

# CABINET CYNGOR GWYNEDD



## Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet Meeting Report

<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	11 February 2025
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Dewi Jones
<b>Title of Item:</b>	Ysgol Gynradd Nebo and Ysgol Baladeulyn
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Gwern ap Rhisiart, Head of Education

### THE DECISION SOUGHT

1.1 We request permission from the Cabinet to:

- a. begin formal discussions with the Governing Body and relevant stakeholders of **Ysgol Gynradd Nebo** and discussing possible options regarding the future of the school in response to the low numbers of learners and concerns about the sustainability of the school.
- b. begin formal discussions with the Governing Body and relevant stakeholders of **Ysgol Baladeulyn** and discussing possible options regarding the future of the school in response to the low numbers of learners and concerns about the sustainability of the school.

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### Part A – Ysgol Gynradd Nebo

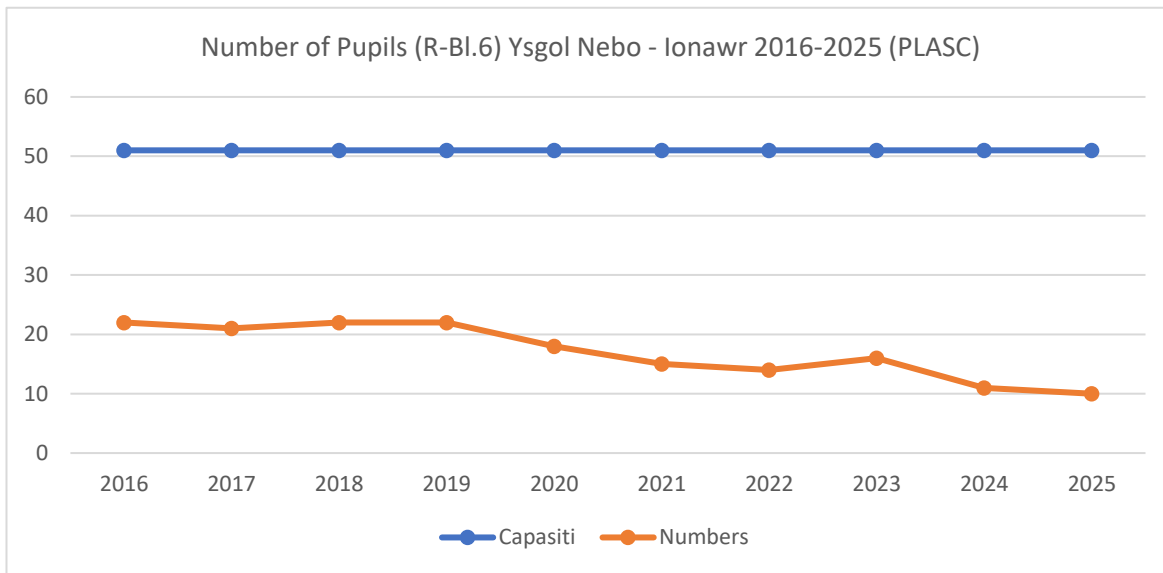
#### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Ysgol Gynradd Nebo is a community primary school located in the village of Nebo, which is around three miles from Penygroes, and provides education for learners aged 3 to 11. Ysgol Gynradd Nebo is a Category 3 Welsh medium school and Welsh is the main language of the school.
- 2.2. According to the January 2025 numbers, there are **10 full-time learners** attending the school with no children in the Nursery Class. The school has a capacity for 51 Reception to Year 6 learners (7 in the Nursery Class).

#### 3. RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

##### 3.1. Low Numbers and Surplus Places

- 3.1.1. The number of learners at Ysgol Gynradd Nebo have been vulnerable for many years. See the graph below which is based on the January census over the last 10 years:



3.1.2. The School Organisation Code 011/2018 states:

*‘Where there are more than 10% surplus places in an area overall, local authorities should review their provision and should consider whether to make proposals for their removal if this will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of provision. A significant level of surplus provision is defined as 25% or more of a school’s capacity (as defined in circular 21/2011) and at least 30 unfilled places.’*

With a capacity of 51, based on the January numbers there is a high percentage of surplus places in the school, which is 80% (place for 41 full-time learners).

3.1.3. In addition to the low number of learners, another challenge is the lack of children living within the catchment area. The Council's GIS software (Geographical Information System) shows that 8 primary age learners live in the catchment area of Ysgol Gynradd Nebo (which includes 1 Nursery age learner). 2 learners choose to attend the school, with 5 attending other primary schools in the Dyffryn Nantlle catchment area, and 1 travelling outside the catchment area. Note that the GIS data above is based on January 2025 numbers.

