

Objections to the statutory notice on the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda on 31 December 2023, and provide a place for the pupils in Ysgol Llandwrog or Ysgol Bontnewydd from 1 January 2024.

(Objection Period 5 September – 4 October 2023)

4 objections were received and they were sorted under the following headings:

A) Impact on the community

D) Reasons for the proposal to close

F) Plans for Ysgol Bontnewydd

B) Cylch Meithrin

E) Negative impact of constructing the Caernarfon and Bontnewydd bypass

G) Education Strategy

C) Comments on the statutory process

Observations		Cyngor Gwynedd's Response
A	Impact on the community	
1	<p>Having considered and discussed the notice, it was agreed that Llanwnda Community Council accepted that a total of 8 pupils was impossible on an educational level.</p> <p>However, there was concern about the security of the hall, members will be grateful to Cyngor Gwynedd for considering the sustainability of the hall for the future - regular use.</p>	<p>The Council notes that you do not object to closing Ysgol Felinwnda as the low number of pupils makes it educationally impossible.</p> <p>Supporting Community Centres is something that is done by the Council's Community Support Service and we will refer your concern to them about the impact of closing the school on the sustainability of the centre.</p>
2	<p>If the school closes, we have real concern about the future of Canolfan Bro Llanwnda community centre and the Cylch Meithrin, which is based there. Although the School does not make direct use of the Centre, the School contributed towards community activities held there, such as the Christmas Concert. As a result, the parents used the Centre for things such as birthday parties.</p>	<p>Supporting Community Centres is something that is done by the Council's Community Support Service and we will refer your concern to them about the impact of closing the school on the sustainability of the centre.</p> <p>Should there be a decision to close the school, the Council's Early Years Service is available to support the Cylch Meithrin with any childcare placements matters.</p>
3	<p>Should the Cabinet decide to close Ysgol Felinwnda, there would not only be a negative impact on the pupils and those families who currently attend the school, but it would also have a negative impact on the community.</p>	<p>The numbers in Ysgol Felinwnda have substantially reduced in the past 10 years, from 31 in 2012 to 8 in 2023, with only 3 of these learners living in the Ysgol Felinwnda catchment area. The other 45 learners (94%) who</p>

	<p>Canolfan Bro Llanwnda community centre is not far from the school. Although the school does not make direct use of the Centre, the school's presence is a great asset and promotes community use of the Centre.</p> <p>For example, Ysgol Felinwnda contributes towards various activities held there, and parents and members of the community use the Centre, who would not do so if it were not for the presence of the school nearby.</p> <p>In addition, Cylch Meithrin Dinas and Llanwnda is one of the main users of the Centre, and there will be uncertainty about its future without the educational provision next door.</p> <p>Although there were calls in recent months for Cyngor Gwynedd to collaborate with the community and relevant parties, in order to ensure the future of Canolfan Bro Llanwnda and the Cylch Meithrin, there have only been informal suggestions from Cyngor Gwynedd and no commitment to ensure their future, should the educational provision be lost in the area. I therefore ask Cyngor Gwynedd to confirm whether they will proactively act to ensure the future of Canolfan Bro Llanwnda and the Cylch Meithrin should a decision be made to close.</p>	<p>live in the catchment area attend other schools.</p> <p>No community use is made of Ysgol Felinwnda and Canolfan Bro Llanwnda is used for community events, including occasional use of the Centre by Ysgol Felinwnda. As a result, it is not anticipated that closing the school will have a significant direct impact on community use of Canolfan Bro Llanwnda.</p> <p>As no final decision has been made on the future of Ysgol Felinwnda, it would currently be premature to start planning for any impact on Canolfan Bro Llanwnda and the Cylch Meithrin. If the Cabinet decides to close Ysgol Felinwnda, the Council's Community Support Service is available to support Canolfan Bro Llanwnda and we will refer your concern about the impact of closing the school on the sustainability of the centre to them.</p> <p>Although the numbers have been fairly consistent at Cylch Meithrin Dinas and Llanwnda over the years, comparing the figures with the number of learners in the nursery and reception classes in Ysgol Felinwnda (see B below) suggests that the majority of children in the Cylch have not been transferring to Ysgol Felinwnda as a matter of course. These figures also suggest that the Cylch Meithrin, potentially, serves a wider area than the catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda. Consequently, it is likely that closing Ysgol Felinwnda would only have a partial impact on parents' choice to send their children to the Cylch.</p> <p>Should there be a decision to close the school, the Council's Early Years Service is available to support the Cylch Meithrin with any childcare placements matters.</p>
4	<p>What will be the future of the Centre in terms of contributory facilities that are linked to the School, such as the sewerage system?</p>	<p>The Council will ensure that Canolfan Bro Llanwnda will continue to benefit from the contributory facilities until there is any change in use of the Ysgol Felinwnda site which will possibly involve the need to review any services that are shared between the school and the centre.</p>
5	<p>Our schools are the main, if not the only, community resource that Cyngor Gwynedd has a direct influence on. Small rural schools in Gwynedd and across Wales draw families and communities together and, as a result, protect and</p>	<p>Cyngor Gwynedd has seen a substantial drop in the number of learners in Ysgol Felinwnda in the past 10 years, from 31 in 2012 to 8 in 2023, with only 3 of these learners living in the Ysgol Felinwnda catchment area. In</p>

