



Lynette Lovell  
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Powys County Council

Dear Lynette

## **Transforming Education in Powys – Pre-Consultation Response to Options for Llangedwyn and Llanfechain Church in Wales Primary Schools**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the amended options appraisal in respect of Llangedwyn and Llanfechain Primary Schools and now including Llansantffraid as a new consideration. Can I say again that the Diocese of St Asaph fully appreciates the need to review the pattern of schooling provision in Powys and the opportunity that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme presents to enable all children to access high quality education.

As we have also stated previously, we remain committed to working with you through this process to ensure that the final proposals are in the best interests of children and sustainable in the longer term.

In making this response, we acknowledge that the Council has taken cognisance of our earlier concerns relating to Church in Wales school places but there remain a number of questions and uncertainties which could call into question the Council's ability to deliver the number of Church in Wales places that we believe need to be provided to ensure parents have parity of choice. I would again quote the School Organisation Code which states that organisations should consider "whether the alternative school-based provision is sufficient to meet existing and projected demand for schools of the same.....designated religious character". Whilst Llansantffraid is a Church in Wales school, our concern will be to preserve the number of places in the area so that parents have the same opportunity to access Church in Wales places.

Turning to the specifics of the proposals:

### **Closure of Llangedwyn and Llanfechain**

We are clearly disappointed that the proposal put forward by the Diocese to create a larger school on the Llangedwyn site is not being pursued. This presented an opportunity to utilise a site which is geographically well placed to serve the needs of the area and to bring two schools together whilst at the same time relieving the pressure on Llansantffraid. It could also have supported the Council with its plans regarding Ysgol Bro Cynllaith and Ysgol Llanrhaeadr.

### **Expansion of Llansantffraid**

We would support the proposal to create 3 extra classrooms at Llansantffraid as this would address the current shortfall, create provision for those pupils moving to this school from Llangedwyn and Llanfechain, and provide permanent capacity overall for 200 pupils in the future. However, we need assurances from the Council that the commitment to create three extra class bases of 30 pupils per class is guaranteed.

We are particularly concerned that the Options Appraisal provides no timescale for the completion of the expansion programme although there is reference to it taking 'several years'.



We also have no assurances that the plans thus far are able to confirm that an extension of this size is viable. We are aware of the physical constraints on the current site, and it would be prudent to have certainty about being able to deliver the three classroom extension before proceeding to formal consultation. It would certainly be a matter of grave concern if the Authority consulted on proposals which it was subsequently unable to deliver. This would generate even more concern and anxiety for parents and would damage the reputation of the Council regarding its ability to manage and implement their Transforming Education Strategy. The document needs to state very clearly how far the plans have been developed and when they will be completed. Parents and communities should not be consulted on possibilities that cannot be confirmed at the time statutory consultation is published.

On the assumption that the extension could proceed, the matter of timing will be critical. This will be a major building programme on a restricted site and disruption to the school will be considerable. This means that scheduling of work to take place during summer holidays will need to be planned accordingly. In addition, the closure of Llangedwyn, with pupils relocating to Llanfechain on a temporary basis, will necessitate the siting of a demountable on the Llanfechain site. This will add to the cost and will create considerable inconvenience for parents whilst the Llansantffraid build is being completed. Some pupils will therefore have to move schools twice and this will undoubtedly create instability in their education at a time when they have already experienced turmoil in their education because of Covid. This might also persuade parents to seek alternative, less disruptive, school places which would be a concern for the Diocese, as it would, in effect, be forcing parents to choose non church schools in order to look after the well-being of their children. It will also involve additional transport costs which could be avoided.

At the very least, we would want assurances that the building programme could start at the earliest opportunity so that these temporary arrangements are in place for the minimum amount of time. Our preferred position is that the Council retains the Llangedwyn site as well as the Llanfechain site until the completion of works at Llansantffraid (as per option 1 "Delay implementation" in the pre-consultation 2 document), and only then would the closure of Llangedwyn and Llanfechain be implemented, thus reducing the difficulty for all schools involved in this proposal. Whilst the cost to the Council in keeping these schools open would continue, these costs would be offset against the alternative proposal of providing demountables and school transport.

We are aware of a piece of land adjacent to Llansantffraid School which is currently in the ownership of The Representative Body of the Church in Wales. In order to create the extra capacity needed in terms of permanent build and outdoor space, we would propose that the Council seriously explores the purchase of this land to create an extension to the main building. This option for the new classrooms could also significantly reduce the disruption for staff and pupils during the build.

In addition, the school currently has access to the Community building on that site. It may be that this could be incorporated into the school for teaching purposes and alternative arrangements offered to the community. Clearly, this would require negotiation with Llansantffraid Recreation Association who have a 99 year lease (which started on 28 November 2007) on the building and surrounding area, but it would enable the utilisation of much needed space by the school.

It is critical before proceeding to formal consultation that the proposals are supported by sufficient detail to give stakeholders a clear understanding of exactly what is being proposed, as well as the confidence that the option under consideration is viable. Failure to provide this could result in proposals being abandoned and communities losing faith in the process.

The Statutory Code states that,

*“In the case of all proposals, the consultation document **must** contain the following information:*

- *A detailed description of the proposal or proposals..., the projected timetable for statutory procedures and for implementation of the proposals and any proposed interim arrangements which might be necessary for their implementation.*

*Where proposals involve the closure of a school, the following information **must** be included in the consultation document:*

- *Information on any building works necessary to ensure the transferred children can be accommodated at the alternative provision.”*

We would urge the Authority to reconsider the timing of the statutory consultation to enable the more detailed information as required by the Statutory Code highlighted above to be included in the Options Appraisal.

In addition, we would suggest that it would be useful to explore further the opportunity to purchase additional land in the ownership of The Representative Body in Wales which we have been informed would be open for negotiation.

In addition to the points above, we want to make it clear that our preferred option is for:

- Llangedwyn and Llanfechain schools to remain open for the interim period to enable stability for children during this challenging time until the Llansantffraid expansion programme is completed and,
- Llansantffraid to be the alternative designated school for pupils in those two schools to retain provision of Church in Wales places.

This is a very worrying and uncertain time for staff and children, coming as it does hard on the heels of the challenges presented over the last year by Covid. As these proposals progress, the wellbeing of staff and all those involved will most certainly be affected. We are keen to work with you to ensure they are supported through the months ahead and that early consideration can be given to alternative opportunities for staff in terms of redeployment. We would be happy to discuss this with you at the appropriate time.

I hope you feel that the points we have raised in this response are worthy of further detailed consideration and we look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

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