**3.2. Age Range of Classes**

The current learners are taught in two small multi-age classes, with 4 learners (Foundation Stage) being taught in one class, and 6 learners in another class (Key Stage 2). It is possible that this could create a challenge when providing a curriculum for a wide range of ages within the same class, together with the fact that there are some years with no learners, as the table below shows:

	Year								Total
	N	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Ysgol Gynradd Nebo	0	2	0	2	3	3	0	0	10
Classes	Class				Class				

### 3.3. Learner Projections

The latest projections, based on January 2025 numbers, show that Ysgol Gynradd Nebo numbers will remain vulnerable in the future, as the table below shows:

	Year								Total	
	N	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Nursery	Reception-Yr.6
January 2025	0	2	0	2	3	3	0	0	0	10
September 2025 Projections	2	0	2	0	2	3	3	0	2	12
September 2026 Projections	2	2	0	2	0	2	3	3	2	14
September 2027 Projections	2	2	2	0	2	0	2	3	2	13

### 3.4. Financial Situation

3.4.1. As a result of the low number of learners, the allocation based on the learners is not sufficient to be able to maintain an appropriate staffing level in the school. As a result, the Council's Protection Policy ensures a minimum staffing level for our smaller schools by giving them an additional financial allocation above the core allocation. This means, for 2024-25, that Ysgol Gynradd Nebo has received a financial allocation of £197,897:

Core Allocation	Additional Financial Allocation (Protection)	Total
£148,493	£49,404	£197,897

3.4.2. This means a cost per learner of £14,857 which is £9,634 higher than the County average:

	Ysgol Gynradd Nebo 2024-25	County Average 2024-2025
Cost Per Learner	£14,857	£5,223

3.4.3. As a result of the current low numbers, Ysgol Gynradd Nebo is in a vulnerable position and under increasing financial pressure. Since September 2022, the school is in minimum teaching staff protection of 1.5 due to fewer than 15 learners on the school register.

### 3.5. Staffing Structure

Through Cyngor Gwynedd's Protection Policy, a minimum staffing level of headteacher and teacher is guaranteed in each school, with a headteacher and an assistant guaranteed in schools with fewer than 15 learners. The current staffing structure of Ysgol Gynradd Nebo includes a Headteacher (equivalent to full time) and 45 hours of teaching assistants.

### 3.6. Quality of Education

The school received a positive Estyn report back in 2017 where it was stated:

*"The quality of teaching is good... Lesson presentations are lively, and activities flow well. Teachers explain new ideas in a meaningful and relevant way and extend learning through practical*

*experiences. Tasks are planned carefully for the range of ages and abilities in the classes. Teachers ask probing questions in order to broaden pupils' understanding and encourage them to use their thinking skills throughout the lesson."*

**Estyn Report, October 2017**

However, it was noted that there was a need to further develop the external area for the foundation phase, and the need to improve opportunities for learners to develop their writing skills across the curriculum.

#### **4. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

##### **4.1 School Organisation Code**

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

Ysgol Gynradd Nebo has been designated as a 'rural school' by the Welsh Government, and a definition of a rural school can be found in the [School Organisation Code](#).

#### **5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE**

**5.1.** Subject to the decision of the Cabinet, the Education Department will hold formal discussions with Ysgol Gynradd Nebo to discuss the situation and establishing a School Review Panel to discuss possible options. All members of the Governing Body, parents and school staff as well as the Local Member will be invited to join the panel and take part in the discussions.

**5.2.** Following this, a report will be prepared for the Cabinet to report back following the local discussions held during the School Review Panel requesting permission to proceed to conduct any statutory process as necessary, in accordance with the guidelines of the School Organisation Code (011/2018).

**5.3.** The outline timetable for the next steps is as follows:

<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>Date</b>
Subject to the decision of the Cabinet, hold formal meetings with the Governing Body and relevant stakeholders of Ysgol Gynradd Nebo to form and consider possible options.	March - April 2025
Report back to the Cabinet following these discussions and, depending on the outcome of the discussions, request permission to proceed to implement the recommendation and conduct any statutory process as necessary, in accordance with the guidelines of the School Organisation Code (011/ 2018).	June 2025

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## Part B – Ysgol Baladeulyn

