

P-05-828 Presumption in favour of rural schools – Correspondence from the Chair of Governors, Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd to Chair, 25.02.19

In the first instance I would once again like to highlight the fact that the decision to close Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd is out of sync with all the other school closures that have taken place under the Authority's "Schools Modernisation Programme". To date the main driver for all the other closures has been the need to tackle the problem of empty places. Consequently small schools with surplus places have been closed to be replaced with a new 21st Century Area School. However this is not the case with the proposed closure of Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd which currently only has 5 empty places. The driver in this instance is the fact that Ysgol Corn Hir in Llangedfni is overflowing. Unfortunately it appears that under the Welsh Government's "21st Century Schools Programme" the necessary funding for a new school will only be provided if an element of rationalisation is included. Hence the need to close Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd so that a valid business case can be compiled. It therefore seems patently unfair that a thriving rural school should be closed in order to further the cause for the expansion of a town school.

I am aware that the Committee has received representations stating that the guidance in the previous "School Organisation Code" has not been followed and I strongly support this view. Section 1:7 of the 2013 Code refers to specific factors in the consideration of school closures and states:

"In some areas, a school may also be the main focal point for community activity, and its closure could have implications beyond the issue of the provision of education. This may be a particular feature in rural schools if buildings are used as a place to provide services to the local community.

The case prepared by those bringing forward proposals should show the impact of closure on the community has been assessed through the production of a community impact assessment, and how any community facilities currently provided by the school could be maintained."

The above section is particularly relevant to Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd as the school hall, known as "Y Ganolfan", is regularly used by various local

community groups. This is acknowledged by the Authority who state in their submission:

“The Authority recognises that significant community use is made of the school on a level which appears to be much higher than the community use made of other schools involved and across the county. It is acknowledged that there would be a need to collaborate with the community in order to identify a solution that would allow community activities to continue”.

The above response from the Authority sounds positive but I have grave reservations as to whether a workable solution can be found. The present position is that a community group has been in exploratory talks with the Authority to see whether an asset transfer of the building is possible. However if such a transfer was agreed it would have to be at the market value of the property, a cost that is very likely to be prohibitive as far as any community group is concerned.

The importance of retaining “Y Ganolfan” for community use cannot be over emphasised and it doesn’t appear that the Authority has paid sufficient regard to this vital aspect. It should also be taken into account that the small playing field attached to the school is the only green space in the village where the children can currently play football and other sporting activities.

The “Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015” outlines seven goals one of which is to build a “Wales of cohesive communities”. Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd (Bodffordd **Community** School) is the glue that binds the village community together. This unnecessary school closure, without guaranteeing an alternative community facility, not only contravenes the guidance in the School Organisational Code but also goes against the aims of the above Act.

Dylan Rees

Chair of Governors for Ysgol Gymuned Bodffordd