

- 2.3 There is a reduction of 88% in the numbers attending the school compared with the PLASC data in January 2025 when there were 17 learners on the register. When learner numbers drop to very low levels, particularly below 10, the ability to present a broad curriculum in the future is hindered. The low number of learners raises concerns regarding:
- Educational experience and interaction with peers
 - Staffing viability and resilience
 - Financial sustainability and efficient use of resources
 - The ability to satisfy the curriculum's statutory requirements

3 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 3.1 The Education Department submitted a report to the Cabinet on 10 February 2026 requesting permission to hold a statutory objection period on the proposal to close Ysgol Y Garreg in accordance with the Standards and Organisation of Schools Act (Wales) 2013 and the Schools Organisation Code 011/2018.
- 3.2 If a school has fewer than 10 learners on the roll when this census is held in January (PLASC - Pupil Level Annual School Census), the Code states:

"The 2013 Act allows governing bodies / local authorities to follow a simpler procedure in order to officially close the school. The only thing they would be required to do under that procedure would be to publish the closure notice - the requirement for consultation would generally be waived, as long as enough places in equivalent schools have been identified that would be reasonably accessible to those pupils who have been displaced or may be displaced."

- 3.3 Due to there being fewer than 10 registered learners in Ysgol Y Garreg (January 2026 PLASC), the Schools Organisation Code allows the authority to follow a simpler procedure to close a school. In particular, the requirement to consult in general is waived, and the only requirement would be to issue the statutory notice.
- 3.4 The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet following an objection period on the proposal - "To close Ysgol Y Garreg on 31 August 2026 and denote Ysgol Cefn Coch as the alternative school from 1 September 2026."
The Statutory Notice was issued on 25 February 2026, commencing a 28-day objection period. The objection period ended on 24 March 2026, and no objections were received.

4 STATUTORY OBJECTION PERIOD

- 4.1 As a result of the decision made by the Cabinet at its meeting on 10 February 2026, a Statutory Notice (**Appendix A**) was issued on 25 February 2026, commencing a 28-day objection period.
- 4.2 The notice was placed on the school gates and in the main entrance of Ysgol Y Garreg and Ysgol Cefn Coch. The notice was published on the Council's website, including the background to the proposal, a link to the report submitted to the Cabinet on 10 February 2026, along with an explanation on how to present objections. All relevant stakeholders received an e-mail with a link to the website, to inform them that the objection period would commence on 25 February 2026.

- 4.3 The objection period ended on 24 March 2026, and no objections were received.
- 4.4 A teacher at Ysgol Y Garreg explained the meaning of the statutory notice to the learners ensuring that they understood the proposal and that the opportunity was given to them to express their views on the proposal, should they wish to do so.

Below is a summary of both letters received from the learners on the proposal -

- They expressed their sadness that the school would be closing.
 - They noted that they were happy at Ysgol Y Garreg and had learnt many things at the school.
 - One of the learners invited the Head of Education to the school, so that he could speak to them.
- 4.5 The Authority has a duty to consider the views of the children affected, in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the Schools Organisation Code 011/2018. Understanding the learners' feelings regarding the proposal is a key element in order to contribute to a balanced and transparent decision, which considers the impact of the proposal on their well-being, as well as strategic and financial considerations.
- 4.6 This report is presented in order for the Cabinet to consider the situation before reaching a final decision on confirming the proposal.

5. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE 'DECISION SOUGHT'

- 5.1 In accordance with the 'Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd' strategy, several factors were considered when developing and appraising the options for the situation. These matters were addressed in detail in the report submitted to the Cabinet on 10 February 2026. Please see **Appendix B** for the background pack.
- 5.2 Having held the objection period, by means of a statutory notice, and the fact that no objection was received, the Authority is satisfied that implementing the proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons noted for the formulation of the proposal, as none of the other options considered would address the main challenges faced by the school, namely:
- **Low learner numbers** - The PLASC data in January 2026 shows that there are two full-time learners at the school (Reception to Year 6) and 0 learners in the nursery class.
 - **Leadership and staffing** - The existing staffing structure at Ysgol Y Garreg includes an interim headteacher in charge who is responsible for two schools through an informal arrangement, one full-time teacher and a temporary assistant (0.6 FTE). The current staffing arrangement has offered a short-term solution; however, the very low numbers of learners have contributed to a situation that is challenging in terms of long-term sustainability.
 - **High percentage of surplus places** – Learner numbers (reception to year 6) from the January 2026 census shows that are 95% empty places at the school (39 in total). The school has capacity for 41 learners (Reception to Year 6) and capacity for 7 learners in the Nursery Class. Therefore, with 0 nursery learners on the register, there are 7 empty places in the nursery also.

