

Additional information provided by the petitioner (Welsh / English)

Cymraeg:

Pam fod cymaint o ysgolion lleol yn y gymuned dan fygythiad o gael eu cau – gan ladd ein cymunedau – tra bod arian yn cael ei wario ar gynlluniau adeiladu newydd, y mae nifer ohonynt tu allan i'n cymunedau ac yn costio miliynau o bunnau, yn hytrach na gwella'r hyn sydd yn ein cymunedau eisioes a chyfoethogi ein cymunedau? Pam fod y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn ceisio rhoi cynifer o ddisgyblion â phosibl mewn un adeilad? Ai dull o arbed arian yw hyn? Pam fod Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn rhoi pris ar addysg disgyblion drwy gymryd hawl rhieni a disgyblion i ddewis oddi arnynt?

English:

Why is it that so many local schools in the community are under threat of closure killing our communities and money is then put into brand new builds, many of which are not in our community and costing millions of pounds instead of improving what we have already got in our communities and therefore enriching our communities? Why is it that the National Assembly seem to want to pack in as many pupils into one building as they possibly can and is this due to cost? Why is it that the National Assembly are putting a price on a pupils education by taking their freedom of choice away from parents and pupils?

Additional information provided by the petitioner

Dear Rhodri

Here is the letter i mentioned to you and is written to provide some background information for the committee. I would be grateful if you could ensure that it is circulated to Members ahead of the committee's next meeting where our petition will be considered.

Our petition is entitled "Policies to help protect pupil needs and rights".

This petition seeks to review and challenge current Assembly Government policy and guidelines on the reorganization of schools and specifically in this case any reorganization of post-16 education. We have already presented a petition to the Assembly Government focused upon saving the sixth form in Brynmawr Comprehensive School. This petition titled -We the undersigned appose against the close of brynmawr foundation schools 6th form-we want a choice-and it contained 2119 names this clearly demonstrates the depth of feeling in the local community.

We fully support the Assembly Government's ambitions as set out in the recent legislation on extending education and training options. We also fully support the Assembly Government's transformation agenda which, as we understand it, seeks to ensure that schools and colleges work far more closely together in order to extend the range of options available to children and young people. In terms of Blaenau Gwent we also support the new Learning Campus which we believe will certainly enhance the learning opportunities for the population of the borough.

Our concern is that our children and young people have a choice of options available to them for post-16 education. All too often the Assembly Government's policies appear to force the closure of sixth forms which in turn remove the element of choice from the options for continuing education from 16 onwards. We feel strongly that young people should have the right to stay on at school if that is their wish and that a sixth form education provides an excellent option for some people. Clearly some will choose to attend a sixth form college and we would support their right to do so.

Recently in Wrexham and in Rhondda Cynon Taff proposals to close sixth forms have been defeated and we believe that this reflects the wishes of parents and the local communities. We hope that this petition will help focus political attention on these matters and will persuade the Assembly Government to re-write its current guidelines and policies for post-16 education options. We want to see a level playing field between schools and colleges that will enable all young people to have a choice of options at 16 and onwards.

At the same time we have significant concerns about the robustness of local authority's consultation processes. Our experience is that a local authority regards consultation as simply a box-ticking exercise. There need to be minimum standards set and expectations for local authorities to reach in terms of consultation exercises.,and has mentioned in the epetition they need to be made more sturdy, strong and easier for the public to access and participate in. .

The consultation period should also give the public enough time to get the information and act accordingly

Thank you or your help on this matter. We are very grateful for your support.

Kind regards,

Mandy Howell's

Leighton Andrews AC/AM
Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg & Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-03-310
Ein cyf/Our ref LA/03145/10

Christine Chapman AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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9 December 2010

Dear Aneel,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November 2010 regarding the petition submitted by Mandy Howells about the closure of sixth forms (P-03-310 Policies to Help Protect Pupils Needs and Rights).

