

Gwynedd Council has a vision to develop a primary education system that will:

“Provide education of the highest possible quality that will provide the County’s children with the experiences, skills and confidence and equip them to become bilingual, successful and well-rounded bilingual citizens.”

In April 2009, Gwynedd Council agreed to approve a strategy that stated that the primary educational provision needed to be reviewed throughout the county.

Strategy for Providing Primary Education of the Highest Quality for the Children of Gwynedd

The strategy was the result of a lengthy period of deliberations and discussions by councillors. During the discussions, presentations were received from several bodies,

- ESTYN
- Assembly Government
- Welsh Language Society
- National Association for Small Schools
- Schools and Supporters Alliance
- Headteachers representing small, medium-sized and large schools in Gwynedd
- Gwynedd Council Officers, specifically officers specializing in educational, financial and building matters

It was agreed that one catchment-area at a time would need to be reviewed, commencing in those areas which were the greatest concern. In order to identify the order in which the catchment-areas would be reviewed, a list of criteria was drawn up that considered:

- Class sizes
- The change in pupil numbers since 1975
- Suitability of school buildings
- Leadership provided by schools and headteacher recruitment difficulties
- Percentage of pupils who receive education outside their catchment-area
- Cost per pupil
- Empty places

By following the above-mentioned criteria, the Berwyn catchment-area was identified as the second catchment-area for review.

A County Advisory Panel will assist the Education Portfolio Leader in leading reviews per catchment-area. Every political grouping on the Council has a seat on the County Advisory Panel although one member resigned during Summer 2009.

Y Berwyn Catchment-area Review Panel

The Y Berwyn Catchment-area Review Panel was established during November 2009. The remit of the Catchment-area Review Panel is to assist the Education Portfolio Leader, Cllr Liz Saville Roberts, to draw up specific proposals for the catchment-area.

The initial step in establishing the Catchment-area Review Panel was for Council representatives – Cllr Liz Saville Roberts and a County Advisory Panel representative, Cllr Siân Gwenllïan – to visit all the catchment-area primary schools on 4 November 2009. They had an opportunity to meet headteachers and staff and see the schools. The visit was beneficial and very constructive.

The initial Y Berwyn Catchment-area Review Panel meeting was held on 4 November 2009. The Panel membership was agreed on, namely:

- Education Portfolio Leader
- County Advisory Panel Representative
- Headteacher, chair of governors and parent-governor from every school (primary and secondary) in the catchment-area
- The three local councillors
- Head of Education Gwynedd Council
- Other officers as appropriate.
- Observers

It was also agreed that an invitation should be extended to representatives of neighbouring schools across local council boundaries, specifically:

- Llangwm local councillor (County of Conwy)
- Cynwyd local councillor (Denbighshire)
- Chair of Governors Ysgol Llangwm

The Panel received a number of papers during the initial meeting as a basis for the work:

- remit and brief for the Panel
- time-table for the Panel's work
- correspondence from Ysgol Y Berwyn on possible schemes for consideration

In addition, a statistical paper summarizing the situation in the catchment-area was received. The paper provides information on:

- the location of schools within the catchment-area
- pupil numbers and changes since 1975 and projections up to 2013
- capacity of schools and empty places
- situation regarding headteachers and recruitment difficulties
- class sizes
- pupils from outside the catchment-area
- schools financial allocations
- linguistic profile of schools within the catchment-area
- suitability of buildings
- facilities and resources at the schools
- community-based use
- pupils claiming free dinner

The schools have agreed to study the information and propose adjustments by 13 November 2009. The statistical paper will be approved by the Panel at its next meeting.

The statutory and legal context was also mentioned, principally Assembly Government Circular 021/2009 on School Organization Proposals. This document will form the basis for deliberations when consulting on proposals. On receiving this information, the Catchment-area Review Panel requested further information on:

- standards of current educational provision,
- impact on the community
- impact of changes on the Welsh language
- school financial projections

So as to move the discussion on, Council officers were also requested to prepare information on a range of possible models on re-organizing the area's schools by the next meeting of the Catchment-area Review Panel. It was also agreed that schools had an interest in observing new schools and models of co-operation in other counties. The Council will try and arrange a visit before Christmas.

Individual Schools

The Council wish staff, parents and pupils to be fully aware of ongoing discussions within the catchment-area. The Catchment-area Review Panel received a suggestion that the Council would prepare a short newsletter at the end of every meeting to summarize the principal matters discussed.

We have also agreed to hold meetings in every individual school led by John Blake, former Meirionnydd area education officer and Gareth Williams, former Chief Executive CYNNAL. This will provide an opportunity for teaching and support staff, governors and parents to contribute to the discussion and ask specific questions. The meetings will be held during the week beginning 11 January 2010.

A discussion group for children and young people will also be established, led by the Council's specialist officers. This session will also be held in the new year.

Time-table

It is envisaged that at least 2 further meetings of the Catchment-Area Review Panel will be held, on 2 December 2009 and on 21 January 2010.

By the end of January 2010, the Education Portfolio will aim to develop firm proposals for the Y Berwyn catchment-area which will be submitted to the Gwynedd Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (February 2010), the Council Board (March 2010) and the full Council. It is intended to complete the process at the full Council meeting to be held on 6 May 2010.

The time-table for implementing the proposals is conditional on receiving the support of the above committees, and on the exact nature of the proposals. The Council will provide additional information as the process proceeds.

Date of next Circular

The next circular will arrive at your schools following the next meeting of the y Berwyn Catchment-area Review Panel held on 2 December 2009.

Further Information

Further information is available on the Council web-site or through contacting the Education Department on 01286 679 247 or e-mailing trefniadaeth.ysgolion@gwynedd.gov.uk