

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



## Report to the Cabinet

**Meeting Date:** 18 December 2018  
**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Gareth Thomas  
**Contact Officer:** Garem Jackson  
**Contact Number:** 01286 679089  
**Item Title:** Principles of an Education System which are Fit for Purpose

### 1 DECISION SOUGHT

1.1 The Cabinet's approval of the appropriate education principles for the following purposes which will be the basis for realising the Education Department's vision and the development of a system which ensures a high quality education for the children and young people of Gwynedd, namely:

- a system of viable secondary schools
- no more than two age ranges within the same class in **primary schools**
- the provision of approximately 80% of non-contact time for the Headteacher to focus on leadership issues in **primary schools**

### 2 REASON WHY DECISION IS NEEDED

2.1 A report was presented to the Cabinet on 12 July 2016 seeking consent to consult with Governors and schools about the suitability of the agreed principles to underpin an education system which is fit for purpose.

2.2 Due to the increasing and deep concerns of the Cabinet and the Services Scrutiny Committee (at the time) following a report by the Primary Federation and consultations with schools, several issues in the report to Cabinet were noted regarding the situation relating to Leadership; namely:

- a large number of our secondary and primary schools are too small to be able to provide time for headteachers, senior managers and middle managers to lead effectively;
- the conflicting requirements of many primary headteachers where they also have a significant commitment to teaching classes alongside their management and leadership functions;
- difficulties in recruiting senior management leaders and middle

- managers in secondary schools;
- difficulties in recruiting headteachers for primary schools;
- a lack of applicants from outside the local authority area.

2.3 A series of 18 drop-in sessions were held across Gwynedd between 7 November and 14 December 2016 to engage with parents, staff, governors and the wider community on the process of developing new principles for Gwynedd schools that would respond to the above concerns.

2.4 The drop-in session held across Gwynedd were successful, with 335 questionnaires completed during the consultation process.

2.5 The discussion relating to the development of principles for an education system which are fit for purpose is taking place within the context of the 21st Century Schools Programme and the School Effectiveness Framework. The vision for education and training is based on six main objectives:

- Provide the best possible learning experiences for all learners within the County, ensuring an exciting and broad curriculum, as well as the extra-curricular curriculum, that motivates them to learn and comprehend, which leads to improved standards, making the best possible use of Information Technology;
- Promote and support the physical health and emotional well-being of children and young people, ensuring that the principal education and training establishments in the County are key players when planning and introducing integrated services for children, young people and their families;
- Prepare young people for the workplace, ensuring that they are equipped with the correct kind of skills for employment, especially within the local economy;
- Create an excellent learning environment for children, young people and teachers within the County, principally through improving facilities and buildings, and ensuring that schools are structured to respond to the change in contemporary teaching and learning process practices, especially when using Information Technology;
- Develop educational establishments of the correct type (primary and secondary) so that they provide a focal point for public and community-based services where appropriate;
- Strengthen the Welsh Language as an educational and social medium, and to enable children and young people to gain access to bilingual education and training.

### **3 INTRODUCTION AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS – PROPOSED PRINCIPLES**

#### **3.1 Secondary**

In considering sustainable models for secondary education, planning will be based on a structure which includes options (e.g. multi-site options) which facilitate partnership working by more secondary schools.

It is essential that the structure for secondary schools enables the provision of a broad curriculum and promotes consistency in high quality teaching and learning across all the County's schools.

The non-contact time of senior management and middle managers is very infrequent and increasingly teachers have to teach a second and third subject which may be outside of their area of expertise.

To address the requirements, the following characteristics will be adopted:

- leadership arrangements with headteachers responsible ideally for an increasing number of learners;
- appropriate consideration of the options for post 16 education provision;
- ensure sufficient time for staff to lead at all levels;
- departments and faculties which are viable and durable;
- a broad and rich curriculum;
- a collaborative self-improvement system established across schools;
- a strategic system and effective governance;
- leadership based on the number of learners.

### 3.2 **Primary**

The proposed education system for primary schools has been assessed on general principles, namely leadership arrangements providing 80% non-contact time for the headteacher and attempting to ensure that schools provide classes of no more than two year groups.

These goals would address the biggest challenge facing the primary sector, headteachers with insufficient time to lead and teachers in very small schools who have to teach a wide range of children of different ages and abilities in the same class.

In some cases, teachers in small primary schools teach three or four year groups in one class and it is difficult to ensure that the work meets the needs of all pupils due to the wide range of ability which may exist across four learning years.

### 3.3 **Statutory Considerations**

The principles will be considered alongside the requirements of relevant statutory processes in accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and School Organisation Code (011/2018), which provides guidance to evaluate any specific statutory proposal. This means that there are procedures and specific statutory processes in school reorganisation. Therefore, when considering proposals, the Authority is required to properly address the

results of consultative processes and relevant impact assessments before reaching a conclusion.

The revised version of the School Organisation Code (011/2018) which came into effect in November 2018 makes special arrangements for rural schools (defined in the Code), establishing a procedural assumption against the closure of rural schools. This document replaces the previous Code of Practice (006/2013). This requires proposers to follow a more detailed set of procedures and requirements when making a proposal to close a rural school. Specifically, during the consultation process on a proposal on whether to close a rural school and in making the decision. However, a presumption against the closure of rural schools does not mean that rural schools will never close - rather it means that every option needs to be considered and ensuring that the case for closing is strong.

