
THE CABINET 9/06/26

Present-

Councillors: Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Craig ab Iago, Dilwyn Morgan, Paul John Rowlinson, Menna Trenholme, June Jones, R Medwyn Hughes, Dewi Jones, Huw Wyn Jones and Llio Elenid Owen

Also present:

Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Nia Gridale (Legal Services Manager), Catrin Thomas (Corporate Director), Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head of Finance - Accounting and Pensions), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education), Debbie Jones (Assistant Head of Education Services) and Siwan Llwyd Roberts (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System).

1. APOLOGIES

This week was recognised as being National Carers' Week. It was explained that this week was an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, to highlight the challenges faced by unpaid carers and to recognise their vital contribution. On behalf of the Cabinet, a sincere thank you was given to the thousands of unpaid carers in Gwynedd who looked after family members, friends and neighbours day in day out. It was emphasised that their work made an enormous difference to people's lives and to our communities, and that this work very often happened behind the scenes. Staff and partners working alongside carers to support them were thanked.

It was noted that the Council was hosting events across the county throughout the week to discuss the support available to unpaid carers, and that these events were open to everyone.

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Cllr June Jones in relation to item 6 as she was a Governor at the School.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent matters.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no matters arising from overview and scrutiny.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 MAY

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2026 were accepted as a true record.

6. YSGOL Y GARREG - OBJECTION REPORT

The report was presented by Cllr Dewi Jones.

DECISION

Final confirmation was given of the proposal given by means of a statutory notice, namely - "To close Ysgol Y Garreg on 31 August 2026, and denote Ysgol Cefn Coch as the alternative school from 1 September 2026", in accordance with Section 53 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the requirements of the School Organisation Code 11/2018.

DISCUSSION

It was noted that the purpose of the report was to report on the outcome of the 28-day statutory objection period on the proposal to close Ysgol y Garreg.

It was noted that the decision regarding Ysgol y Garreg was one of the most difficult decisions that he had considered as a Cabinet Member for Education. He noted that nobody went into education with the intention of closing schools, noting his desire to see schools thriving, children succeeding and communities being resilient. The strong emotions that had surfaced during this process and the sadness felt by many were acknowledged.

It was noted that Ysgol y Garreg had served its community faithfully for many years. Tribute was paid to the staff, governors, parents and the community for their hard work for the school for over a century. However, it was noted that there was a responsibility to be looking at the current situation rather than a desired situation.

It was noted that the demographic challenges facing some of our rural communities were real and profound. Although painful, the need to acknowledge the facts in hand was noted, especially the grave situation of Ysgol y Garreg. It was noted that the well-being of and opportunities for children were central when making educational decisions, which had been the guiding principle throughout this process. The need to ensure that children could access sustainable education, a wide range of experiences and a learning environment that could meet the needs of the present and the future was underlined.

It was noted that the decision regarding Ysgol y Garreg was not one that the

Cabinet wanted to make, but one that had been brought about by circumstances. It was noted that, should the situation, numbers and projections be different, the decision would not have been considered. It was emphasised that Gwynedd had seen a significant fall in the number of children over the last decade, and that there was a duty to make responsible decisions for the long term, even when that decision proved difficult and unpopular.

The decision to close Ysgol y Garreg was therefore recommended, recognising the contribution of many people to the school over the years, and the need to take action to ensure the best and most sustainable school provision for the future children of Gwynedd.