	promote Welshness and the Welsh language.	comparison with the other catchment areas in the area, the number of learners in the Ysgol Felinwnda catchment area who choose to attend an out-of-catchment area school is high. The latest data shows that 48 learners aged between 3-11 (September 2022) lived in the Ysgol Felinwnda catchment area; with only three of them attending Ysgol Felinwnda. This means that 94% of the learners who live in the catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda attend out-of-catchment area schools.																										
6	We have real concern that the Llanwnda, Dinas and Saron area will lose an invaluable community resource and become an area without any heart or identity. What are the Council's intentions to alleviate these negative impacts on our community; and what long-term steps and support will the Council be willing to invest to ensure the prosperity of the local community?	<p>Also, it is noted in the community impact assessment that no community use is made of the school. Canolfan Bro Llanwnda is located next door to the school and holds a number of activities including the Cylch Meithrin and Cylch Ti a Fi. As a result, it is not anticipated that closing the school would have a significant direct impact on the community of Felinwnda.</p> <p>Supporting communities is something that is done by the Council's Community Support Service and we will refer your enquiry about support to them.</p>																										
B	Cylch Meithrin																											
7	Over the years, the Cylch Meithrin has been an initial educational link for a number of pupils at the School; an uncertain future is now anticipated for the Cylch without a School nearby. It is clear that the Council has not sufficiently considered the future of these community resources or, at worst, has ignored their future.	<p>Although the numbers have been fairly consistent at Cylch Meithrin Dinas and Llanwnda over the years, comparing the figures with the number of learners in the Nursery and Reception classes in Ysgol Felinwnda suggests that the majority of children have not been transferring to Ysgol Felinwnda as a matter of course. Consequently, it is likely that closing Ysgol Felinwnda would only have a partial impact on parents' choice to send their children to the Cylch.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Year</th> <th rowspan="2">Cylch Meithrin Dinas and Llanwnda</th> <th colspan="2">Ysgol Felinwnda</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Nursery Class</th> <th>Reception Class</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2018-19</td> <td>11</td> <td>1</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019-20</td> <td>6</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020-21</td> <td>9</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021-22</td> <td>8</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022-23</td> <td>16</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Cylch Meithrin Dinas and Llanwnda	Ysgol Felinwnda		Nursery Class	Reception Class	2018-19	11	1	4	2019-20	6	2	2	2020-21	9	2	2	2021-22	8	1	1	2022-23	16	0	0
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		Should there be a decision to close the school, the Council's Early Years Service is available to support the Cylch Meithrin with any childcare placements matters.
C	Comments on the statutory process	
8	<p>Although we succeeded to get the Council to defer their original proposal back in March with the promise of having a discussion and listening to the voice of both communities in the area of Ysgol Felinwnda and Ysgol Llandwrog, no consultation of value was undertaken. "Engagement" sessions were held, which were essentially information sharing sessions only. Although the Portfolio Leader promised to gather observations to provide feedback to the Cabinet, no such presentation was seen.</p> <p>At the beginning of all this, an informal meeting was held between Council officers, the Headteacher and the two Governing Body Chairs in January this year. We were assured that there was <i>"no need to worry"</i> at the time, that there was no need to share anything with the remaining Governors and that they would <i>"update and share information"</i> with us, after further discussion with the Education Department.</p> <p>At the end of February, the Clerk of Ysgol Felinwnda Governors received a request to arrange an urgent meeting of the Governing Body. An urgent meeting was held at the beginning of March where Council Officers presented their intention to submit a report to the Cabinet recommending the closure of the School due to the low numbers of pupils. By 20 March, the report had been published on the Council website and we informed parents of children at the School at that time.</p> <p>No further communication was received by the Education Department after the informal meeting in January until the urgent meeting with the Governors at the beginning of March. It seems that the impact assessment process had commenced since the beginning of February, three weeks after the informal meeting but the School, Ysgol Llandwrog or the wider community were not engaged with as it was drawn up. It seems that the impact assessments are factually incorrect on a number of analyses. Although we drew attention to this, the analyses in the latest report had not been amended.</p>	<p>At the beginning of discussions on the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda, officers of the Education Department explained that any statutory process is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 which notes:</p> <p><i>"The requirement to consult does not apply to proposals to close a small school..." (section 48(3))</i></p> <p>The Welsh Government's Statutory Code (The Schools Organisation Code 011/2018) notes:</p> <p><i>"Where a school has fewer than 10 registered pupils (or there are no pupils remaining at a school) at the January census point, the 2013 Act permits governing bodies/local authorities to undertake a streamlined procedure to bring about official closure.</i></p> <p><i>This consists solely of the issue of the notice of closure – the requirement for general consultation being waived, provided sufficient equivalent school places have been identified which would be reasonably accessible to those pupils actually or potentially displaced."</i></p> <p>However, after listening to local concerns about the original proposal of holding an objection period on the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda and offering a place for children of the catchment area in Ysgol Bontnewydd, the Cabinet Member for Education resolved to defer submitting the report on the proposal to the Cabinet in March. Following this, and as an additional step to the requirements of the Schools Organisation Code and in response the community's wishes, officers from the Education Department and the Cabinet Member for Education held engagement sessions in Felinwnda, Bontnewydd and Llandwrog to explain that the</p>
9	The contact between Cyngor Gwynedd and the school and the community prior to issuing the Statutory Notice was disappointing. Although the original proposal to issue a Notice was deferred in March, and that there was a	