In considering the necessary arrangements, the Council is confident that it already undertakes comprehensive engagement processes to ensure local input in the development and consideration of any strategic plans. The provision of schools across the county sets the needs of the child above any other factor.

### **The Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)**

- 3.4 As a Council, we are committed to the principles contained in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the communities of Gwynedd. We will ensure that the Council considers the long term, working together and acknowledging people of all ages when solving and preventing problems. Implementation in this way will enable us to meet the existing needs of our communities ensuring that today's decisions are not damaging to future generations.

As part of the duty, the Council has published well-being objectives which outline how it will improve well-being in "The Gwynedd Plan 2018-2023". The Education Department has a role to promote the Act's well-being objectives amongst the county's pupils through its activities and projects. Any change to the current system will be considered and assessed in accordance with the requirements of the wellbeing act, ensuring that decisions coincide with the 7 wellbeing aims of the Act, together with the Council's well-being objectives.

### **Other Key Considerations**

- 3.5 It is acknowledged that there will be far reaching implications to implementing these principles on the present education system in Gwynedd. As a result, the implementation of these principles across the education system will not be a rapid process during the term of this Council, but rather, as an action that would take a number of years, spanning several Councils.

It is also acknowledged that implementing significant changes across the education system in a relatively brief period of time could lead to concern being expressed by all stakeholders of our schools, together with the communities they serve.

In parallel with these considerations, it is also acknowledged that there are major

changes on the horizon in education: changes to the organisation of the schools inspectorate (Estyn), as well as considerable changes to the curriculum and organisation of our schools following Professor Donaldson's recommendations. These changes over the next few years will create obvious challenges for our schools to address and realise all the changes, whilst at the same time, facing continuous and unprecedented budget cuts nationally.

Considering all these factors, and their far reaching effect on the education system and future provision, the intention will be to implement the education principles gradually, within a context, and in a way which would facilitate the ability of the education system to respond to the major changes on the horizon.

## **4 NEXT STEPS & TIMETABLE**

### **4.1** By approving the following principles:

- a system of viable secondary schools
- no more than two age ranges within the same class in **primary schools**
- the provision of approximately 80% of non-contact time for the Headteacher to focus on leadership issues in **primary schools**

this would allow the Education Department to consider the suitability of the present and future educational system within the context of these principles, and in the context of wide reaching changes in the organisation and provision of our schools which are on the horizon.

## **5 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO MAKING THE DECISION**

### **5.1** Education Principles which are Fit for Purpose System Sessions

A series of drop-in sessions (18 in total) were held across Gwynedd from 7 November to 14 December to engage with parents, staff, governors and the wider community as part of the process of developing new principles for Gwynedd schools .

See the Appendix for the results of the consultation.

Below are three of the principles which were consulted on:

(i) Non-contact time for headteachers: 98% of respondents agreed that headteachers needed sufficient time to fulfill their managerial duties. A high number of responses set out the importance of reducing the administrative burden to focus on education provision, together with the need to consider joint working to improve education in the County. A number of comments commented on the need to work together to reduce duplication, reduce workload, and to provide opportunities to share expertise and good practice.

(ii) Age range in classes: In addition, 70% agreed with the principle that no more than two age ranges should be taught together in one class. Several comments were received highlighting the difficulty of teaching of children of more than two age ranges, although it is also important to consider this in a practical context regarding any changes.

(iii) Secondary school management: In considering whether secondary school headteachers should be in charge of around 900 pupils, most of the responses disagreed with the principle, although this may reflect the perception that this would relate to a school of 900 rather than considering different management models. In addition, a large number of responses were received strongly agreeing with the statement that children need to be taught by subject specialists. Therefore, there is a need to consider collaborative arrangements between schools which create opportunities to strengthen the system, including horizontal leadership models.

## **5.2 Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee**

A report on the Education Principles which are Fit for Purpose was presented to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 19 April 2018 seeking the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the principles of the proposed education principles which will underpin the realisation of the Department of Education's vision and the development of the system to ensure high quality education for the children and young people of Gwynedd for the twenty first century.

Based on the results of the consultation with Governors and schools, and the Education Department's vision, the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the following principles was specifically sought, which would be considered as the basis for the education system in Gwynedd for the future,

- a system of viable secondary schools
- no more than two age ranges within the same class in the primary
- approximately 80% of non-contact time for the Headteacher to focus on leadership issues in the primary school

To summarise the discussion in the Scrutiny Committee, it was noted that the principles were generally supported, but at the same time it was acknowledged that challenges will be encountered in delivering and implementing these principles.

## **5.3 Views of the statutory officers:**

### **i. The Monitoring Officer**

*In planning school organisation establishing principles of this kind provides a context for forward planning . The consultations and discussions with stakeholders which were a key part of preparing the Principles were an appropriate step to strengthen the process and its transparency. As acknowledged in the report the schools organisation regime is subject to a*

*statutory framework as well as statutory guidance in the Schools Organisation Code 2018 which has detailed provisions. The report acknowledges this framework and appropriately sets the Principles in this context.*

## **ii. Chief Finance Officer**

*‘On the previous report to Cabinet on 12 July 2016, I noted that “there is a need for agreed principles as a solid foundation to shape the education system for the future. We know that further savings must be identified in the medium term. Therefore, the Council will need to rationalise in order to realize these principles”. These comments still stand, and the latest forecasts of the financial situation beyond 2019/20 are triggering the need to consider this soon’.*

## **APPENDIX 1**

The results of the consultation on the principles of an education system which are fit for purpose