### 6. BACKGROUND

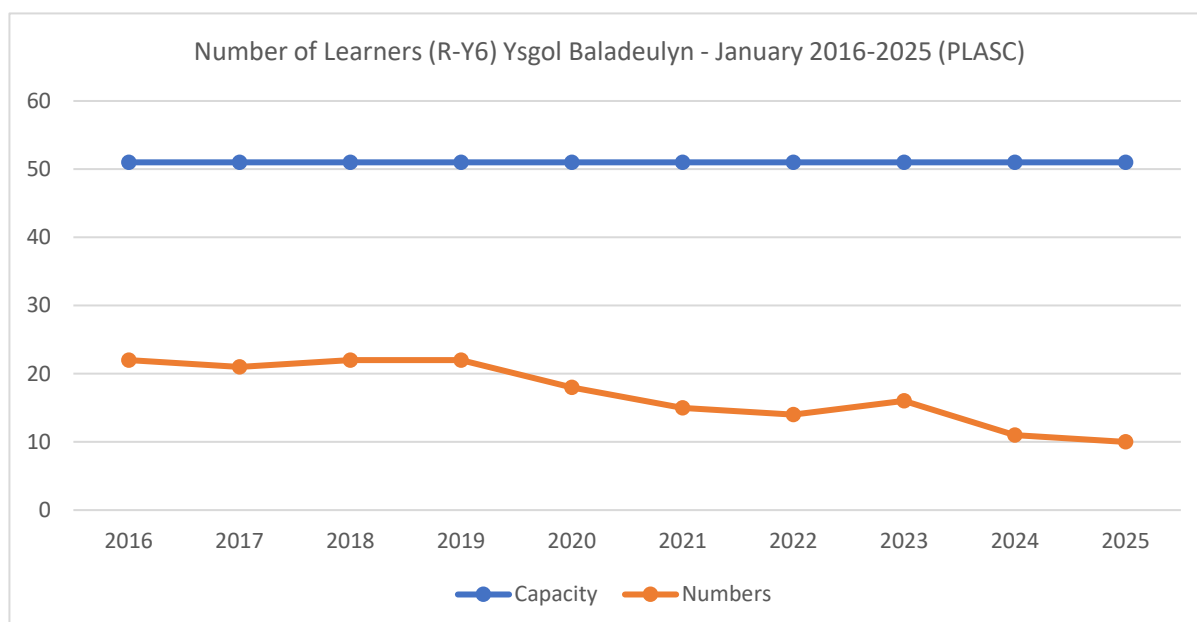
6.1. Ysgol Baladeulyn is a community school located in the village of Nantlle and provides education for learners between the ages of 3-11. Ysgol Baladeulyn is a Category 3 Welsh medium school and Welsh is the main language of the school.

6.2. According to the January 2025 census (CYBLD / PLASC), there are **13 full-time learners** (Reception - Year 6) in the school with no children in the Nursery Class. The school has a capacity for 55 learners from Reception to Year 6 (7 in the Nursery Class).

### 7. RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

#### 7.1. Low Numbers and Empty Places

7.1.1. Ysgol Baladeulyn's learner numbers have decreased over recent years. The graph below shows that there has been a significant drop in learner numbers from 27 in 2017 to 13 in January 2025.



7.1.2. The School Organisation Code 011/2018 states:

*'Where there are more than 10% surplus places in an area overall, local authorities should review their provision and should consider whether to make proposals for their removal if this will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of provision. A significant level of surplus provision is defined as 25% or more of a school's capacity (as defined in Circular 21/2011) and at least 30 unfilled places.'*

With a capacity of 55, based on January numbers there is a high percentage of empty places at Ysgol Baladeulyn, which is 76% (places for 42 full-time learners).

7.1.3. In addition to the low numbers attending the school, another challenge is the lack of children living in the catchment area. The Council's GIS software (Geographical Information System) shows that 14 primary age learners live in the Ysgol Baladeulyn catchment area (which

includes 1 Nursery age learner). 5 learners choose to attend Ysgol Baladeulyn, with 8 attending other primary schools in the Dyffryn Nantlle catchment area and 1 travelling outside the catchment area. Note that the GIS data above is based on January 2025 information.

## 7.2. Age Range of Classes

The current learners are taught in two small multi-age classes, with 3 pupils (Foundation Stage) being taught in one class, and 10 pupils in the other class (Key Stage 2). It is possible that this could create a challenge for the teachers when providing a curriculum for a wide range of ages within the same class, together with the fact that there are some years with no learners, as the table below shows:

	Year								Total
	N	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Ysgol Baladeulyn	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	4	13
Classes	Class				Class				

## 7.3. Learner Projections

The latest projections, based on January 2025 numbers, show that Ysgol Baladeulyn's numbers will remain vulnerable into the future, and are likely to fall further to below 10 learners (Reception – Year 6) from September 2025, as the table shows below:

	Year								Total	
	N	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Nursery	Reception-Yr.6
January 2025	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	4	0	13
September 2025 Projections	2	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	2	9
September 2026 Projections	1	2	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	10
September 2027 Projections	1	1	2	0	2	1	0	2	1	8

## 7.4. Financial Situation

7.4.1. Due to the low number of learners at Ysgol Baladeulyn, the allocation based on the learners is not sufficient to be able to maintain the school. Because of this the Council's Protection Policy ensures a minimum staffing level for our smaller schools by giving them an additional financial allocation above the core allocation. This means that, for 2024-25, Ysgol Baladeulyn has received a financial allocation of £237,914:

Core allocation	Additional financial allocation (protection)	Reduction to the protection due to level of balances	Total
£175,744	£77,659	-£15,489	£237,914

In accordance with the policy, the protection has been reduced by £15,489 due to the school having balances of over 5% of the allocation.

