

\*NOTE: When preparing these comments, I have not received Appendix 2 which contains the impact assessments.

**OBJECTION TO THE PROPOSED PROPOSAL TO CLOSE YSGOL NEBO ON 31 DECEMBER 2026 AND TRANSFER PUPILS TO LLANLLIFNI SCHOOL FROM 1 JANUARY 2027 ONWARDS.**

I would like to thank the Education Department for their work in preparing the document and the support Ysgol Nebo has received over the years.

As the Local Member I wish to present my comments on the Ysgol Nebo Cabinet Report and that I am against the preferred recommendation to close Ysgol Nebo on 31 December 2026 and transfer learners to Ysgol Llanllyfni from 1 January 2027 onwards. The case for closure does not meet the "*procedural presumption against the closure of rural schools*" (section 4.5-4.7) in the Organisation Code 011/2018. The report, as it stands, does not prove that all other practical options have been "conscientiously" considered, nor does it show a full and up-to-date impact assessment.

Disappointingly, the Education Department is not in favour of the same option preferred by the Governing Body - namely:

**"Ysgol Nebo to offer a site as provision to support and nurture children with social and emotional needs, where mainstream education is challenging for them, including pupils with IDP for social, emotional and behavioural needs and other young people with mental health needs including anxiety and neuro-diversity."**

**Corrections**

In 10.7 the report states that there is a strategic Headteacher 0.2 and a full time Headteacher. Instead, the correct arrangement is a strategic Headteacher 0.2, a Headteacher in care 0.8 and a teacher 0.2.

The document states that Ysgol Nebo has 1 class. Nebo School actually has 2 classes.

**Recognition**

We recognise that the school is currently in a vulnerable position with low numbers. Unfortunately, this is a wider pattern across the County's primary and secondary schools. However, it is important to note that a high percentage of pupils who attend Nebo School are out-of-catchment pupils. The reasons for this need to be understood before deciding to close. In addition to this, the number of pupils at the school has increased by 50% since the last year.

**Projections**

There is no clear methodological explanation as to how the population forecasts were calculated. Without a transparent demographic model, the conclusion "*numbers will remain low*" is not strong enough. For example, consideration should be given to Cyngor Gwynedd's Housing Action Plan (700 social housing by 2029), where the village of Nebo could benefit directly and lead to an increase in school numbers.

## **Finance**

Although closing a school appears to be a saving for the Council, the document does not include the costs of redundancies, restructuring, transition, or possible reductions in grant revenue.

The reference to maintenance costs is also misleading, as this work is 'necessary' the work would take place regardless of the decision. In addition, there is no supporting evidence to justify the figure of £95,000. For these reasons the £95,000 figure should be omitted.

## **Impact on the Community and the Welsh language**

Closing Ysgol Nebo would have a significant negative impact on the community, as there is a very close relationship between the school and the community. The school is an asset to the Welsh language and local culture, losing it will mean a permanent loss to the village.

## **Home Education (EHE)**

269 children receive their education at home in the County - an increase of 134 since September last year. A very worrying figure. A number of parents have indicated that a larger school would not be suitable for their children; local evidence shows that some learners have flourished after moving to Nebo, thanks to smaller classes and individual care - an invaluable asset.

## **Small Classes**

A number of studies in Britain support the benefits of smaller classes, especially for younger children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ysgol Nebo's experience supports this through an improvement in well-being and progress for some learners.

## **Unexplored Alternatives**

In accordance with the "procedural presumption against closing rural schools" (Organisational Code 011/2018), it must be proven that all options have been conscientiously considered. We believe that this has not happened sufficiently. Although option 8.8 refers to what was presented by the Governing Body, the body did not intend to include a ALN unit. Instead, the intention is to offer a school that would provide an opportunity for vulnerable pupils to remain in the mainstream and possibly avoid a further increase in children receiving their education at home.

We wish that an option presented by the Governing Body of Ysgol Nebo is fully considered.

**"Ysgol Nebo to offer a site as provision to support and nurture children with social and emotional needs, where mainstream education is challenging for them, including pupils with IDP for social, emotional and behavioural needs and other young people with mental health needs including anxiety and neuro-diversity."**

## **Conclusion**

There is an opportunity for Cyngor Gwynedd to act innovatively by supporting Ysgol Nebo as a pilot and model site, taking advantage of the options the Governing Body has offered. This would show national guidance on how to strengthen rural schools and provide a positive choice rather than closing a valuable school.

With numbers of pupils choosing to teach at home increasing at an alarming rate in the County, it is necessary to examine why some have chosen Ysgol Nebo before turning to home teaching.

Therefore, we ask the Cabinet to postpone the statutory consultation on the closure, and support a pilot scheme to test an innovative model that would offer a site as a provision to support and nurture children with social and emotional needs, where mainstream education is challenging for them, including pupils with UDP for social, emotional and behavioural needs and other young people with mental health needs including anxiety and neuro-diversity.

We often see this Council leading the way in Wales and beyond. This is another opportunity for Cyngor Gwynedd to lead on how to ensure a sustainable future for rural schools, support the Welsh language, and attract families back from home education.

Diolch

Councilor Dafydd Davies

**Local Member**

**Clynnog Ward**