The Petitions Committee will be aware that local authorities are responsible for the planning and supply of schools places, and for proposing alterations to their schools provision where they believe this is appropriate. The closure of a school's sixth form is an alteration which requires prior consultation with interested parties and the publication of a statutory proposal. Anyone wishing to object to a published proposal would be able to do so in writing and if objections are received the matter is referred to the Welsh Ministers for determination, normally by me as Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning.

Welsh Assembly Government Circular No 021/2009: *School Organisation Proposals* sets out the factors that need to be taken into account by those bringing forward proposals to reconfigure schools and the criteria which the Welsh Ministers will apply in reaching decisions on proposals which come to them for determination. Amongst other things, the Circular requires that the impact that proposals might have on the local community is considered through the preparation of a community impact assessment. However, the Circular makes it clear that for all of those involved, the effect of the proposals on educational standards should be the prime consideration.

I note that the petition suggests that improvements should be made to the consultation process in order to make it *'sturdy, strong and easier for the public to access and participate in'*. I am keen to ensure that the views of local people are given due account in the process of determining school reorganisation, including changes to sixth form provision, and have recently commenced consultation on possible changes to the current process to that effect. If adopted, these changes would include a more prescriptive approach to the depth, duration and extent of pre-publication consultation which needs to be undertaken, including a new statutory code which local authorities and others would have to follow.

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Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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I believe that this has the potential to introduce to the process the additional robustness, transparency and accessibility which is sought by the petitioners.

However I do not agree with the petitioners that the closure of sixth forms should only be allowed *'if there is consent and support in the community'*. Firstly, it is not obvious how this support would be objectively measured, and in any case there is likely to be a range of opinion amongst local people with some opposed and some in favour in relation to any given proposal. Secondly, it is vital that local authorities continue to bring forward proposals for change where they believe them to be in the interest of learners, and it should not be the case that individual communities have an effective veto over changes which may be beneficial to learners in the local or wider area. I am strongly of the view that, as set out in Circular 21/2009, educational standards should be the prime consideration in these matters.

I have also considered the additional information provided by the petitioners in respect of their petition. Notwithstanding the fact that this information appears to relate more to whole school closures rather than the closure of sixth forms, I believe that it contains a number of points which need to be answered.

Schools are proposed for closure by local authorities when they believe that the existing pattern of provision no longer delivers education as efficiently and effectively as it should do. It is inevitable in the context of constant demographic and frequent curricular change that alterations to school provision, including closures and openings, will be necessary in order to ensure that provision remains in line with demand. It is also the case that much of our school stock is aging and inefficient. Although each case must be considered on its merits, it is simply not appropriate in general terms to invest limited capital funding in order to sustain inefficient school buildings which are inappropriately located and no longer cater adequately for the needs of learners. I consider that it is better that money is spent developing brand new schools which might serve a larger community, but which do so efficiently and effectively. I believe that delivering the best possible education for learners is the best way for schools to enrich their communities.

I am bemused by the suggestion that the Welsh Assembly Government is seeking to pack as many pupils as possible into one building. We have developed a robust formula for measuring the pupil place capacity of schools and place great emphasis on the need for schools and local authorities to ensure that this capacity is not exceeded and that overcrowding is avoided. However, it is clearly in everyone's interest that schools are not operating with half their classrooms standing idle and I make no excuse for encouraging local authorities to eliminate wasteful surplus places where this is possible.

I support the right of parents (and post 16 learners) to express a preference as to the school which they wish their child to attend and to have their child educated in accordance with their wishes in so far as that is possible. However, it is essential that schools are not retained solely in order to provide choice. The primary purpose of schools is to educate pupils so that they reach their full potential. Where that purpose is no longer being served, and it is in the interests of pupils and older learners that a school closes or is altered in some other way, it is vital that action is taken. I should also point out that in some instances the maintenance of the status quo can militate against choice; namely the ability of pupils to choose from a broad range of curriculum options which suit their individual needs, delivered by institutions of sufficient scale to be able to support such provision. I would argue that this form of choice is as important, if not more so, than a choice of schools.

