

Consultation Report on the Proposed Amalgamation of
Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont
& Ysgol Trefriw

Conwy

January 2016

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1. Introduction

Conwy County Borough Council has recently completed a period of Consultation in relation to the proposal to close Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont and Ysgol Trefriw as of the 31st August 2017 and establish a new School on the current Dolgarrog site as of 1st September 2017. The consultation period began on the 28th September 2015 and came to a close on the 9th November 2015.

The Consultation has been carried out in accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 which requires the School Organisation Code 2013 to be issued to and give guidance to relevant bodies (Welsh Ministers, Local Authorities, Governing Bodies).

This document will set out the steps taken during the Consultation Period, will refer to findings obtained during the Consultation and will aim to answer and tackle queries that have been put to the Authority.

2. Consultation

2.1 Publication of the Consultation

Copies of the Consultation Document were sent out to 204 recipients via hardcopy and by email link. The Consultation Document was also published on the Conwy County Borough Council webpages bilingually along with all other documentation regarding the Proposal. The table below sets out the list of recipients who received a copy of the Consultation Document, in accordance with the School Organisation Code.

Name/Organisation	No of Recipients
Parents, teachers & staff of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw	150
Governors of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw	20
Headteacher & Governors of Ysgol Bro Gwydir / Ysgol Eglwysbach / Ysgol Llangelynnin	6
Church in Wales Diocese of Bangor & Roman Catholic Diocese of Wrexham	2
Denbighshire County Council Education Services	1
Gwynedd County Council Education Services	1
Welsh Minister for Education & Skills	1
Welsh Government Schools Management and Effectiveness Division	1
Assembly Member & Member of Parliament representing area subject to proposals	2
Local Conwy Councillors for Caerhun & Trefriw Wards	2
Caerhun Community Council, Dolgarrog Community Council, Trefriw Community Council	3
Estyn	1
Teaching & Staff Trade Unions	8
GWE	1
Taith	1
Police & Crime Commissioner for North Wales	1
Conwy CYPP	1
Conwy Community First	1
Flying Start Conwy	1

2.2 Consultation Meeting

As part of the Consultation process all of the above recipients of the Consultation Document were invited to attend a drop-in session / meeting at each of the 3 schools on the 13th 19th & 20th October respectively. Attendance at these meetings was low with parents, staff, Governors and members of the community present.

The Statutory Proposal process was explained to attendees to ensure clarity that in comparison to previous consultation with the Caerhun & Trefriw Area the Statutory Notice would legally close the 3 schools and open the new school on the current Dolgarrog site.

There were concerns raised in regards to the distinction between current and previous consultation, and it was re-iterated that this Consultation was to discuss the statutory timeline. Following an explanation of the Statutory timeline, a number of attendees felt misled, as they were under the impression that it had already been agreed that 1 New School would open on the Dolgarrog site (Cabinet had not agreed this to date). It was explained that in 2013 Cabinet gave approval to continue to Welsh Government Business Case & Statutory Proposals for the preferred option of a new build School on Dolgarrog site.

Any further questions raised regarding the Project that was not part of the Consultation Process were answered as appropriate.

2.3 Information for Children

As part of the ongoing proposal to amalgamate Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw information for pupils has been shared informing them of the details of the proposal and what the future plans would be for them.



What is happening?

There is a plan to change your school...
and we would like to know what you think about it...

What is the Plan?

The Plan is for Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal-y-Bont and Ysgol Trefriw to become one school and to build a new school at Dolgarrog.



What will Change?

- If you already go to school at Ysgol Dolgarrog, you would stay in the same place while the building work is going on and then move into the new school with all the other children from Tal y Bont and Trefriw in September 2017.
- If you go to either Ysgol Tal y Bont or Ysgol Trefriw, you would stay in your schools until the new school opens in September 2017 and then you would go with your friends to your new school at Dolgarrog and make more friends with the children from the other schools
- The new school would have a new name and a new uniform.



3. Consultation Feedback

During the course of the Consultation Period Conwy Education Services received 64 responses to the Consultation Document. The tables below demonstrates the format of response used by stakeholders and the breakdown of who responses were received by.

