



Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Observations to Cabinet on:

Call-In of Cabinet Decision – Llanfair Caereinion C.P. School and Caereinion High School.

The Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee met on 1st February, 2021 and considered the following documents:

- Llanfair Caereinion C.P. School and Caereinion High School.

The Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee thank the Portfolio Holder for Education and Property and officers for attending scrutiny.

Scrutiny make the following observations:

- Scrutiny are concerned about the educational viability of the school following the amalgamation of the two schools, with the new remaining dual stream this will leave it with approximately 200 pupils in each stream. This raises significant concerns about the ability of the school to deliver a comprehensive offer at post 14 and post 16 in either language;
- The Committee welcome the acknowledgement by officers that this decision is a progress step in the transformation process, and that this decision does not preclude the school being subject to further transformation or linguistic changes in the future. However, we note that this is not explicitly stated in the cabinet report. Scrutiny has concerns that this may be taken as an indication that this is a settled position which could then be exploited in future consultations. Moreover, Scrutiny are concerned that this will create uncertainty over the schools future so would have expected to see more clarity as the roadmap for the school at this time.
- The Committee questioned whether as this was a short term measure, there would be sufficient benefit arising from the amalgamation on the short term basis prior to the full review of the area would take place during 2022-23.
- The Committee expressed concern and urge Cabinet to undertake clear consideration of:
 - Whether that, in the absence of a public meeting, the engagement process sufficiently included input from all the feeder schools rather than just the two schools concerned. As indicated in the papers the combining of the schools has benefits for transition for pupils of the primary school that will not be afforded to other local schools so the decision clearly affects those feeder schools. So for the council not to offer a digital meeting for those parents does raise questions as to how fully the impacts have been explored and full consultation achieved.
 - That the proposal creates a continuum of upheaval within the school that could have been avoided by a decision that showed more ambition in respect of the transformation process. Officers identified that the wider cluster review will take place 2022-3 with a likely implementation date of Sept 24 or 25. This could result in pupils and staff at the schools being subject to the uncertainty of two processes should the school become part of any wider federation model or further merger that could have been avoided had there been wider consultation and transformation at this time.

- That the proposal does not align with the Council's current WESP 2017-2022 which identifies the establishment of a Welsh medium school in the Newtown area and would not in the Committee's view progress the Council's aims in developing Welsh Language provision in North Powys. The committee are specifically concerned that the separation of the change of language categorisation will require a further process and the commitment to moving along the language continuum in the report is weak and lacking in clear guarantee. Scrutiny notes that proposals for post 16 and Welsh language policy have still to be presented to Cabinet and therefore have concerns that the establishment of an all through school in the absence of this policy may be detrimental to the wider aims of both the current and evolving WESP and would urge caution in making a decision in the absence of these policies.
- As previously noted the proposal would not in any way address the size of the cohorts entering the high school or contribute the aims of the transformation program to reduce excess capacity within the wider education system particularly at KS3 and above. As such we have to question whether the proposal would assist in the long term develop both Welsh Medium and English Medium education in Llanfair Caereinion.
- That as a short term measure the proposal would be unsettling for staff, parents and pupils instead of delay and a comprehensive review this could have an ongoing impact over 3 to 5 years of constant change and uncertainty with an impact on the educational performance of pupils.
- That the current overspend by the high school (£47k) which would be written off by the Council if the proposal proceeded would in effect take 4 years to be paid based on the proposed saving of £12k per year by the amalgamation of the two schools a timescale in which further changes are likely.
- That the proposal would not achieve the aims set out in the report to the Cabinet such as improving the building condition, addressing reductions in pupil numbers, challenging financial pressures, providing attractive post 16 education and providing a comprehensive curriculum in a small school where every year group is bilingual.

Following discussion the Scrutiny Committee decided to refer the decision back to the Cabinet for further consideration due to the concerns expressed above.

Scrutiny's Recommendation	Accept (plus Action and timescale)	Partially Accept (plus Rationale and Action and timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
1 That the decision regarding Llanfair Caereinion C.P. School and Caereinion High School be referred back to the Cabinet for further consideration for the reasons set out above.	Accept. Cabinet will reconsider the decision to establish an all-age school in Caereinion on the 16 th February 2021.		

<p>2. In addition, we would make the following recommendations in respect of the ongoing transformation agenda.</p>			
<p>(a) That a virtual/physical meeting is convened specifically for parents and governors within the cluster where a change to a high school may impact upon cluster primaries</p>		<p>Partially accept. The consultation process, as outlined in the School Organisation Code, provides opportunity for all stakeholders to participate in the consultation without the need for specially convened meetings. However, the authority will consider if virtual/public meetings with cluster feeder schools provides further opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the consultation process.</p> <p>The requirements of the Code are outlined below:</p> <p><i>‘There is no requirement for proposer to hold consultation meetings although there will be circumstances where proposers will consider that meeting with certain groups of consultees will assist greatly in the dissemination of information and provide a suitable platform for the consultees to make their views known’.</i></p> <p><i>The local authority must publish a</i></p>	

		<p><i>consultation document in hard copy and electronically on their website, and the Code outlines the list of stakeholders who must be advised by letter or email of the availability of the consultation document. The consultation document must include details of how people can make their views known and details of how people can ask further questions about the proposals or suggest alternatives to the proposals.</i></p>	
<p>(b) That the council bring forward the remaining policy papers that will underpin the wider transformation including but not limited to the Welsh language and Post 16 as a matter of urgency so that all proposals can be evaluated by scrutiny in respect of those</p>			<p>Reject</p> <p>Reports in respect of post-16 and the WESP are already scheduled to be brought to Cabinet by May 2021</p>
<p>(c) that the decision if reapproved should be modified to include a clause making it clear that the new school may be involved in future transformations.</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The original proposal paper to establish an all-age school in Llanfair Caereinion that was considered by Cabinet on the 29th September 2020 included the following sentence which will be added to the report of 16th February 2021</p>		

	<p>3.9 <i>It must be noted that the establishment of a new school does not preclude that school from being a part of future reorganisation proposals.</i></p>		
--	---	--	--

In accordance with Rule 7.27.2 the Cabinet is asked to provide a written response to the scrutiny report, including an action plan where appropriate, as soon as possible or at the latest within 2 months of the date of the Cabinet meeting i.e. by 09-04-2021

Membership of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee on 01-02-2021:

County Councillors:

P. Roberts, B. Davies, D. Jones, L. Roberts, G. Thomas, K. Roberts-Jones, S. Davies, M. Weale.

A. Davies, S. Davies, M. Evitts, G. Robson (Co-opted Members)