- **Very small class sizes and a broad age range** - The learners (Reception to Year 6) are educated in one class. The second class in the school is empty. There are no learners in Nursery to Year 5 at the school.
- **Projected numbers** - The projections based on the PLASC numbers in January 2026 suggest that there will be no statutory age learners at the school in September 2026 as there are no learners in the Reception to year 5 classes or in the Nursery class this year.
- **Catchment area learners** - The PLASC census in January 2026 shows that only 9% of the Ysgol Y Garreg catchment area learners choose to attend the school. 91% of the catchment area learners choose to attend out-of-catchment schools.
- **Ysgol Y Garreg receives an additional sum to the core financial allocation** - Ysgol Y Garreg receives an additional amount to the usual allocation via the minimum staffing protection policy (which ensures at least a headteacher and teacher at each school, and a headteacher and an assistant in schools with fewer than 15 full-time learners). Based on September 2025 numbers the school would receive £68,822 in additional funding to the usual allocation via the minimum staffing protection policy.
- **Average cost per learner** - The average cost per learner at Ysgol Y Garreg in 2026-27, based on September 2025 numbers, would be £21,471, compared to a county average of £5,998.

6 SPECIFIC FACTORS WHEN CONSIDERING CLOSING THE SCHOOL

Although a process to close a school that has fewer than 10 learners waives the requirement for general consultation, the School Organisation Code states that relevant matters included in the Code must be considered. It notes that when considering whether a school closure is appropriate, special attention should be given to the following options:

- a. *Whether the establishment of multi-site schools might be considered as a means of retaining buildings, or the reasons for not pursuing this option.*

With only 2 learners at the school, Ysgol Y Garreg is facing an increasing challenge to set a balanced budget as the school receives an allocation based on learner numbers, and this, as well as the protection sum allocated to them will enable them to employ a headteacher and assistant only, based on the numbers of 2 learners. Because of this Cyngor Gwynedd is of the opinion that consideration cannot be given to the establishment of multi-site schools as a means of keeping the school open.

- b. *Whether alternatives to closure, such as clustering, collaboration or federation with other schools, might be considered or the reasons for not pursuing these as an alternative.*

As clustering, collaboration or federation with other schools, would mean continuing with the existing school, and therefore there would be a high likelihood that the current challenges would continue and intensify over the next few years, therefore the Council is of the opinion that making this an option does not address the challenges facing Ysgol Y Garreg now and in the future.

- c. *Whether the possibility of making fuller use of the existing buildings as a community or educational resource could be explored.*

Since Canolfan Gymdeithasol Llanfrothen is located next door to the school, and the local pub, Menter Y Ring (The Brondanw Arms) has received funding to re-open for the benefit of the community, it is not anticipated that another community resource is needed in the area. Nevertheless, if the proposal is implemented, Cyngor Gwynedd has a policy for the post-use of school sites and this policy would be followed when considering the future of the site.

ch. The overall effect of closure on the local community (including the loss of school-based facilities which are used by the local community).

At present, no community use is made of the school. A Community Centre is located next door to the school. Cyngor Gwynedd is of the opinion that as the Centre is independent from the school, it is not anticipated that closing the school would have any impact on local community events.

d. How parents' and pupils' engagement with the alternative school and any facilities it may offer could be supported.

In order to mitigate against any potential negative impact on learners, we would encourage discussions between Ysgol Cefn Coch and the parents of learners at Ysgol Y Garreg so that they can take advantage of their facilities and after-school activities, and to encourage collaboration between the school and the community of Llanfrothen.

7 PRESUMPTION AGAINST THE CLOSURE OF RURAL SCHOOLS

- 7.1 In the case of Ysgol Y Garreg, which has been designated as a rural school for the purpose of the code, specific consideration was given to the additional procedural requirements in relation to drawing-up proposals for rural schools.
- 7.2 The School Organisation Code includes a special procedure in relation to rural schools, establishing a procedural presumption against closure. It is noted in the Code *"This does not mean that a rural school will never close but the case for closure must be strong and all viable alternatives to closure must have been conscientiously considered by the proposer, including federalisation."*
- 7.3 In addition to the factors that are relevant when developing any proposal, specific assessments must also be undertaken in relation to a proposal of this type. Several assessments were conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Code, of the options believed that would address the school's situation.
- 7.4 Several impact assessments were conducted in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code 011/2018, including:
- Assessment of the probable impact on the Welsh Language
 - Assessment of the probable impact on different transport arrangements
 - Assessment of the probable impact on the community
 - Assessment of the probable impact on the quality and standards of education
 - Composite Impact Assessment

Further consideration was given to the above assessments, following the objection period. It is considered that the findings of the assessments are still current and relevant to the recommendation. The latest assessments have been included in **Appendix B**.

