

1. OUR VISION

“Provide education of the best possible quality that will provide the county’s children with the experiences, skills and confidence to develop into bilingual, successful and well-rounded citizens.”

2. OUR AIMS

To achieve the vision, the Working Group has agreed on the following aims:

- Provide the County’s children with the best possible experiences and opportunities by ensuring **classes of appropriate size** and **high quality school leadership**;
- Aim to **promote and strengthen the Welsh language** – as an educational and social medium - by presenting new proposals for primary education within the County;
- Respond **pro-actively and creatively** to the needs and opportunities provided by the current education system through fostering a collaborative, sustainable and practical **long-term plan** ;
- Ensure that children gain the greatest positive from education spending within the county by **fully utilising all available resources** – whether human, technological or financial;
- Improve resources and buildings to **create a learning environment of the best possible quality**.
- Develop our schools into **establishments that are central to community activity**.

3. OUR STRATEGY

3.1. The Working Group has already decided that **“change is imperative in some areas for several reasons”**. Implementing this change requires a clear and practical strategy.

3.2. The Working Group has also decided that the detailed planning work should be developed within secondary school catchment-areas. *Appendix 1* contains a list of these catchment-areas.

3.3. The Vision and Aims realisation strategy will be based on the principles that:

- The change will be planned on a catchment-area basis, prioritising those catchment-areas where the need for the change is most clearly apparent;
- The scale, nature and timetable of change will vary from one catchment-area to the next;
- The change must be planned with local representatives – in some catchment areas there will be scope to discuss several options and there will be an opportunity to consider new ideas which arise from the discussion locally;
- A clear and fair review framework is put in place for catchment-areas and individual schools - the framework will serve as an important context within which the scale, nature and time table for the change in specific catchment-areas will emerge;
- Any proposal to alter the local primary education provision maintains and improves the use of Welsh as an educational and community language amongst children.
- The Council undertakes to keep any savings which result from school reorganisation within the schools system.



4. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE REVIEW FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the Review Framework is to support the process of identifying and prioritising catchment-areas where the need for change is most clearly apparent. The following considerations will be used in prioritising catchment-areas for review. In addition, they will be used to support the work of determining the scale and nature of the change required in the various catchment-areas.

4.1. Class Sizes

4.1.1. Our expectation is that there will be appropriately-sized classes in Gwynedd primary schools so that children within the county acquire the best possible experiences and opportunities.

4.1.2. At present, class sizes vary significantly throughout the County, affecting the educational experiences of children. Classes in some catchment-areas are large and can contain more than 30 pupils. The Council believes that very large classes have a negative impact on children's educational experiences, a view supported by recent research (Blatchford et al, Institute of Education, 2008). On the other hand, many of the County's schools have very small classes. In a report to Gwynedd Council (2004) the former Chief Inspector of Education for Wales Roy James noted that "...*(a) small number of pupils in year groups in the smallest schools lead to less academic competition and stimulation, and fewer opportunities to take advantage of a diverse range of curricular and extra-curricular experiences*". The Council will endeavour to reduce larger classes and strengthen the county's smaller classes to ensure that all pupils receive the full range of appropriate experiences and attention.

4.1.3. In light of the above, it is our objective to develop schemes which achieve the following in terms of class sizes:

- that pupil numbers of the same age-group in a Key Stage 2 class do not exceed 30;
- that we will aim, over a period of years, to ensure that there is a maximum of 25 pupils of the same age-group in a primary school class;
- Ensure that there are on average no more than 20 pupils or fewer than 12 pupils in any mixed age class.

4.1.4. *"Class size" will therefore be a key indicator when prioritising catchment-areas for review.*

4.2. Pupil Population and Numbers

4.2.1. Our expectation is that planning for the future of education in different catchment-areas needs to reflect trends in terms of population and primary pupil numbers.

4.2.2. Research conducted by Gwynedd Schools Service shows that there has been a reduction of 21% in pupil numbers across the County since 1975. A minimum reduction of 11% has occurred in every catchment-area. The reduction has varied from area to area, with a 15% reduction in Arfon, 27% in Dwyfor and 28% in Meirionnydd. There are currently over 2,000 fewer children in the County's schools (5-10 years of age) than in 1975.

4.2.3. The substantial reduction in pupil numbers means that the County has high levels of surplus places in its Primary schools. In January 2008, 55% of primary schools in Gwynedd operated with a surplus capacity in excess of 25%. The reduction in numbers has also led of course to an increase in the number of primary schools within the county with 39 pupils or fewer (schools within the "safety net"). There are currently 30 schools within this category.