The sadness of the situation was echoed by the Glaslyn Ward Local Member, who noted that the school had been serving the community for approximately 143 years. This change in demographics and the fall in the number of children in our society was highlighted, with only two year-6 pupils at Ysgol y Garreg who would be moving to secondary school in September 2026. The staff of Ysgol y Garreg were thanked for their dedication to both pupils in difficult circumstances, offering them wonderful and engaging educational experiences. The governing body's views were highlighted in the report, urging the Council to consider restructuring the school building as a specialist centre for pupils who struggled to settle into mainstream schools, but who were not eligible to attend an additional learning needs school.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- With regard to the Welsh language, it was noted that the Welsh language would be more natural in the lives of the two pupils upon moving to a larger school, with more activities being available through the medium of Welsh. It was emphasised that this was a positive. In response, it was noted that the impact assessment regarding the Welsh language looked at the positive aspects of moving both individuals to much larger classes, where they would have more opportunity to communicate through the medium of Welsh.
- Concerns were raised about the future capacity of Ysgol Cefn Coch, which was the new alternative school from 1 September 2026, should there be an increase in the demography of the catchment area. In response, it was confirmed that Ysgol Cefn Coch had sufficient capacity to serve the catchment area and that there were no concerns about this.
- Tributes were paid to the staff, young people and the community who had been involved in the process so far, noting that the process had been difficult but dignified.
- Questions were asked about the future of the Ysgol y Garreg building, noting that there was a precedent for similar buildings to be converted into community centres. In response, it was noted that an after-use policy existed for such situations. It was confirmed that the Education Department would have the first choice as to whether it intended to make use of the building, and if not, the building would be offered for community use. In this case, attention was drawn to the awareness of the existence of a community provision being in very close proximity to the building, which was not necessarily being fully utilised. Therefore, any application

regarding the building would have to be reviewed very carefully moving forward.

- A recent trend had emerged regarding schools re-advertising for headteacher positions. It was asked whether recruiting headteachers was more of a challenge in small schools. In response, it was confirmed that recruiting headteachers was currently proving challenging across the education sector, both in primary and secondary schools. It was highlighted that this was no exception to Gwynedd compared to other authorities, noting that there was a shortage of individuals who were willing to lead schools for various reasons. It was recognised that leading a small school such as Ysgol y Garreg was a challenge, noting that the planning and preparation involved with a small school was just as demanding as in a larger-sized school. It was confirmed that this concern about recruiting headteachers was on the Department's risk list. It was noted that the headteacher of Ysgol y Garreg had managed to secure a job in another school as a permanent headteacher.
- It was asked how many headteacher positions were vacant across the county. In response, it was noted that at least three posts were vacant, with an increasing number of acting headteachers, and the percentage tending to rise from one term to the other.
- It was asked whether the two pupils at Ysgol y Garreg had been consulted. In response, it was noted that the views of both learners had been obtained and summarised in the report.
- Sadness was expressed about the situation, noting that moving school was a difficult experience, especially when it involved moving to a school with many more pupils. It was questioned what support would be available to the two pupils of Ysgol y Garreg. In response, it was noted that the pupils, in this case, had already been having experiences with children from other schools over the past few months, to facilitate the transition process and build relationships. It was confirmed that the Department would rely on school staff, who already knew the pupils well, on how best to support them through the process.
- They asked about the transport arrangements for the two pupils to the new alternative school. In response, it was noted that relevant arrangements would be made for both pupils to reach their new school.
- It was asked whether the Education Department had any suggestion as to how Gwynedd's demographic trend was likely to change in the future, and whether there was any indication that the situation would improve or continue to deteriorate, with more small schools having to consider closure. In response, it was noted that future demographics were difficult to predict. It was confirmed that the 2025 figures were now public, with births falling to 925 in Gwynedd. It was expressed that there was still a steady downward trend and that a change of direction in numbers was not anticipated. It was highlighted that as Gwynedd's schools were already relatively small compared to other authorities, they were likely to face a situation where decisions about school closures would need to be made sooner here than in other counties.

7. GWYNEDD EDUCATION LANGUAGE POLICY

The report was presented by Cllr Dewi Jones.

DECISION

The Gwynedd Education Language Policy was accepted and adopted to be introduced as a Model Education Language Policy for schools to consider its adoption and implementation.

DISCUSSION

Pride was expressed at the opportunity to present the new Model Education Language Policy for schools to Cabinet. It was noted that the policy had been before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on more than one occasion, and previously before Cabinet for permission to engage. It was further noted that the policy before Cabinet followed that public stakeholder engagement process. It was noted that discussions had been held with individual members of the Council, language organisations, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and several other organisations in order to obtain different perspectives, listen to concerns and consider ideas before moving forward.

