

REPORT TO THE CABINET

Meeting Date: 17 September 2019

Cabinet Member: Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams

Subject: Ysgol Abersoch

Contact Officer: Gwern ap Rhisiart – Area Education Officer

The decision sought and the purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to initiate formal discussions with the governing body and other relevant stakeholders of Ysgol Abersoch due to concerns over the school numbers, thus enabling a range of possible options to be drawn up relating to the future of the school.

1. Background

- 1.1 Ysgol Abersoch is located in the centre of the village of Abersoch near Pwllheli, providing education for pupils aged 3-8. The school has a capacity of 34 (Nursery to Year 3), and in January 2019, had 12 full-time pupils, aged 3-8, and 1 part-time nursery pupil on the register. Today (September 2019), numbers have dropped to 7 pupils aged 3-8, and 2 nursery pupils.
- 1.2 In July 2019, as a result of a recent drop in the numbers at Ysgol Abersoch, officers from the Education Department met with the governing body of Ysgol Abersoch to discuss low numbers at the school and to explain that the next step would be to seek Cabinet approval to commence a formal discussion with the governing body and other relevant stakeholders, to consider the options for the future of the school.
- 1.3 Ysgol Abersoch was last inspected in June 2017, and it was concluded that the school's performance was 'Good'. In addition, in January 2019, as part of the Welsh Government's national system for categorising schools, the school was placed in the 'Yellow' category of support. The Government's definition of a 'Yellow' category school is "an effective school that is already doing well and knows what areas it needs to improve."

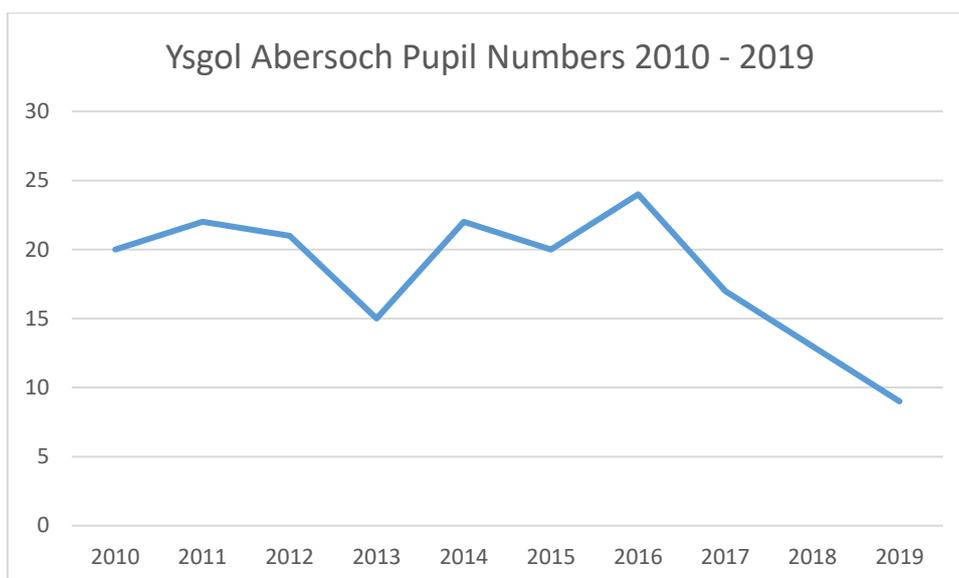
2. Reason why decision is needed

- 2.1 Pupil numbers at the school over recent years have been generally low, although a recent fall has meant that there are now 9 pupils attending the school (2019-20).
- 2.2 In addition, numbers are projected to remain low over the next few years. The September 2018 projections show that in September 2021 we are expecting 9 pupils to be on the school roll.
- 2.3 Given these challenges, permission is sought to enter into formal discussions with the governing body and other relevant stakeholders to consider possible options for the future of Ysgol Abersoch.

3. Reason and justification behind the 'decision sought'

3.1 Low numbers and surplus places

- 3.1.1 It can be seen from the graph below that there has been a reduction in pupil numbers at Ysgol Abersoch over recent years. With 9 pupils on the register in September 2019, school numbers have more than halved since 2016. Comparing school numbers since 1980, we see that school numbers were at their highest and the school was full in 1981, with 35 pupils.



3.1.2 In September 2019, there are only 9 pupils on the register, a decrease of 63% since 2016. With a capacity of 34, this means that the school is 74% empty.

3.1.3 In addition, in September 2018, out of the 34 pupils aged between 3 to 8 who live in the Ysgol Abersoch catchment area, 24 (71%) choose to attend nearby schools. As Ysgol Abersoch is a school for infants and children up to the age of 8, the pupils transfer to neighbouring primary schools after Year 3. The nearest school is Ysgol Sarn Bach, a 3-11 primary school located in the village of Sarn Bach, about a mile away from Abersoch.

3.2 Projections

3.2.1 According to the school's projections calculated in September 2018, when there were 13 pupils registered at the school, it was anticipated the school numbers will remain low in years to come. Below are the full projections calculated in September 2018:

	Nursery	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
September 2019 Projections*	2	1	2	3	3	-	-	-	11*
September 2020 Projections	2	2	1	2	3	-	-	-	10
September 2021 Projections	2	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	9

*Actual pupils numbers in September 2019 = 9

4. Relevant Considerations

4.1 **School Organisation Code 011/2018:** Any process will be conducted in accordance with Welsh Government guidelines (School Organisation Code 011/2018).

5. Next Steps & Timetable

5.1 Subject to the Cabinet decision, there follows an initial outline timetable for discussions:

Next Steps	Outline Timetable
Hold formal meetings with the Governing Body and relevant stakeholders of Ysgol Abersoch to consider and formulate possible options.	October 2019
Report back to Cabinet following local feedback. + <i>Depending on the outcome of the local discussions, seek Cabinet approval to undertake a statutory consultation on the preferred option if required.</i>	November 2019

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

“It is explained in the report that the intent is to identify possible steps to address the challenges facing the school. It is also acknowledged that there are a range of matters which need to be considered in trying to identify possible answers and actions. It is also noted that the provisions of the Schools Organisation Code 11/2018 will have a central role in the considerations and that options on the way ahead will be the subject of further consideration by the Cabinet when the work is concluded. From a propriety perspective, what is proposed is appropriate.”

Head of Finance:

“I support the decision sought.”