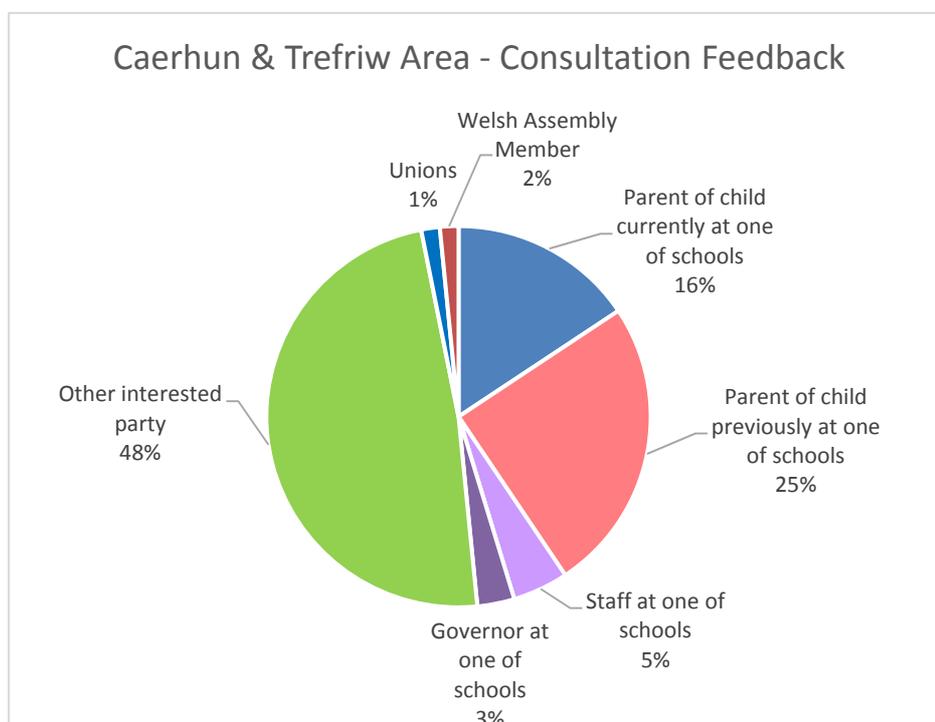
The content of all the responses received can be seen in Appendix 1.

Please note that the Appendices to this document can be found at www.conwy.gov.uk/caerhunatrefriwarea

Format of Response	Number of Responses Received
Consultation Response Form	59
Letter / Email	5
Total Received	64

Responses Provided By	Number of Responses Received
Parent of child currently at one of schools	10
Parent of child previously at one of schools	16
Staff at one of schools	3
Governor at one of schools	2
Other interested party	31
Unions	1
Welsh Assembly Member	1
Total	64

Of the 64 responses received 61 were not in favour of the proposed amalgamation. The majority of those not in agreement with the Proposal were from the Trefriw community; concerns raised included transportation of pupils to Dolgarrog from Trefriw and the impact on the community with the loss of the village school.



3.1 Stakeholder & Community Feedback

The feedback that we have received from parents, Governors and members of the wider community in the main were not in agreement with the Proposal. The main concern for

stakeholders was the loss of the local community school and the impact on the wider community.

Another concern was the additional travel time for pupils from Trefriw to Dolgarrog.

Whilst local residents have been informed that travel times will be in excess of an hour each way per day, this cannot be regarded as accurate.

Conwy County Borough Council Education Services Home to School Transport Policy stipulates that "It is considered that normal journey times should be no more than 45 minutes for primary school travel and 60 minutes for secondary school travel."

The cost of transporting pupils from the Trefriw community to the proposed new School in Dolgarrog has been estimated at £31,000 per annum.

Some of the comments received during the Consultation were: -

"As much as I prefer the smaller School, realistically one bigger School makes more sense."

"Four generations of my family have attended Trefriw School. It would be a shame to see it close. It would worry me what the transport situation would be for little children having to attend a school at another village."

"Young children would have to be transported some distance from their homes/village - safety issues! Loss of community spirit - detrimental to a small county village leading to (possibly) further loss of village services."

"If the school shuts in Trefriw it will discourage other families moving here which will have a knock on effect on business and attracting any new business."