	<p>promise to consult and gather the observations of stakeholders, only engagement sessions were held. In these, Cyngor Gwynedd explained their intentions but there was no opportunity for the community to express its opinion. Should the community have received a better opportunity to express an opinion, it is possible that Cyngor Gwynedd would not have proceeded to issue a Statutory Notice and that other options could have been considered.</p>	<p>Council would now hold an objection period on the closure of Ysgol Felinwnda and then undertake a separate consultation on a review of the catchment area boundaries of schools that border with the current catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda.</p> <p>The impact assessments met the statutory requirements and the Council is confident in the accuracy of the information submitted in the documentation.</p> <p>Apart from correspondence from the Cylch Meithrin questioning the number of children that had been noted in the impact assessments, offering accurate numbers, the Education Department has not received any other correspondence about errors in the analyses in the impact assessments. As a result of receiving observations about the Cylch Meithrin, the impact assessments were amended in the July 2023 Cabinet report to include the information from the Cylch.</p>
10	<p>On behalf of Canolfan Bro Llanwnda Committee, I would like to convey our disappointment about the proposal and the likely decision from Cyngor Gwynedd to close Ysgol Felinwnda.</p> <p>We express our dissatisfaction about this process so far and the lack of full consultation with the local community and the errors in the analyses of impact assessments within your report the Cabinet.</p>	
D	Reasons for the proposal to close	
11	<p>If the main arguments are based on data and funding, we have no evidence to provide a strong counter case. However, the fact that the School has faced such arguments in the past must be noted and that the community's needs changed where a growth was seen in numbers.</p> <p>Based on this, the area of Llanwnda, Dinas and Saron will lose an invaluable community resource and become an area without any heart or identity.</p>	<p>The Authority is proposing to close Ysgol Felinwnda as it is faced with a number of challenges, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of learners at the school is causing concern, with only 8 learners attending the school, • The estimates of learner numbers remain vulnerable, • The class sizes are small – 2 classes with 3 pupils in one and 5 in the other (January 2023), • There is an age range of up to 3 years in both classes
12	<p>We are very disappointed that Cyngor Gwynedd has reached the conclusion that it wants to close Ysgol Felinwnda. The decision is being made based on pupil numbers and budget, namely data and money, rather than based on a proactive vision to enable vulnerable Welsh rural communities to continue and thrive.</p>	<p>The Council is of the opinion that implementing the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda would offer better experiences for pupils to socialise and work together on a daily basis with peers, and means that children are taught in classes of a more suitable size.</p> <p>No community use is being made of Ysgol Felinwnda and Canolfan Bro Llanwnda is used for community events. Occasional use is made of the Centre by the school. As a result, it is not anticipated that closing the school will have a significant direct impact on community use of Canolfan Bro Llanwnda. If the Cabinet resolves to close Ysgol Felinwnda, then the</p>

		Council's Community Support Service is available to support Canolfan Bro Llanwnda.
E	Negative impact of constructing the Caernarfon and Bontnewydd bypass	
13	<p>Of course, after the School is finally closed, no increase in numbers will bring the School back to existence. There has been no consideration of the negative impact on the School during the work of constructing the Caernarfon and Bontnewydd bypass. For an approximately 18 month period, a number of pupils were forced to find alternative transport to take them past the road works. It was obvious that this had also influenced new parents to take their children to other nearby schools. This has not been considered at all by the Council.</p>	<p>The number of learners in the Ysgol Felinwnda catchment area who chose to attend other schools was high prior to commencing the work of constructing the Caernarfon and Bontnewydd bypass. For example, 50 learners attended other schools in 2019 and 46 learners attended other schools in 2017 and 2018. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was no negative impact on the number of learners as a result of the work of constructing the bypass.</p>
F	Plans for Ysgol Bontnewydd	
14	<p>The whole process has now been split where a discussion will be held about reviewing the boundaries of School catchment areas in the next phase after closing Ysgol Felinwnda.</p> <p>We are still suspicious of the coincidence of the announcement from the Welsh Government at the same time to fund £12 million to construct a new 'area' School for Bontnewydd. It appears to be a deliberate attempt to undermine and endanger the future of rural schools in the area in order to justify a new super School. This should be a warning to other rural schools in Gwynedd. When closing Ysgol Felinwnda, we continue to have a strong opinion that the catchment area should be redrawn to Ysgol Llandwrog rather than Ysgol Bontnewydd, and this for the benefit of protecting and strengthening that rural School.</p>	<p>After listening to local concerns about the original proposal of holding an objection period on the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda and offering a place for children of the catchment area in Ysgol Bontnewydd, it was resolved to defer submitting a report to the Cabinet in March. Following on from this, officers from the Education Department and the Cabinet Member for Education held engagement sessions in Felinwnda, Bontnewydd and Llandwrog to explain that the Council would now hold an objection period on the closure of Ysgol Felinwnda and then undertake a separate consultation on a review of the catchment area boundaries of schools that border with the current catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda.</p> <p>Therefore, if the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda is approved, we would hold this consultation to give an opportunity to those who would be affected by the proposal to voice their opinion on potential new catchment area(s) before Cyngor Gwynedd's Cabinet makes a final decision on changing any boundaries of school catchment areas that about the current catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda.</p> <p>The Education Department was successful in a national competition, namely the Welsh Government's Sustainable Schools Challenge, to secure a substantial capital investment in Ysgol Bontnewydd. The success of the application was not certain as it was a competitive process. The</p>

		investment in Ysgol Bontnewydd is a project that responds to the needs of that particular school's catchment area. However, should the outcome of the consultation show that space is needed for any additional learners from the current catchment area of Ysgol Felinwnda, then there will be a need to ensure sufficient space for them when planning the new school.
G	Education Strategy	
15	<p>I would also like to highlight the need for Cyngor Gwynedd to ensure that it has an operational and credible strategy in terms of the county's small and rural schools in the future. This would provide an additional opportunity to eliminate the vulnerability of Gwynedd's small and rural schools, and give them an opportunity to thrive.</p> <p>A question must be asked whether the new draft Education Strategy by Cyngor Gwynedd expresses a broad enough vision in respect of the county's small and rural schools. Does it sufficiently respond to the drop in numbers of pupils who will attend schools like these over the next ten years?</p> <p>Although acknowledging that the strategy is not in its final form, it is currently vague and superficial. I cannot see that it explains what part small and rural schools will play in Gwynedd communities in the future. I would be grateful if you could consider my above observations.</p>	<p>An objection period on the proposal to close Ysgol Felinwnda has just been held and the sole purpose of this report is to respond to observations on that proposal.</p> <p>The Authority is in the process of drawing up a draft Education Strategy and, as part of this work, it is intended to undertake a public consultation. There will be an opportunity to voice an opinion on the draft Education Strategy as part of the proposed consultation.</p>
16	<p>Although there was a mention of a new Education Strategy by the Council, it still has not been published. Will the new Education Strategy be innovative and set a more proactive direction on sustaining our Welsh communities? Will the Strategy establish a better way of holding a discussion and consensus on the future of education provision within every community, rather than expect the data and funding to force the closure of more small rural schools? Instead of following some organisation code, a Council led by a political party that had a specific rural manifesto and states that they are the only party that promises to "<i>safeguard, protect and promote the rural Wales</i>" is expected to provide better guidance on saving rural Welsh schools. We continue to live in hope for a turnaround.</p>	

Any personal information about the objections has been deleted in order to comply with the Data Protection Act 2008 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).