

Janet Finch-Saunders AM/AC

Assembly Member for Aberconwy
Aelod Cynulliad dros Aberconwy

Shadow Minister for Local Government
Gweinidog yr Wrthblaid dros Lywodraeth Leol

Richard Ellis Owen,
Head of Education Services (Chief Education Officer)
Education Department
Government Buildings
Dinerth Road
Colwyn Bay
LL28 4UL

Office of Janet Finch-Saunders AM,
29 Madoc Street,
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LL30 2TL.
01492 871 198

Ref: TYH/JFS/HM
27 October 2015

National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1NA.
0300 200 7246

Dear Mr Ellis Owen,

I am writing with regards to the current consultation relating to the proposed amalgamation of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont and Ysgol Trefriw.

I understand that a number of consultees intend to register objections to this proposal, however representations have been made to myself expressing concerns as to the recourse of these consultees (e.g. parents, residents, governors), in particular with regards to Section 5.5 of the Welsh Assembly School Organisation Code, which implies that the Local Authority has the final decision on matters such as this, even when objections to the proposal have been registered.

Therefore, I would be grateful if you could provide some clarity as to how the responses will be considered when the final decision is made by Conwy County Borough Council.

Yours sincerely,



Janet Finch-Saunders AM/AC

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Janet Finch-Saunders will treat in confidence any personal information which you may pass on to her, and she will normally allow her staff to see it, so that they can consult with relevant authorities in order to help and advise you. We may wish to write to you from time to time to keep you informed on issues which you may find of interest. Please let us know if you do not wish to be contacted for this purpose.

Mi wnaiff Janet Finch-Saunders cadw unrhyw wybodaeth bersonol yn gwbl gyfrinachol, ac fel arfer mi fydd rhaid iddi rannu'r wybodaeth 'efo aelodau o staff i'w galluogi nhw i ddellio 'efo'r awdurdodau perthnasol er mwyn eich helpu a'ch cynorthwyo chi. Efallai mi fydd angen i rywun ysgrifennu atoch er mwyn darparu'r wybodaeth ddiweddaraf o bwys. Gadwch wybod i ni os nad oes diddordeb gennych mewn cael eich cysylltu at y diben hwn.

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Office of Janet Finch-Saunders AM,
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01492 871 198

Ref: TYH/JFS/HM
30 October 2015

National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1NA.
0300 200 7246

Dear Mr Ellis Owen,

I am writing with regards to the current consultation for the proposed amalgamation of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont and Ysgol Trefriw.

I would firstly like to highlight my concerns regarding this proposal. As well as the loss of two village schools, and a number of potential redundancies, there are potential concerns regarding future performance. I note from the consultation document, that all three schools have been reviewed by ESTYN, with performance judged, in the majority, as 'Good'.

Whilst I understand the purpose of this amalgamation is in line with the Welsh Labour Government's commitment to drive down the numbers of surplus places, I feel it necessary to raise the point that this policy has, to date, resulted in 69 schools being closed across Wales since 2009, despite evidence from the National Association of Small Schools that smaller schools generally outperform their larger counterparts.

It is my firm opinion that, where possible, good schools should remain open. The priority, first and foremost, must be the pupils themselves.

The consultation document does not make clear the potential savings or costs of the proposed amalgamation, and I have concerns that there is insufficient evidence to justify the statement *"One of the drivers for Primary School Modernisation is equality of funding for pupils and through the amalgamation of the 3 schools we would expect the cost per pupil figure for the Caerhun and Trefriw Area to be reduced."* The National Association of Small Schools, further advises that savings from closures are "miniscule", and small schools "...are probably in some cases the only public service of any dimension that still survives. Rural people are paying the same taxes as everybody else in this country and they deserve a service on their doorstep for young children." I would like to enquire as to whether this 'equality of funding' is intended to bring funding per pupil in line with all primary schools across Conwy County Borough Council, or just for those in rural areas?

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Finally, the consultation document states that *"It is anticipated that there will be an increase in transport provision as some pupils will have a slight increase in their journey to their nearest appropriate School."* However it is not made clear what the anticipated additional costs for this increase in transport provision will be. I would like to enquire as to whether this has been factored into the costing of the proposed amalgamation?


Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet".


Janet Finch-Saunders AM/AC

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Gofynnwch am / Please ask for: **Wyn Jones**

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Ein Cyf / Our Ref:

Eich Cyf / Your Ref:

Dyddiad / Date: **10.11.15**

Dear Janet Finch Saunders,

In response to your letters dated 27th October and 30th October, both of which were received by email on the 30th October.

I acknowledge your concerns and this email is intended to answer your queries.

I can confirm the Welsh Government School Organisation Code empowers Local Authority's as the decision making body for school reorganisation proposals, and as such officers will collate all responses received which will be written into a report and submitted to Cabinet for their consideration.

As one of the drivers for Primary School Modernisation equality of funding per pupil is expected to be rationalised across Conwy County Borough Council with the realisation that smaller and rural schools will have higher 'cost per pupil' figures than those in the more densely populated areas of the County.

The Consultation Document references that the current cost per pupil for the 15/16 financial year at each of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw is £4,840, £7,122 and £7,992 respectively in comparison to the County average of £3,956. Based on current information available the anticipated cost per pupil for one school in the Caerhun and Trefriw Area stands at £4,402 with revenue savings in the region of £150,000.

In respect of increased Home to School Transport provision an estimated additional cost has been based on the current number of pupils at Ysgol Trefriw receiving transport to the new School in Dolgarrog. This would be an anticipated increase of £8,000 in comparison to the current cost of transporting pupils to Ysgol Trefriw. I must reiterate that this is an estimate with the actual cost only known when the true numbers of pupils to be transported is realised.

For information I have outlined below the steps that have been taken in what is a fairly complex process:-

Engagement Meetings

Education Services have taken proactive steps to engage with the communities of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont & Ysgol Trefriw during June 2013 and prior to these meetings,

workshops were held with children in each area during January 2013. Such attempts to engage with local communities is considered as good practice by Welsh Government.

The engagement meetings held in 2013 were in order to:

- present and share information about possible options for the area
- allow members of each community to express their views and preferences
- explain the next steps.

Identifying Preferred Option

Having discussed and taken into account the views of stakeholders, it was necessary for Education Services to identify a preferred option to be considered by elected Members.

Cabinet Approval

In November 2013 a report was presented to Cabinet describing each of the options which had been discussed with the local communities. Cabinet minutes (12th November 2013) stated "That Option 1 – a new build area school on one site (Ysgol Dolgarrog) be approved as the agreed option to take forward through to the Welsh Government Business Case and Statutory Proposals."

Current Position

As a consequence of Cabinet's decision, the Primary School Modernisation Programme in the Caerhun & Trefriw Area is now at the Statutory Consultation stage and the Authority must comply with the requirements of the WG School Organisation Code.

Due to the fact that not all members of the communities were able to take advantage of the consultation meetings held in October 2015, Education Services have sent further copies of the Consultation Feedback Forms to each Headteacher so that residents can have a further opportunity to present their views.

I hope the above clarifies the situation and demonstrates that Education Services have provided Stakeholders with sufficient opportunities to engage with the School Modernisation process in the Caerhun & Trefriw Area.

Regards



Richard Ellis Owen

**Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Addysg (Prif Swyddog Addysg)
Head of Education Services (Chief Education Officer)**

Janet Finch-Saunders AM/AC

Assembly Member for Aberconwy
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Ref: TYH/JFS/HM
06 November 2015

National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1NA.
0300 200 7246

Dear Mr Ellis Owen,

I am writing with regards to the current consultation relating to the proposed amalgamation of Ysgol Dolgarrog, Ysgol Tal y Bont and Ysgol Trefriw.

Further to my previous correspondence on this matter, there are an additional number of points I would like to register with regards to this consultation:

- I understand that there is some local support for the federalisation of the schools in question (*as per the Education (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 2 Chapter 1, and The Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014*), as opposed to the amalgamation of them on one site, and I would like to enquire as to how this option has been considered by the Council. If it has not been considered, I would be grateful if you could advise as to the reasons for this and, if possible, make considerations of this option.