Yours sincerely
Leighton Andrews

Leighton Andrews AM
Minister for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning

I wish to make a response in connection with the Welsh Government's consultation on school reorganisation as well as make a response to Mr Leighton Andrews' response to a petition - Policies to protect pupils' needs and rights. I feel that all consultations should only be carried out during term time, as proposed by the assembly. I believe that consultations do need to be made more sturdy, and much broader, which will help the consultation to be more meaningful, and that they do need to provide proper opportunity for concerns to be voiced and heard and responded to though I feel that the responses need to be made on an individual basis, to each individual addressing their own concerns, instead of the current system in which all responses are made by simply printing out the same letter to each person. This would mean that local people would have more faith in the consultation process and that their concerns and objections are listened to on a personal basis.

The consultation and arrangements which are presented should be done so by a statutory code which is based on a very good practice. All local authorities need to follow this code of practice, and all documents regarding any complaints, need to be filed and logged within the Welsh Assembly's framework much more informative consultation documents and statutory notices need to be made available to the schools, and local people, which is why they need to be made broader and more accessible. I feel that the time scale does need to be lengthened, this may cost more money but you cannot put a price on a child's education and welfare, and parents need to have time to participate and act accordingly. I feel that any closure of a part or the whole of a foundation school should remain within the governing bodies of the school and the Welsh Government has, I believe, that this would be in the best interest of the school and its pupils.

I recently started a campaign in an attempt to help save Brynmawr Foundation School 6th form and have delivered two separate petitions to the Welsh Assembly, the first one was - we the undersigned oppose the closure of Brynmawr School's 6th form, the second was policies to protect pupils' needs and rights. I did the second one because I felt that the consultations need to be improved and made broader, this was because the consultations which were run by our local authority were not, should I say, good enough. I wish to ask the Welsh Government to reconsider the closure of any part of a secondary school, as it will have a detrimental impact on the education of the future generations as well as the community it serves.

Blaenau Gwent is known as a community of much unemployment, and crime, if it loses its 6th form within a school, and the only choice is for pupils to attend a 6th form within a college, many pupils will decide to go out of Blaenau Gwent, many will attend the secondary school in Abergavenny, this I give as just one reason why the Welsh Government needs to provide a choice, so pupils will stay in the communities in which they live, as well as have their needs met, not all pupils' needs can be met within a college setting.

I also ask that the Welsh Government changes the format of all consultations when closing a school or any part of one, the consultations need to be made more sturdy, run over longer periods of time, and the local authority's need to be made more accountable to the people of the community. It has been carried out several times in Blaenau Gwent where, the local authority has not been made accountable, where

consultations have not been run very unprofessionally and the Welsh government needs to have a policy in which the local authority's need to follow. We all want the best for the future generations and no one more than myself, which is why I have been campaigning to at least try to protect our children's freedom of choice, and I ask the Welsh government to listen to me, as not just has a mother but has someone whom cares about the future of every child. We need growth, and we need change, and we need choice. Our communities are not as they once were, people are moving away, when buying a house one of the first things the buyer looks at is local schools and what they can offer and provide. Education does need to be improved, policy's updated and maintained, and all children need to be treated fairly and equally, and the teaching staff need to ensure that they are.

I also wish to respond to minister for children and lifelong learning Mr Leighton Andrews, response to my petition Policies to protect pupils needs and rights, his response is dated the 9th December 2010. He mentioned in his response that it simply is not appropriate in general terms to invest limited capital funding in order to sustain inefficient school buildings which are inappropriately located and no longer cater adequately for the needs of learners.

