



Pilot Planning

In 2025, it was agreed to implement a pilot project to provide education transport in-house by the Education Department to provide transport to Ysgol Hafod Lon in an attempt to try and reduce transport costs for our special schools, as well as improve the travelling experience for learners and their families. At the time, transport costs to Ysgol Hafod Lon cost £1m per annum, and £500k to Ysgol Pendalar. On the grounds of these costs, it was agreed to prioritise Ysgol Hafod Lon for the pilot.

Suitable vehicles were bought, with easy access and wheelchair equipment in the back. The total cost of the vehicles was £72,000 each, so the total cost for both vehicles was £144,000.

£79,000 from a central fund was earmarked to order two electric mini buses for this purpose, and a grant application from Welsh Government was successful for the other £65,000 under the green vehicle, clean electricity scheme. We were also successful when receiving a UK Government grant to order and install charging points on the site.

The vehicles were ordered in May 2025 and were sent to be adapted for mini buses by a bespoke contractor. Work of installing the charging points was commenced in June and July 2025, most of the work done by the Council's in-house team.

The construction work was completed in September 2025, and the vehicles were received in the Autumn.

During the same period, we advertised for mini bus drivers and travel chaperones.

One qualified bus driver and two travel chaperones were appointed.

Following the appointments, specialist communication training, training on the best use of the Welsh language with the learners, and specialist training to become familiar with the appropriate equipment, manual handling skills and awareness of specialist education transport arrangements were provided.

Suitable learners were identified for the pilot, identifying a group of learners who lived relatively close to each other in the areas of Blaenau Ffestiniog, Llan Ffestiniog and Gellilydan.

Sufficient notice was given to the taxi operators that the arrangement was coming to an end at the end of the autumn term, and those operators were fortunate to be awarded other new contracts for the following term.

Implementing the pilot

The pilot commenced in January 2026. The pilot was supported during the first four weeks, including training, communication with parents, mentoring and shadowing, in order to ensure general support to ensure the pilot's success.

Following the first four weeks, staff were seen to be confident, and the parents and learners were satisfied with the provision and all arrangements, therefore the plan has worked very easily following this initial period.

A saving of approximately £55,000 has already been identified this year as a result of implementing this pilot. In addition, the mini bus and driver have been helping during the day to Ysgol Hafod Lon by providing transport to swimming lessons and activities outside the classroom. This is a huge help to the school and enriches the learners' experiences.

The intention is to operate the second mini bus at the start of the next academic year, and a substantial saving of £130,000 is anticipated during the second year of operation.

Positive observations were received from the parents recently, and we intend to send out a quality questionnaire before the end of term to school parents and staff. Here is a selection of some of the comments we have already received:

"the service is punctual every day, the staff are polite and my child looks forward to travelling every morning. Hopefully it will continue next term..."

"she enjoys travelling on this transport - staff consistency in terms of sitting in the same seat, providing suitable communication resources and being consistent with journey times and routes is a good foundation for the rest of the day for her; we had a few days in the past where it was difficult to get her in the taxi!"

Added Value

As well as the usual transport already in place, there are opportunities to extend the transport provision to secure savings for schools, by supporting journeys during the school day, e.g. swimming lessons, college courses, work experience, curricular days, etc., which would result in operating a full day of education transport contracts in-house.