- As per your Consultation Letter, dated 28th September 2015, you state:

"As part of the consideration process the Local Authority Education Services is consulting with the parents of pupils, staff and governors of both schools, the Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors at local schools, Councillors, Welsh Ministers, Members of Parliament and other interested parties."

I would like to enquire as to why Assembly Members are not explicitly mentioned as consultees – certainly both myself as Assembly Member for Aberconwy and the regional Assembly Members for North Wales should have been directly contacted by the Local Authority Education Service on this matter, given that Education is a devolved matter, and therefore falls under the remit of the National Assembly for Wales. I would like to express my disappointment here, and request that this consultation is extended and all relevant Assembly Members formally contacted, and given appropriate time to respond.

- Concerns have been expressed to me regarding transport and travel between Trefriw and Dolgarrog – I understand that there is no footpath or active travel route between these locations. I am further led to understand that the school bus provider may

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estimate a journey time of up to 1.5 hours each way for children being picked up from Trefriw. Given the actual distance between these sites, this seems excessive, and I would like to enquire as to what consideration has been given to transport links and travel between catchment areas and the proposed school site.

- Finally, it is unclear from the consultation document what consideration has been made of the potential impact on the communities who stand to lose a school site – i.e. Trefriw and Tal y Bont. For example, reduced footfall in a village may result in the closure of shops – I would be grateful if the Council would advise as to what considerations of this nature have been made for Trefriw and Tal y Bont.

I would appreciate these points being taken into account accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet".

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 **Wyn.jones1@conwy.gov.uk**

Ein Cyf / Our Ref:

Eich Cyf / Your Ref:

Dyddiad / Date: **11.11.15**

Dear Janet Finch Saunders,

Further to your letter dated 6th November 2015, which was received by email on Monday 9th November, please note below responses to your queries.

- During 2013 key information was gathered to support the completion of an Option Appraisal and associated Impact Assessments on Language, Transport, Community, Equalities and Buildings 'Fit for Purpose', all of which can be found on the Conwy Primary School Modernisation webpage <http://www.conwy.gov.uk/section.asp?cat=10702&Language=1>

The Options for the Caerhun & Trefriw Area were –

- Option 1 - New Build Area school on Dolgarrog site
- Option 2 – Maintain Current Schools
- Option 3 – Area School via re-modelling of existing Ysgol Dolgarrog building
- Option 4 – Area School on Existing Sites

During this time Education Services consulted with the schools, pupils and communities in order to present and discuss the above options. The option to provide an Area School on the Existing Sites was the least feasible, owing to the fact that the number of unfilled places in the area would not be improved, there would be very little revenue and cost per pupil savings and extensive capital costs would be required to bring the three schools up to a 'fit for purpose' standard which could not be financed via the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme.

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. I am not 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. 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.

- The Welsh Government School Organisation Code 2013 requires that Local Authorities consult with a number of people, groups and organisations. In reference to Assembly Members the Local Authority is required to ensure that either a hard copy or email link is provided to "Assembly Members (AMs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) representing the

area served by/intended to be served by any school which is the subject of the proposals". I can confirm that an email was sent to you on the 29th September 2015 containing the link to the Conwy County Borough webpage with the Consultation information for the Caerhun & Trefriw Area. The consultation was also sent to the other local AM's.

- The Welsh Government Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance which was issued in 2014 does not specify a time limit for journeys in regards to Home to School Transport however suitable and appropriate travel arrangements will be provided for those pupils who live 2 miles or further from their nearest suitable school. Currently the pupils living at the furthest point in the Trefriw catchment are only 4.2 miles from the new school site in Dolgarrog. We can assure you that reasonable arrangements will be put in place by the Home to School Transport team once pupil information is known.
- A Community Impact Assessment was completed by officers in Community Development Services on behalf of Education Services in May 2013 and a copy of this can be found on the Conwy Primary School Modernisation webpage.
<http://www.conwy.gov.uk/section.asp?cat=10702&Language=1>

Regards



Richard Ellis Owen
Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Addysg (Prif Swyddog Addysg)
Head of Education Services (Chief Education Officer)