4.2.4. It is however equally true that pupil numbers have grown in some communities since 1975. Some schools within these communities face substantial difficulties in trying to cope with the local growth in child population, and experience difficulties in keeping class sizes under 30.

- 4.2.5. Future population projections must be considered although this is not an exact science. The County's schools present three year projections to the LEA every September. Based on figures for individual schools in September 2008, there will be a further reduction of approximately 4% over the next 3 years. If this is realised, there will have been a reduction of almost 10% in the number of primary school pupils attending the county's primary schools between 2006-2011.
- 4.2.6. Projections up to 2016 vary, depending on the methodology used. In Appendix 2, the Council's Research Unit presents a paper that provides information on population projections for Gwynedd.
- 4.2.7. In terms of the Review Framework, *the scale of the reduction in pupil numbers since 1975 within the catchment-area is a key indicator when prioritizing catchments for further consideration.. This ensures that any substantial reduction in numbers is taken into account in future planning of primary education in various catchment-areas.*

4.3. The Child's Learning Environment

- 4.3.1. Our expectation is that the "learning environment" for the County's children and teachers – in other words the condition of the school, the classroom, staffroom, play provision – meet 21st century teaching and learning requirements.
- 4.3.2. There is real concern about the condition and suitability of the County's primary schools. The buildings require substantial investment so as to address health and safety matters and achieve appropriate standards. A number of schools are in poor condition. The Council's Assets Management Plan estimates Gwynedd school maintenance accumulated costs of £12.6million. In addition, there is concern about the condition of temporary buildings in schools which may mean expenditure requirements of approximately £11million. The cost of upgrading and adapting the county schools buildings to meet new curriculum requirements and expected standards are even more substantial.
- 4.3.3. According to the 2007 Estyn report (Evaluation of schools performance prior to and after moving into new buildings or substantially renovated property) *"old school buildings which are in poor condition cannot meet modern teaching and learning requirements. Inadequate buildings make it more challenging to make improvements in standards of achievement... Improvements in quality of buildings have a very beneficial impact on quality of teaching and staff morale that has a positive impact on pupils' performance"*.
- 4.3.4. In light of the above, we aim to ensure that our plans achieve the following with regard to the child's learning environment:
- To consider the findings and implications of the Council's Assets Management Plan and the cost of repairing, renovating and adapting school buildings;
 - The opportunities to attract capital from various sources to build new schools or substantially renovate some current schools;
 - To aim to provide quality primary education buildings within the County through structured planning, providing headteachers and teachers with appropriate rooms and access to playing fields and an appropriate hall for children. Buildings will also need to comply with Foundation Phase and Curriculum 2008 requirements.
- 4.3.5. *In terms of the Review Framework, information on the condition and suitability of primary schools will be a key consideration when prioritizing catchment-areas for review.*

4.4. Leadership

- 4.4.1. Our expectation is that headteachers will have a fair opportunity to provide professional leadership and management for their schools.

- 4.4.2. There is no doubt that the Headteacher's excellent leadership qualities are a key factor in creating a successful school. Enabling the County's headteachers to place an emphasis on the following factors – identified by the Welsh Assembly Government's Revised National Standards for Headteachers in Wales guidance document - would be a major contributor towards achieving our educational aims:
- The ability to create a strategy direction;
 - Provide leadership on Learning and Teaching;
 - Develop and Work With Others;
 - Manage the School;
 - Ensure Accountability;
 - Strengthen the Community based Focus.
- 4.4.3. However, one of the main threats that we face are the difficulties in recruiting new Headteachers. The Schools Service has a record of these difficulties. There is clear evidence that several schools have to re-advertise posts and consequently, several of our primary schools have an acting headteacher.
- 4.4.4. In addition, over 50% of current headteachers are or will be eligible to retire over the next 5 years. There is therefore a possibility that the situation will seriously deteriorate.
- 4.4.5. The Working Group is very concerned about this situation, mainly due to the possible impact on quality of school leadership. This matter therefore requires continued prioritisation, and steps are required to ensure an increase in the number of candidates in Gwynedd who apply for the NPQH course to prepare teachers for headteacher posts.
- 4.4.6. In terms of the Review Framework, *if difficulties in appointing headteachers have or are about to impact schools within the catchment-area, this will be a key indicator in the prioritisation of a catchment-area where the need lies for the most apparent and clear change.*