In Brynmawr foundation school I must add that this is not the case, it is well maintained, both inside and out, offers an excellent sports outdoor facilities, a very large running track, netball area, etc, plus an indoor sports hall. Many subjects are available and more are added every year. The school is very well located sitting on top of the old black rock, it can be seen from the road coming from Blaenavon, and is accessible from Gilwern, Clydach or Brynmawr. Mr Leighton Andrews mentions that he considers it is better that money is spent developing brand new schools which might serve a larger community, I wish to reply to this by saying that Brynmawr school does serve a larger community, it serves many, pupils attend from Brynmawr, Abertillery, Blaina, Nantyglo, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Gilwern, Clydach, Blaenavon, and Abergavenny, a much wider community than a local one.

And in total over 1000 pupils attend 300 of which attend the schools 6th form, which means that the school is running very efficiently, and adequately meets the needs of the learners.

Mr Leighton Andrews also mentioned that he supports the right of parents and post 16 learners to express a preference as to the school which they wish their child to attend and to have their child educated in accordance with their wishes in so far that it is possible, he mentioned that schools are not retained solely to provide choice. I must reply to his response by saying that my petition is asking the Welsh government to provide a choice of a college and a 6th form, in a school setting. I am not asking that the Brynmawr school is retained solely to provide a choice, as to what school a parent wishes their child to attend. Yes the 6th form will help a parent decide if they wish their child to attend the school or if they prefer for the child to attend a school which does not offer a 6th form, in which case they may choose later for their child to attend a 6th form in a college, or may change their views later and decide for the child to attend the 6th form within a school.

Individual needs he also has mentioned, which need to be delivered by institutions of sufficient scale to support such provision. Again I respond to his response by saying

as i have already mentioned, that the scale of Brynmawr school, caters very very well for the 1000 pupils which attend, the teaching staff there do an excellent job to ensure that every child reaches their full potential, exam rates are within the top of the schools in the country. And the provision there is of a very high standard. Maybe Mr Leighton Andrews could pay a visit to the school himself then he could see how well this school runs?

Individual needs, he's mentioned, not all pupils feel they are suitable for a college setting. Therefore their individual needs may only be met within a school setting, which offers more support, guidance, stability, structure and discipline. Therefore choice needs to be made available a school or a college? To ensure that individual needs are met. I am asking the welsh government to listen to my responses to the proposals and to Mr Leighton Andrews response to my petition.

And i trust that i will hear from you very soon in connection to my response

Many thanks Mrs Mandy Howells

I have read much of the welsh governments consultation and i have sent in my response to you, though i would like to add that i do feel that all consultations should only be carried out during term time, has proposed by the assembly. I have already mentioned that consultations do need to be made more sturdy, and much broader, which will help the consultation to be more meaningful, and that they do need to provide proper opportunity for concerns to be voiced and heard and responded to though i feel that the responses need to be made on an individual basis, to each individual addressing their own concerns, instead of the current system in which all responses are made by simply printing out the same letter to each person. This would mean that local people would have more faith in the consultation process and that their concerns and objections are listened to on a personal basis.

The consultation and arrangements which are presented should be done so by a statutory code which is based on a very good practice. Much more informative consultation documents and statutory notices need to be made available to the schools, and local people, which is why they need to be made broader and more accessible. I feel that the time scale does need to be lengthened, this may cost more money but you cannot put a price on a child's education and welfare, and parents need to have time to participate and act accordingly.

Leighton Andrews AC/AM

Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg & Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-03-310
Ein cyf/Our ref LA/00626/11

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11 March 2011

Dear Chris

Thank you for your letter of 3 March 2011 regarding petition P-03-310 *Policies to Help Protect Pupils Needs and Rights*.

The consultation referred to in my letter to you of 9 December 2010 concluded on 18 February 2011. Efforts are now underway to collate and consider the responses received.

I am not in a position to say when an outcome might be known but the Petitions Committee will wish to note that it would not be before the end of the current Assembly term.

Yours sincerely


Leighton Andrews AM
Minister for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning