimate that 33 children aged between 3-11 currently reside in the Aberdyfi catchment-area. 13 of these are educated either at Ysgol Penybryn or in the Tywyn nursery catchment-areas.
- 2.5.8 Should the Council approve this proposal, an assessment of the community impact of implementing the proposal will be held in accordance with the Government's guidelines in circular 021/2009.

2.6 Financial Resources

- 2.6.1 Ysgol Aberdyfi comes within the Education Department's minimum staffing protection policy. The County spends £416,300 during 2009-10 to maintain a minimum of a head and teacher at every school which has fewer than 15 pupils and a head and assistant at a school with fewer than 15 pupils. £90,184 of this is in the Tywyn Catchment Area, £22,212 in Ysgol Aberdyfi. The staffing reduction protection policy is not implemented at Ysgol Penybryn.
- 2.6.2 Ysgol Aberdyfi's allocation in 2009-10 is £128,803. If the school was closed, it is envisaged that up to £56,360 will follow the school's pupils to Ysgol Penybryn. It is envisaged that there will be additional annual transport costs of approximately £15,000, that would release a saving of £57,443 back to the Education Department for allocation to other schools.
- 2.6.3 75% of places at Ysgol Aberdyfi, and 35% of places at Ysgol Penybryn, are empty. Once the proposal is implemented, empty places at Ysgol Penybryn would reduce to approximately 127%. The Government guidance is that there are a "significant number" of empty places when there are more than 25% and more than 30 empty places (national indicator), with a recommendation that the aim be to ensure that no more than 10% of places are empty.

2.7 The Welsh Language

- 2.7.1 A summary was prepared of the schools financial situation and the headteachers view for and development of the language at the schools. The summary was published in the statistical document and every school agreed to include it.
- 2.7.2 There are linguistic similarities between the communities. Over 80% of pupils from both schools come from monoglot English speaking homes. 36% of pupils at Pennal come from monoglot English speaking homes with 44% coming from bilingual homes and the remainder from Welsh speaking homes.

2.7.3 If the Council approves this proposal, the Council will fulfil the Language Impact Assessment when proceeding to the statutory process. This is done in accordance with Assembly Government requirements in the Circular 021/2009.

2.8 Geographical Factors

2.8.1 The road between Tywyn and Aberdyfi is of a high standard, with one school being 3.6 miles from the other. There are also train stations at both places. Ysgol Pennal is located 7 miles from Aberdyfi.

3. Pennal and Corris

3.1 Class Sizes

3.1.1 The size of individual classes at both schools varies from 15 to 30.

3.2 Pupil Numbers

3.2.1 Pupil numbers at both schools jointly has remained consistent over the past 35 years. Between both schools, there were 99 pupils between 4-10 years in 1975, and 94 today. Ysgol Pennal has seen an increase from 22 to 33 pupils, and Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas a reduction of 77 to 61.

3.2.2 Between the sites, there will be at least 80 children by 2014.

3.3 Child's Learning Environment

3.3.1 Expenditure is required on both schools to make them fit for purpose. There is a post-accumulation of £60,000 on both buildings, £9,500 on fire precautions for one site and £285,000 on adapting the buildings. This is a total of £355,000.

3.4 Leadership

3.4.1 There is an acting headteacher at one of the schools, and a head who will be eligible to retire within the next two years in the other.

3.4.2 Discussions with the permanent head suggest that she would wish to remain to assist with the development of the co-operation arrangement.

3.5 The Community

3.5.1 Staff, governors and parents of pupil at Pennal and Corris wish to establish an arrangement of co-operation as soon as possible.

3.5.2 The vast majority of primary school age children at Corris attend Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas. Pennal draws half its pupils from the Machynlleth catchment-area.

3.6 Financial Resources

3.6.1 Places at both schools are put to effective use, only 18% of places at both schools are empty.

3.6.3 Ysgol Pennal receives £3,921 through the minimum staffing protection policy. This would continue if the schools co-operated.

3.7 The Welsh Language

3.7.1 The schools are linguistically more similar to each other than Aberdyfi - 66% of children at Pennal and 46% of children from Corris come from either Welsh speaking or bilingual homes.

3.8 Geographical Factors

3.8.1 Geographical factors support keeping both sites open. There are 8 miles between Corris and Pennal. Pennal lies within 3 miles of Machynlleth. It is probable that children from Pennal and perhaps Corris would attend schools in Powys if the schools were to close.

XXX Frequently asked questions

General Questions

1. Statutory Requirements

Whether attention was paid to “Schools Organization Proposals” (circular 021/2009) when preparing proposals for the Tywyn catchment-area

The new document was published on 18 September 2009. It replaces Circular 23/02.. Consideration has been given to the main factors that authorities need to consider when preparing proposals to alter schools organisation, when drawing up proposals in the Tywyn area.

The Circular lists various considerations that need to be dealt with when evaluating and arriving at decisions and the factors to be considered by the Minister in making decisions.

2. The Statutory consultation period

The time-table for closing Ysgol Aberdyfi if the Council agrees to the proposal on 10 December 2009

The following is an example that takes the government's requirements into consideration

January 2010	A non-statutory meeting is offered to every school on which a closure notice has been issued. Audience members is at the school's discretion.
February 2010	Publish formal consultation document on the intention to close the school
March 2010	Hold statutory meetings for staff, governors and parents of every school. Pupils should also be invited.
March-April 2010	Hold statutory consultation period on the formal document
May 2010	The Council decides whether to issue statutory notices (the Board can decide if required)
May 2010	Subject to the Council's decision, issue statutory notices
May-July 2010	Period for presenting formal objections
September 2010	The Council/Board's final decision or transfer the case to the Assembly Government

Government guidance stipulates that 7 months will be required from the date when the proposal is issued (i.e. 7 months from February 2010) to enable the Minister to decide. In practice, and when it is expected that there will be objections, planning should be done 7 months from the date of closing period for objections. It is therefore likely that the minister will have decided by Easter 2011. It will therefore be possible to close the school by August 2011.