7.4.2. This means a cost per learner of £14,982 which is £9,759 higher than the county average:

	<b>Ysgol Baladeulyn 2024-2025</b>	<b>County Average 2024-2025</b>
<b>Cost per learner</b>	£14,982	£5,223

7.4.3. As a result of the current low numbers, Ysgol Baladeulyn is in a vulnerable position and under increasing financial pressure. As there was less than 15 learners on the register in September 2024, this will have a significant impact on the school's budget from April 2025 onwards. As things stand at present, the school will need to reduce the school's staffing levels by September 2025 with the minimum teaching staff protection reducing from 2.0 to 1.5 from April 2025.

## 7.5. Staffing Structure

Through Cyngor Gwynedd's Protection Policy, at least a headteacher and a teacher are guaranteed in every school, with a headteacher and an assistant guaranteed in schools with fewer than 15 learners. Ysgol Baladeulyn's current staffing structure includes, a full-time headteacher, 2 part-time teachers (3 days each) and the equivalent of 55 hours of teaching assistants.

## 7.6. Quality of Education

Following Estyn's latest inspection in 2017, it was noted:

*"The quality of teaching is good. Teachers provide interesting and stimulating learning opportunities for pupils. Staff establish a particularly good working relationship with pupils, which fosters a successful learning environment. There is a very strong Welsh ethos and provision that encourages pupils to make full use of the Welsh language in all aspects of school life."*

**Estyn Report November 2017**

In addition to this positive overview from Estyn, the recommendations for the school following the inspection were:

- *Raising extended writing standards in both languages across the curriculum.*
- *Improving opportunities for the school's older pupils to develop the full range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills.*
- *Ensuring that pupils are more aware of what they need to do to improve their own work.*

## 8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

### 8.1 School Organisation Code

Any action will be implemented in accordance with Welsh Government guidelines (*School Organisation Code 011/2018*).

Ysgol Baladeulyn is designated as a 'rural school' by the Welsh Government, and a definition of a rural school can be found in the [School Organisation Code](#).

## 9. NEXT STEPS AND SCHEDULE

9.1 Subject to the decision of the Cabinet, the Education Department will hold formal discussions with Ysgol Baladeulyn to discuss the situation and establishing a School Review Panel to discuss possible options. All members of the Governing Body, parents and school staff as well as the Local Member will be invited to join the panel and take part in the discussions.

9.2 A report will be prepared for the Cabinet to report back following the local discussions held during the School Review Panel requesting permission to proceed to conduct any statutory process as necessary, in accordance with the guidelines of the School Organisation Code (011/2018).

9.3 The timetable for the next steps is outlined as follows:

Next Steps	Timetable
Subject to the decision of the Cabinet, hold formal discussions with the Governing Body and relevant stakeholders of Ysgol Baladeulyn to form and consider possible options.	March - April 2025
Report back to the Cabinet following these discussions and, depending on the outcome of the discussions, request permission to proceed to implement the recommendation and conduct any statutory process as necessary, in accordance with the guidelines of the School Organisation Code (011/ 2018).	June 2025

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## OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

### The Monitoring Officer:

It is explained in the report that the intent is to identify possible steps to address the challenges facing the schools. 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.

### The Head of Finance:

*The decision sought does not create a new financial commitment. However, there are financial matters which are evident in the report that will need to be considered when reaching a decision.*

### Local Member for Llanllyfni Ward (Ysgol Baladeulyn)

This school is very close to the hearts of the people of Nantlle, whether they are young or old, still in the village, or have left by now.

Many have had a great education at this small school over the decades and it is extremely disappointing to see that the numbers attending the school have dropped significantly in recent years.

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As you know the quality of the school's education according to Estyn is good and the teachers provide interesting learning opportunities for the pupils. In my opinion the current staff are fantastic at their work and they need to be applauded for their commitment to the children and the school.

I have read the report from the education department and understand the additional financial costs there are because of the current low numbers at Ysgol Baladeulyn and realise that the situation is very vulnerable at present.

In a perfect world the numbers attending the school would increase in the coming years but projections do not look good.

The welfare of the children who are currently at the school is the priority as well as their parents and the wonderful teachers who teach there.

I am confident that Ysgol Baladeulyn's governing body and relevant stakeholders will have every opportunity to form and consider the options that are possible with the education department.

I am more than willing to take part in these discussions with the hope of reaching a positive result for Ysgol Baladeulyn and the residents of Nantlle.

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