- 7.5 The conclusions of the assessment of the likely impact on different travel arrangements are noted that the option of closing the school would mean that learners in the current catchment area of Ysgol Y Garreg need to travel further to their school every day. As the alternative school is more than 2 miles from their homes, they will be entitled to free transport to the alternative school. Ysgol Cefn Coch is located 2.1 miles from Ysgol Y Garreg and transport to the alternative school will be offered in accordance with Cyngor Gwynedd's transport policy.
- 7.6 The community assessment shows that some negative impact on the community is anticipated if the proposal to close Ysgol Y Garreg is implemented. It is acknowledged that closing the school would lead to the loss of a school in the Llanfrothen community, however the assessment notes that a very large proportion of the children who live within the school's catchment area already attend other schools (78%), including Ysgol Cefn Coch (13%), and therefore it is concluded that some link between Ysgol Cefn Coch and the Ysgol Y Garreg community already exists.
- 7.7 An assessment of the likely impact on the quality and standards of education was carried out on all the options. See the full report in Appendix B. According to Estyn's latest reports, Ysgol Cefn Coch offers education of a quality and standard that is equivalent, at least, to Ysgol Y Garreg.

Ysgol Y Garreg was last inspected by Estyn in 2023 (new inspection framework) and it was noted that 'the standard of teaching is consistently good'. Estyn presented the following as recommendations:

- Ensure an appropriate level of challenge to support pupils to develop their skills to the best of their ability.
- Providing opportunities for pupils to take on a leadership role, in order to contribute to the wider work and life of the school.

Ysgol Cefn Coch was last inspected by Estyn in 2018, where it was concluded that the school's current performance against the outcome questions and the provision was Good, and the leadership and care and welfare were Excellent (previous review framework).

As there are more learners at Ysgol Cefn Coch, it is anticipated that there will be an opportunity to teach children in larger groups, with age-related peers to broaden their experiences if the proposed proposal is implemented. Based on this, it is concluded that there would be a positive impact on the learning and teaching experiences of Y Garreg catchment area learners at Ysgol Cefn Coch.

- 7.8 It should be noted that it is not concern about the quality of the current education at Ysgol Y Garreg that has led to this proposal. Indeed, due to a very low learner to teacher ratio, the children are making good progress. Nevertheless, the main challenges the school faces are very low numbers and small class sizes, meaning that there are limitations on the school's ability to provide opportunities for learners to nurture and take advantage of extracurricular, social experiences and the ability to collaborate with pairs and groups of peers in the class in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum.

8 RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The impact assessments were carried out in accordance with the specific guidelines of 'presumption against closing a rural school.' The assessments, together with the report, were presented to the Cabinet on 10 February 2026 and their conclusions are summarised below. There is no change to the conclusions of the assessments as no objections to the proposal were received.

8.2 Composite Impact Assessment

A Composite Impact Assessment was carried out on the proposed proposal. The full assessment can be found in Appendix B.

The assessment gives specific attention to different equality elements such as race, gender, disability, language, religion or belief and age. The assessment notes the current situation and shows that policies and arrangements are in place which would ensure that the proposal considers and is compatible with equal rights.

Having weighed up the relevant factors, it is concluded that the proposal is not likely to have a negative impact on the majority of equality features. It is noted that measures are already in place to ensure that there will be no illegal discrimination or harassment.

It is anticipated that the implementation of the proposed proposal would reduce the inequality in the case of socio-economic disadvantage by ensuring that the learners have more experiences and access to more services and activities in the alternative school. Learners would receive more equal opportunities as the learners would receive learning experiences based on national learning principles, with a variety of styles including working in mass groups, smaller groups, partner work and individually within their specific age range together with lessons that are appropriately differentiated for the age range in question.

By implementing the proposed proposal, the learners of Ysgol Y Garreg would have a better learning environment and the learners would benefit from having more age-related peers in a school with more learners, which will ensure suitable educational and extracurricular experiences for them together with access to more extracurricular activities.

The Council would follow normal processes by supporting and monitoring, in order to ensure compliance of each school with the equality characteristics.