One of the responses received raised a number of questions in relation to the impact of the proposal on the wider community of Trefriw in regards to council tax, tax receipts, impact on local businesses and potential future planning applications on the village.

During the meeting of Conwy Cabinet on the 24th November it was requested that Community Development Service undertakes an Economic Impact Assessment on the affected communities. This will allow the Authority to respond appropriately to the above specific queries along with providing an assessment on the impact on the communities of the 3 schools.

This response also raised queries in regards to transport for pupils to the proposed new school. As previously stated transport to the new school will be provided in accordance with the Authority's Home to School Transport Policy.

Further questions were raised in relation to the effect on increased traffic in the area resulting from the new school and the recent Surf Snowdonia development.

The new School would have provision for off road drop off and pick up points for parents and taxis to ensure pupils arrive to school safely.

A Transport Impact Assessment in relation to the proposed new school has been completed previously prior to the opening of the Surf Snowdonia attraction. As part of the Planning process for Surf Snowdonia a Traffic Assessment was completed by the developers for the facility suggesting an additional 15 vehicles per hour on the on the road at peak times. In accordance with Planning regulations a Traffic Assessment would be completed for the proposed new school at the required planning stage.

Another aspect to this response was the risk of the proposed new school being located near electricity pylons. Information on the Cancer Research UK website tells us that "Some reports have suggested that exposure to electromagnetic fields (for example, overhead

power lines) might increase a child's risk of developing cancer. But as yet no conclusive link has been found.”

“A UK report in February 2014 found that children who live near overhead power lines in early life do not have a greater risk of developing childhood leukaemia. The report is from the Childhood Cancer Research Group at the University of Oxford. The researchers looked at nearly 16,500 children diagnosed with leukaemia since the 1990s who lived within a kilometre of overhead power lines. They say that there is no direct biological effect of power lines on leukaemia risk.”

The full content of this stakeholder response can be seen in Appendix 2a of this report.

During the course of the Consultation Period correspondence was received from Janet Finch Saunders, the Assembly Member for the Aberconwy area, this correspondence along with the Authority’s response can be seen in Appendix 2b of this report.

3.2 UCAC Union Feedback

The feedback provided by UCAC Union focused on three main points – Reasons for the change, buildings/resources and staffing structure/interim arrangements. Comments from the feedback include: -

“UCAC fully realise that local authorities are under pressure to reduce empty places at schools and it’s obvious that this scheme tries to respond to that. Planning new schools or remodelling must ensure that it’s easy to extend the provision if the need arises.”

“We gather that the Authority is fairly confident that it will receive money for the scheme through a 21 century schools grant from the Welsh Government, but also presumes that the proposed scheme is totally dependent on it.”

The Primary School Modernisation Programme is funded on a 50/50 basis by Conwy County Borough Council and the Welsh Government’s 21st Century Schools Programme.

“UCAC notes that the Document refers to the different options that were under consideration prior to this but also note that there are no options regarding co-operation, such as federalisation, have been fully explored.”

In response to the above comment from UCAC we can confirm that at the time of considering the options for the Caerhun & Trefriw Area Local Authorities were not empowered to federalise schools, this was a Governing Body power only. Conwy Education Services were not made aware that the Governing Bodies of any of the schools made any contact with a view to federalisation.

In May 2014 the Welsh Government Federation Process of Maintained Schools in Wales Guidance was issued making the federation process more accessible for Governing Bodies and allowing Local Authorities the option of instigating federalisation. In regards to the Caerhun & Trefriw Area, Conwy Cabinet had resolved in November 2013 (prior to the change in guidance) to progress with option 1, a new build Area School on Dolgarrog site.

UCAC also commented *“While accepting that it will be the shadow governing body’s responsibility to set final staffing structures for a new school, there is room for the Authority to give greater consideration to the implications of the amalgamation on the posts of current staff. Naturally, the first step will be the appointment of a head and UCAC would like to see this happen at least a year in advance.”*

The current Statutory timetable aims to publish the Statutory Notice in the New Year, once this has been done arrangements to establish a Temporary Governing Body can begin. Upon their formation one of their first duties will be to appoint a Headteacher and all staff of the current schools and Unions will be kept informed of plans and progress.