It was noted that this was a policy for Gwynedd, which reflected Gwynedd, its values, ambition, needs and the needs of the children and young people of the county. He thanked his predecessor on the Cabinet, Meirion Prys Jones, and the officers for their work on producing the policy. The importance of openness during the process, being open to ideas, challenge and collaboration with stakeholders to formulate the best possible policy was noted.

The importance of persuading and convincing, rather than insisting or enforcing was emphasised. The need to convince people of the value of the Welsh language, to win their hearts and show the value of Welsh education and the way in which the Welsh language opened rather than closed doors was noted.

It was underlined that incredible work had been done over the last few decades in this respect. It was noted that generations had worked tirelessly to strengthen the language, to build the Welsh education system we had today, and to ensure that more children and young people had the opportunity to live and work through the medium of Welsh. It was emphasised that these achievements were something to celebrate. It was noted that this new policy would hopefully build on that work, on the success, on what was already working, on opportunities, on confidence, and on building a stronger future for the Welsh language.

It was emphasised that the Welsh language belonged to all of us, those who were fluent speakers, those who were learning the language, and those who had not yet had the opportunity. It was noted that there was a place for everyone in the story of the Welsh language. Everyone was asked to unite behind the Welsh language and give every child in Gwynedd the opportunity to experience the benefits of having the language, ensuring that it continued to be a living, thriving and confident language. Everyone was urged to open doors to a world of opportunities, experiences and benefits that would stay with our young people for the rest of their lives.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- The need for the Cabinet and the Council to support the journey was noted to ensure that adequate resources were in place to deliver the policy. The importance of committing to providing this support was emphasised to ensure that the policy was fully implemented.
- Support for the policy was expressed, noting that a lot of input had been received along the way through the Scrutiny Committees.
- A question was asked about the support available to schools in catchment areas where English was more prevalent. In response, it was noted that the support of the immersion system was an important part of the policy, and that it now ensured access from Bangor down to Tywyn, with the number of referrals being consistently high. It was emphasised that additional support was available for the schools identified as being transitional schools in the policy, noting examples such as Ysgol Tywyn and schools in the Bangor catchment area, where workforce tutors had been appointed to provide support. It was noted that staff who needed further support were encouraged to take advantage of sabbatical schemes. It was noted that the Government was extremely supportive of what was being done in Gwynedd, and eager to develop the work of the Athrofa Dysgu Cymraeg (National Institute for Learning Welsh), with the aim of providing resources and training to train staff and schools in Wales.
- It was questioned how progress would be monitored moving forward. In response, the expectation was noted for schools to submit delivery plans within the Welsh Language and Education Act, with a pilot being formed with the Government to take that forward by 2029. It was noted that within the delivery plans, there was an intention for schools, in conjunction with the authority, to set criteria, a vision and goals, which would be the subject of statutory monitoring every three years after 2029. It was emphasised that the Department would work closely with schools between now and 2029 to ensure that it met the needs of Gwynedd's schools. It was underlined that the plans would not be universal, as each school belonged to its own community, and therefore would be considered from a community and catchment area perspective. It was confirmed that every school started from a different baseline and that targets could vary from school to school, with the aim of ensuring that every school was making progress.
- A question was asked around how the Department would encourage schools to adopt and implement this model policy. In response, it was noted that the input of headteachers and schools had been considered when producing the policy, and therefore no significant objection was expected from those who had been involved in putting the policy together. It was expressed that the general message in education was that there was a desire for a clear, explicit and cross-county policy that gave priority to the Welsh language. It was confirmed that the policy would be presented to every governing body with an opportunity to discuss the policy given the unique differences between each school. It was noted that the Department would monitor the adaptations made to the model policy from school to school.
- It was asked when the policy was expected to have a real impact. In response, it was noted that the policy was an important step and a foundation for ensuring the Welsh language within schools, and that

further work needed to be done to build on this foundation, not only within schools but more broadly through several language initiatives and within the community, to ensure that more people were able to speak and use Welsh in their daily lives.

The meeting commenced at 1:00p.m and concluded at 1:47pm

CHAIRMAN