4.5. The Community

- 4.5.1. Our expectation is that the County's Primary Schools serve as a focal point for community-based activities, enriching pupils' experiences and opportunities.
- 4.5.2. As a Working Group, we would like to see the community making full use of the school, mostly after school hours, in compliance with the Assembly's programme to develop "community focused schools". There is no doubt that schools have opportunities to provide additional services or activities, e.g. play groups, sports clubs and voluntary establishments, which will in turn involve parents, members of the community and local groups.
- 4.5.3. The LEA has information on the community use of the County's schools, e.g.:
- Area regeneration officers have held a review of community facilities and there is evidence of the use made of educational establishments as well as other establishments within the community;
 - The Schools' Service held a review of the use of schools by the community in 2007 in an attempt to gauge the suitability of school buildings to host community-based activities.
- 4.5.4. We also wish to further foster and develop the links between schools and the local community, so that pupils appreciate the history, culture and development of these communities.
- 4.5.5. However, a key factor in achieving this is that the school represents and serves its community. The Working Group's concern is that over 20% of primary school pupils currently attend schools outside the catchment-area. Whilst parents have a legal right to select their child's school, the significant percentage that opts for schools from outside the catchment-area is an increasing concern in terms of strategic planning and the aim of developing community schools.

4.5.6. The Working Group is of the view that information should be gathered on the number of schools who have a substantial number of pupils from outside the catchment-area or who lose pupils to other schools/catchment-areas.

4.5.7. We wish to consider such movements within our Review Framework. The Working Group feel that *the situation should be reviewed if schools within the catchment area gain or lose more than 20% of its pupils due to the impact on the neighbouring community and the catchment-area. This will therefore be a key indicator when prioritizing catchment-areas for review.*

4.6. Financial Resources

4.6.1. Our expectation is that Gwynedd will make the best possible use of all financial resources available for the County's primary education.

4.6.2. Gwynedd already stands among the highest quartile on expenditure on education in Wales, and on devolving funding to schools. According to Estyn (2007), the Council had allocated net teaching budget per pupils (including funding which isn't devolved to schools such e.g. integration budget) for 2006-07 of £4,322 compared to an average of £4,094 for the whole of Wales (composite budgets). However, a substantial percentage of this budget goes on maintaining poor buildings, a high number of school sites across the County and on surplus places.

4.6.3. In addition, the schools service – as all other services across the Council – faces regular cuts over the next five years. Any reorganisation proposals must therefore take full account of this context and respond appropriately. However, the Council will endeavour, where appropriate, to keep any savings which result from the reorganisation of schools within the schools system.

4.6.4. There is a significant difference between expenditure per pupil in one catchment area compared with another, as well as between schools within the same catchment-area.

4.6.5. In addition, a large number of the county's schools were designed to cater for many more pupils than have attended the school for several years. Although the cost of empty places should not drive any new proposals, the impact and implications of substantial expenditure on schools which have a high percentage of empty places has to be taken into account – especially the impact and implications on the budget and on other schools.

4.6.6. At present 30 schools which have 39 pupils or fewer receive additional revenue worth £477,000 between them through the "safety net" which enables them to employ a Headteacher and a teacher. Although circumstances in these schools can vary significantly, this factor must be considered when focussing on use of resources.

4.6.7. *The Working Group has identified the following as key indicators when prioritizing catchment-areas for review:*

- *Surplus places across the catchment-area;*
- *Per capita expenditure per school greater than 10% above or below the county average*

4.7. Specific request for consideration or an exceptional situation

4.7.1. Whilst there is a desire to review school organization strategically and at a catchment-area level, individual schools have written to the Council asking the authority to review specific situations. The Council must be willing to consider and respond positively to such requests.

4.7.2. Relevant professional information should also be considered so as to draw attention to urgent situations within the County that directly impact quality of pupils' education and experiences. (e.g. very low pupil numbers within a school, very poor condition of a school building, difficulties in headteacher recruitment).

- 4.7.3. *Situations of serious and immediate concern as evidenced by relevant professional specialist information and including specific requests from individual schools will be a key consideration when prioritizing catchment-areas for review.*

4.8 The Welsh language

- 4.8.1 Our expectation is that all the county's pupils will have developed age-relevant bilingual skills which allows them to become fully participating members of the bilingual society in which they live.
- 4.8.2 A language impact study was completed on the possible language impact of the October 2007 draft plan (available on the council's website), and this information is a basis for considering educational developments in the use of Welsh outside the classroom.
- 4.8.3 Any new proposals to change the organisation of local schools must take full consideration of the possible language impact.
- 4.8.4 Supporting and improving the use of Welsh as an educational and social language among children will therefore be a key consideration in drafting proposals within individual catchment areas.