UCAC concluded with the following: - *“UCAC presses the Council to do all it can to come to a final decision on the future of schools in the Caerhun and Threfriw area as soon as possible and try to keep to the proposed timetable.”*

The full response from UCAC can be seen in Appendix 3 of this report.

3.3 ESTYN Feedback

The feedback provided by ESTYN is prepared by answering set questions to ensure that the Local Authority have taken into account all educational requirements within their proposals. ESTYN made the following comments about the description & benefits of the proposal: -

“The proposer has adequately outlined the benefits of the proposal in terms of addressing the current excess capacity in all three schools and developing more appropriate school accommodation to meet the needs of pupils in the area more effectively.”

The response from ESTYN also comments that *“The proposer does not clearly demonstrate how the proposal will reduce the overall number of surplus places in the area. The proposer identifies current surplus capacity of 44%, 63% and 68% in Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont and Ysgol Trefriw respectively and asserts that the development of a new area school will reduce the number of surplus places significantly. Elsewhere in the report, it provides useful information on projected pupil numbers for the current schools for the next five years but it does not link this to an estimate of surplus places in the new school.”*

The 3 schools currently have a combined 124 unfilled places against their collective capacities; the projected pupil numbers for September 2017 (when it is proposed to establish the new area school) would see 34 unfilled places against the new capacity of 120, this would be a reduction of 90 unfilled places in the area. Projected pupil numbers and surplus capacity for the proposed new area school can be calculated based on current numbers in the 3 current schools, as demonstrated in the table below.

	2017 Projected Pupil Numbers	% of Surplus Places	2020 Projected Pupil Numbers	% of Surplus Places
Dolgarrog (90 Capacity)	54	40%	57	37%
Tal y Bont (60 Capacity)	22	63%	21	65%
Trefriw (69 Capacity)	10	85%	2	97%
New School (120 Capacity)	86	29%	80	34%

The ESTYN response also comments as follows on the Welsh Language *“The proposal to amalgamate the three schools is unlikely to have a negative impact on Welsh medium provision within the local authority. All three schools are currently Welsh medium category 1 schools as would the proposed new school.”*

In regards to the Educational aspects of the proposal ESTYN states *“It lists a number of potential benefits for outcomes, provision, and leadership and management that would arise from the amalgamated school. These include more opportunities for additional activities, better access for pupils and staff to additional specialisms, resources and facilities, and greater opportunities for staff development with potential for specialist staffing and management structures. However, these relate mainly to provision and the proposal does not evaluate these in any detail. Overall, it does not clearly identify how the potential benefits it lists would have an impact on school standards.”*

Enhanced provision, opportunities and access can lead to improved pupil standards as outlined in more detail below and in particular reference to summarised by Estyn’s report *“School size and Educational Effectiveness”* (December 2013)

Original L.A. proposal 'curriculum comment'	Additional L.A. information	*Estyn findings "School size and Educational Effectiveness" report (December 2013)
<p>"Amalgamation would build upon the work that the headteachers, staff and governing bodies have already started in order to improve school standards further. This good work could be more easily built upon; collaboration providing the following potential benefits for pupils standards, enhanced provision, leadership and management:</p>		
<p>Creating a shared educational ethos that supports children from age 3 through to 11 and providing consistently high expectations of for all</p>	<p>More non contact time for headteacher to strategically lead, manage and implement improvement in pupil standards</p>	<p><i>*In small primary schools, many headteachers have a significant teaching responsibility that limits the time they can devote to leading and managing and they have fewer opportunities to evaluate standards and to drive improvement'</i></p>
<p>In addition it will allow the community to identify with and support a single primary school and potentially providing a more effective community focus role through its single governance</p> <p>Having a wide range of 'out of school' activities that benefit from greater resources and that could be interest and age related</p>	<p>Promoting parental engagement is proven to have a positive impact on standards (See Estyn 'Good practice in parental involvement' and 'Impact of family learning programmes on standards')</p>	
<p>Promoting greater interaction allowing opportunities for additional activities which could be supported by parents, children and staff</p> <p>Enabling pupils and staff to access additional specialisms, resources and facilities more easily</p>	<p>All primary pupils in the area will have access to a 21st century learning environment benefitting from the facilities and resources of 3 schools on one site leading to improved pupil outcomes e.g. access to physical education hall.</p>	<p><i>**Wellbeing is judged excellent in 15% of large primary schools compared to 8% of medium-sized schools and 3% of small schools. The excellent features are usually high attendance, exceptional good behaviour, pupils being involved in initiatives that promote healthy life styles, pupils' attitudes to learning, their social and life skills, and their ability to make decisions. One of the most notable features is the emphasis given to pupil voice and how pupils influence the life of the school. In general, the larger the school, the greater is the capacity of staff to enable these practices to be developed, formalised and embedded'</i></p>
<p>Reduced duplication and economies of scale in management of budgets</p>	<p>A larger staff organisation provides better opportunities to share resources, best practice, experience and expertise across the whole of the</p>	

	school, ultimately for the benefit of pupil standards	
Greater opportunities for pupils to mix, socialise, learn and develop with additional pupils of their own age	Classes of a more suitable size and reductions in the range of ages within classes. Opportunities for children to work with their peers in larger classes and with children of similar achievement levels in more suitable sized groups leading to improvement in standards	<i>*"The quality of teaching is good or better in 80% of primary schools overall, but 72% of very small primary schools (under 30) have teaching that is good or better. In these schools, there are three or more age groups in each class and teachers have to plan and deliver lessons that meet the needs of pupils from a wide age and ability range"</i>
Accommodating a wider breadth of activities for more able and talented pupils and those with additional learning needs which will result in improved standards		<i>*"Pupils' standards are good or better in a higher proportion of larger primary schools than small and medium-sized primary schools. This may be because large schools tend to have more expertise and capacity to address the needs of more vulnerable pupils and the more able and talented pupils"</i>
Strengthening the school's language provision by working together to continue to promote the use of Welsh both in and outside of the classroom.	Increased number of children enabling pupils to practise their Welsh daily with more peers. Additional opportunities to support pupils attempting to increase their confidence in their use of both languages, thereby encouraging pupils to continue with their education in Welsh or bilingually	<i>*"Foundation Phase assessment outcomes improve with school size for language, literacy and communication skills"</i> <i>'The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in Welsh is higher in large schools.'</i>
Providing greater opportunities for staff development and learning from new ways of doing things.	Ability to use teacher skills more widely giving more opportunity for staff to share expertise and experience leading to an improvement in pupil standards	<i>*"Curriculum provision is better in large primary schools. In small schools, there tends to be shortcomings in the provision of foundation subjects at key stage. These shortcomings differ from school to school, but are often linked to gaps in the expertise of staff"</i>

In 2008, Estyn submitted evidence to the Welsh Governments' Rural Development Sub-Committee, which noted that: "overall, there is no advantage to pupils in relation to the standards achieved in small primary schools.....The quality of leadership and teaching is a more important factor than the overall size of a school; and small schools, generally, face greater pressures in areas of leadership and management, staff development and curriculum planning"

The response from Estyn concludes in saying the following - *"The proposer indicates that, should the proposal proceed, building work for the new school will take place on the grounds of the existing school site at Ysgol Dolgarrog while the existing school remains in operation. However, the proposer does not show how it intends to minimise potential disruption to current learners or staff at the school."*

In terms of disruption to pupils and staff whilst building work for the new school is ongoing both Education Services will ensure that any disruption will be kept to a minimum and will work with the appointed contractor, the Temporary Governing Body and the 3 schools when developing the phasing of the works.

The full response received from Estyn can be seen in Appendix 4 of this report.

4. Cabinet Decision

Conwy County Borough Council Cabinet Members met on the 24th November 2015 to discuss the Consultation for the Proposed Amalgamation of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw.

Having been provided with the information gathered through the Consultation, including all of the correspondence received, Conwy Cabinet gave approval to formally publish the Statutory Notice for determining the amalgamation of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw. As with all Cabinet decisions this decision was subject to a 5 working day call-in period, following the publication of the Cabinet minutes. This decision has been called-in and consequently went before Principal Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 7th December.

Scrutiny Committee agreed to a 'pause & review' for the Caerhun & Trefriw Area requesting that further financial information be provided. The proposal, along with the additional information requested by Scrutiny, will go before Conwy Cabinet in February 2016. Following Cabinet's resolution the onward timeline will be shared.