3. Availability of capital funding

The Assembly Government has allocated over £200m of capital funding through the SBIG transitional/21st C Schools programme during 2009. There will be a further round in March 2010. Whilst Gwynedd has failed to obtain any capital

funding, other counties have received substantial amounts. For instance, Powys' scheme to build 4 new area schools to replace 10 village schools, and make substantial improvements to the catchment-area's secondary schools (in the Ystradgynlais area) has received a grant of almost £37m.

Our discussions with Government officers clearly suggest that Gwynedd's failure is due to a lack of a strategy. A letter sent to us from the government confirms that capital funding is available for "...large scale strategic projects".

4. Pupil numbers in the catchment-area

There has been a reduction of 30% in pupil numbers in the catchment-area since 1975. A pupil reduction in the catchment-area of approximately 9% is envisaged by 2013

School	Number September 2009	Projection September 2013	2009-13	%
Abergynolwyn	14	13	-1	-7%
Bryncrug	21	23	2	10%
Corris	67	50	-17	-25%
Llanegryn	34	22	-12	-35%
Llwyngwrl	28	22	-6	-21%
Pennal	35	32	-3	-9%
Penybryn, Tywyn	199	195	-4	-2%
Aberdyfi	20	23	3	15%
Total	418	380	-38	-9%

Aberdyfi

5. Pupil numbers at Ysgol Aberdyfi

Direct information received from the school has been used when preparing the analyses and projections – namely schools censuses for September 2008, January 2009 and September 2009. The figures for September 2009 were received a month ago.

See the latest figures below:

	Actual 2008	Proj. 2009	Actual 2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
June 2009 (agreed by PAD Tywyn)	24	23	20	24	22	23	23	
September 2009 (schools census)			20	24	22	22	23	
Children to start in the nursery class			1	6	2	2	3	
Children to leave year 6			4	2	4	2	2	5

Source: Gwynedd Schools Census, 24 September 2009

It is therefore seen that there is very little difference between the projections agreed upon in June 2009 and the new projections provided by the school in September 2009.

6. Transport from Tywyn to Aberdyfi

Will there be a guardian on the bus? Is Penybryn site safe?

- Transport will be provided to Ysgol Penybryn for Aberdyfi children in accordance with the Council's transport policy.
- We do not provide guardians on the county's buses
- Regular surveys by the Education Department shows that the site at Penybryn is safe for buses – children are dropped outside the school gate.

7. Is it possible to delay the decision on Ysgol Aberdyfi for 5 years?

- Number of schools have asked for a final decision now to end the uncertainty.
- Feeling that deferring the decision will not be beneficial to the staff nor the children's education in the long run.
- The main factors for the change are listed in the report to the Council, but the reasons can be listed including that 40% of Aberdyfi children travel to Penybryn, Tywyn already, surplus places are over 70%, uncertainty about pupil number forecasts, there will be no more than 24 pupils in the school at any point in 2013, and past experiences of working with Pennal and Pen y Bryn,.

BRO DYSYNNI AREA SCHOOL

8. Is there a plan B?

What will happen if capital funding will not be available? Is there intention to move the catchments children to Bryn-crug or Penybryn schools?

- Confident that every effort is made to ensure adequate capital
- We have recently received a sign of support from the Assembly with the successful SCIF application for a new building for Ysgol yr Hendre.
- Powys Council (plan to build 4 new schools to replace 10 schools in Ystradgynlais area) has won £37m of capital grant by the Government this year whilst Gwynedd has failed to win a penny. A clear indication that a lack of strategic planning is at the heart of this.
- The argument that the Authority has a Plan B (that suggests that there is no desire or intention to maintain a rural school in Bro Dysynni) does not reflect the desire of the Portfolio Holder

9. Area School Location

- We have identified five possible sites around Llanegryn and Bryn-crug. It is not yet possible to be more detailed because of the commercial sensitivity of the matter.

- Work continues on development options and further information will be available by the Council meeting.

10. Bryncreg Community Centre

This is part of the school building, and there are concerns for the future of the centre if the new area school moves out of the village.

- It is understood that there is uncertainty until a definite decision can be made on the location of the proposed area school.
- If the new school will not be close enough to Bryncreg to house a centre, it will have to be looked into how to provide a community centre for the village.

11. What are the “exceptional circumstances” that could lead to school closure before the new area school will be built?

- Key factors were identified in the strategy approved by the Council (April 2009) including factors such as unsustainable low pupil numbers, the condition of the building, difficulty in appointing staff among others.
- Want to avoid a situation similar to Llawrybetws and it is hoped to provide security until the new school will be ready.

12. Catchment pupil numbers

Are there enough children in the area to make the area school viable?

There were 107 children of primary school age living in the 4 school catchments in January 2009. At present, over 20% of pupils from the 4 schools attend other schools. Other counties have won capital grants to fund building schools of similar size to the proposed area school.

PENNAL AND CORRIS

13. Nature of the collaboration between Pennal a Dyffryn Dulas schools.

The precise nature of the collaboration between schools, will depend on local needs. The Education Department will support two schools in developing a model of collaboration to suit the purpose.