4.9. Geographical Factors

- 4.9.1. Our expectation is that every child will be entitled to have access to quality education within reasonable distance of home.
- 4.9.2. There is recognition that Gwynedd is a very rural county with considerable travelling distance between some communities. When presenting any specific proposals in a county such as Gwynedd, the distance between sites and travel time for the child will be key.
- 4.9.3. A national policy notes that up to 45 minutes of one way travel is appropriate. It is the Working Group's view that the aim should be to limit home-school travel to a maximum one-way journey of 30 minutes.
- 4.9.4. *The above will therefore be a key consideration when preparing proposals within individual catchment-areas.*

5. THE MATRIX

- 5.1. A Matrix is presented in *Appendix 3* which draws together the various considerations.
- 5.2. Those catchment-areas which score highest against the key indicators will be prioritized for review. To all intents and purposes, these indicators serve as "trigger points" for review.
- 5.3. Data packs for each catchment-area will be prepared and published. We will invite comments on these packs. This is the information that will be used to complete the matrix.
- 5.4. On the basis of the assessment carried out using the Review Framework, 3 catchment areas have been identified as areas which will be subject to the initial round of the review, namely the Tywyn, Berwyn and Gader catchment areas.
- 5.5. The Review Framework will be reviewed in January 2010 as the work programme for 2010-11 is developed.

6. THE COUNTY CONSULTATIVE PANEL

- 6.1. County Consultative Panel will be established by the Schools' Portfolio Leader to support her in developing proposals for each catchment in turn. In addition, the County Consultative Panel will maintain a county-wide overview.

- 6.2. The Consultative Panel's membership will include the present members of the Primary Schools Reorganisation Improvement Working Group and will meet as required and at the invitation of the Schools' Portfolio Leader.

7. THE CATCHMENT-AREA REVIEW PROCESS

- 7.1. Following the completion of the catchment-area prioritization process, careful consideration will need to be given to the current provision and various options in catchment-areas of greatest concern.

- 7.2. To achieve this in an inclusive and open manner, we aim to establish a Catchment-area Review Panel. The Panel will be able to co-opt a limited number of people to support its work. While there is concern that groups which are too large could limit open discussion, it is accepted that schools will have an interest in being represented on the Panel. It is therefore proposed that the membership should be limited to a size which allows for constructive communication side by side with fair representation, but that this will be dependent on the agreement of school representatives at the first meeting within the catchment area. It is anticipated that the Catchment Area Review Panel's membership will include:

- all local elected Members;
- the Schools Portfolio Leader (or her representative);
- representation from among Working Group members;
- The headteacher of the local secondary school;
- At least one headteacher and one chair of governors drawn from the catchment area's primary schools, or the headteacher and the chair of governors (or another governor representative) of each school if that is the wish expressed locally ;
- Denominational representative where relevant;
- Any further members the Catchment Area Review Panel wishes to invite;
- The work will be supported by the appropriate Council officers.

- 7.3. In essence, the role and scope of the Panel will be to collect local evidence (on a catchment area basis) and to present various ideas and options to the Schools' Portfolio Leader.

- 7.4. In establishing the Catchment Area Review Panel, a meeting will be held for the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of each schools along with Catchment Area representatives outlines in 7.2 above. The meeting will:

- share information and check data, providing an opportunity to discuss and to challenge the evidence presented. The Panel will not move ahead to develop alternative models until any reasonable doubts on the veracity of the data has been assuaged:
- explain the process;
- nominate the optional members of the Catchment Area Review Panel;
- seek comments/ideas to be discussed at the first official meeting of the Catchment Area Review Panel.

- 7.5. It is envisaged that the Catchment Area Review Panel will meet on 3/4 occasions over a 3 month period. The Panel Members will play a key role supporting the Portfolio Leader in developing proposals for each catchment area.

- 7.6. The first meeting of the Catchment Area Review Panel will agree Terms of Reference. This will include an outline of the following:

- A detailed and clear project plan including firm milestones:
- Communication and dissemination strategies for the purpose of sharing information with relevant individuals and groups.

Particular attention will be paid during the first meeting of the Catchment Area Review Panel to situations facing individual schools – and the results of the Review Framework will provide a context for these considerations. There will also be an opportunity to collect preliminary ideas put forward by members of the Catchment Area Review Panel on the basis of the discussions at the meeting noted in 7.2 above.

- 7.7. The second meeting will provide an opportunity to respond to any ideas presented and to seek consensus. This will involve the discussion of any models developed during the communication process within the catchment area in addition to the Council's preliminary ideas.
- 7.8. The County Consultative Panel will be given an opportunity to discuss and consider any proposals which have been put to the Catchment Area Review Panel.
- 7.9. The third meeting of the Catchment Area Review Panel will provide an opportunity to present the Schools' Portfolio Leader/County Consultative Panel's comments on the basis of the discussion and the factual information considered and to present final draft options
- 7.10. There will be an opportunity to examine creative models, including the development of area schools. In addition, models which engender formal co-operation will need to be considered within the catchment-area, whether co-operation between local primary schools, between the primary and secondary sectors, or with other agencies and establishments. A thorough understanding of the schools within the catchment area is key, and there will be scope to arrange visits to schools within the catchment area at the request of the Catchment Area Review Panel.
- 7.11. In presenting options, the Catchment Area Review Panel will collect the views of children and young people, parents and other local residents, local community councils and other local authorities, and local schools and nursery groups.
- 7.12. Following the contribution of the Catchment Area Review Panel and the County Consultative Panel, the Portfolio Leader will present proposals to the relevant Council committees before moving to a formal consultation. The Catchment Area Review Panel is seen as a vital link between the Portfolio Leader and community representatives.
- 7.13. The aim will be to complete the task of putting proposals in place in 3 catchment-areas between April 2009 and April 2010. We will endeavor to complete proposals for three catchment areas annually from that point on. It is essential that adequate resources are provided to the Schools Service to administer the plans.

8. WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

- 8.1. Any proposals which emerge from the catchment area discussions must give full and proper consideration to the requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government. The key considerations outlined in *School Organisation Proposals (Circular 23/02)* are listed below:
 - the effect on the standard of education to be provided in the area;
 - the cost-effectiveness of proposals and whether adequate financial resources are available to implement them;
 - the effect on accessibility to schools, particularly in rural areas and on journey times to school;
 - the views of those most directly affected, such as parents and other schools or providers in the area;

- the need for the particular type of provision that is proposed, for example the level of parental demand for Welsh medium education;
- any effect on the proportion of places in faith schools in the area;
- the need for LEAs to comply with their duties under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, including those provisions relating to single-sex schools;
- the extent to which proposals would foster collaborative arrangements between providers for students aged 16+;
- any new requirements included in the revision to Circular 23/02 following a recent consultation exercise, specifically any further emphasis on ensuring that new proposals contribute to the aims of *Iaith Pawb*, *the Foundation Stage*, *Curriculum 2008*, *14-19 Learning Pathways* and any other new requirements.

9. COMMUNICATION ARRANGEMENTS

- 9.1. In developing this Strategy, the Working Group has given consideration to means of communicating. Naturally, the Council is keen to listen to local opinion, to seek agreement on the way ahead with the aim that change arises from cooperation with the local community. Put simply, the intention is that all parties work collaboratively through the changes in those catchment areas which will require attention.
- 9.2. The Improvement Working Group believes that communication is required on two levels – county and catchment area. The messages – on a county and catchment area basis – must be clear and consistent, and the process must be open.
- 9.3. In terms of county-wide communication, our intention during the first part of the process will be to disseminate information among elected members and others in order to explain WHY change is needed including a synopsis of all evidence presented to the working group.
- 9.4. A conference will be held for all Council members, headteachers and governing body chairs or their representatives in order to present this information.
- 9.5. The Working Group will also ensure that Council members, headteachers, teachers, school governors, pupils, non-teaching members of staff and the public receive regular information briefings. A bespoke section of the Council website will be developed which will summarise all evidence presented to the Working Group and other relevant information.
- 9.6. In terms of communication on a catchment area basis, the Review Panel (see paragraph 6) will have a key role in facilitating mature and responsible discussions on the way ahead in each locality. Clear and consistent message will be presented on a catchment basis to explain WHY change is needed, alongside a discussion on HOW the reorganisation will happen. .
- 9.7. **After completing the above process, clear proposals will be drafted for the catchment area under review, doing so in line with the Vision, Aims and Principles presented in this Strategy.**