8.3 Linguistic Impact Assessment

The Welsh Government's guidelines (School Organisation Code) states that an impact assessment on the Welsh Language needs to be carried out as part of any proposal to reorganise schools. See the full assessment in Appendix B. The impact assessment on the Welsh language stated that it is anticipated that the proposed proposal would have a partial impact on certain elements in the context of the Welsh language, mainly:

- the proposed proposal to close Ysgol Y Garreg and denote Ysgol Cefn Coch as the alternative school would mean that learners in the Y Garreg catchment area would continue to be educated in a Welsh-medium school.
- the proposed proposal would mean that learners would have access to a higher supply in terms of staffing and they would be part of a larger group of peers of the same age, the proposal could strengthen the opportunities for learners within the class.
- that the proposed proposal would mean that Ysgol Y Garreg learners would be likely to use the Welsh language in informal Welsh contexts informally with their peers outside of school hours.

- that the proposed proposal would mean that fewer parents would likely meet on a daily basis in the Llanfrothen community during drop off and pick up times.

On the basis of the above, if the proposed proposal is implemented, it is anticipated that there would be no impact on Ysgol Y Garreg catchment area learners' use of the Welsh language in a formal context at the school. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that there would be more use of the Welsh language in informal contexts outside of school hours.

9 CONCLUSION

9.1 As no objection was received during the objection period, and that no other option that would address the main challenges faced by the school was identified, it is recommended that the Cabinet approves the decision sought, namely to formally confirm the proposal given by means of a statutory notice, to close Ysgol Y Garreg on 31 August 2026, and denote Ysgol Cefn Coch as the alternative school from 1 September 2026, in accordance with Section 53 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the requirements of the Schools Organisation Code 11/2018.

9.2 The Education Department remains of the opinion, following the objection period, that none of the other options, including federalisation, would address the main challenges facing the school, namely -

- very low learner numbers.
- projections showing a further drop in learners.
- learners being educated in classes with very small numbers, with only 2 learners in one class and the other class being empty.
- a continued very high cost per head, compared with the average amount in the county.

10. IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

10.1 Learners in the catchment area

If the Cabinet decides to implement the proposal, Ysgol Y Garreg will close on 31 August 2026 and Ysgol Cefn Coch will be denoted as the alternative school from 1 September 2026. The catchment area of Ysgol Y Garreg would be adjusted to include the current catchment area of Ysgol Cefn Coch.

Map 1: The current Ysgol Y Garreg and Ysgol Cefn Coch catchment areas

10.2 Transport

If the Cabinet decides to implement the proposal, Ysgol Y Garreg will close on 31 August 2026, transport to the alternative school will be offered in line with Cyngor Gwynedd's transport policy.

10.3 Staffing Considerations

Should the proposal be implemented, it is anticipated that there would be staffing implications that could lead to redundancies. Cyngor Gwynedd has developed a detailed staffing policy, jointly with Trade Unions and headteachers. Any redundancies resulting from this proposal will have to comply with that policy. Clear and open communication will play a core part in the implementation of any proposals.

11 RECOMMENDATION

11.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet approves the decision sought which is to confirm the proposal given by statutory notice, namely –

"To close Ysgol Y Garreg on 31 August 2026 and denote Ysgol Cefn Coch as the alternative school from 1 September 2026."

In accordance with section 53 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the requirements of the Schools Organisation Code 11/18.

12 NEXT STEPS

Subject to the Cabinet's decision, these are the next steps of the process together with a timetable:

June 2026	Share the final decision with all relevant stakeholders. Hold discussions with staff at Ysgol Y Garreg.
31 August 2026	Implementation of the proposal to close Ysgol Y Garreg.

13 VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

"This work has been supported with advice and guidance from the Legal Services. The report is based on the result of the statutory objection period that has been in place under Part 3 of the School Standards and Organisation Act (Wales) 2013 and presents a final proposal to close Ysgol Y Garreg

and denote Ysgol Cefn Coch as the alternative school. I am therefore satisfied with the appropriateness of the decision sought."

Head of Finance Department:

"As stated in the previous report in February 2026, it is clear from the evidence that has been gathered that Ysgol y Garreg's situation is no longer sustainable and that decisive action is needed to address the situation. The result of the further work included in this report supports the previous conclusion and I have no objection to the decision being sought."

13. THE LOCAL MEMBER'S COMMENTS

"No councillor wants to face this situation, and it is extremely sad to have to face the fact that there are no children to go to Ysgol Y Garreg in September 2026. Ysgol Y Garreg has been a key part of the community for over a century and has provided excellent education to the children of the area. It is sad that the numbers have fallen to this extent. The two pupils currently at school are in Year 6 and will be transferring to secondary school in September 2026.

Like other parts of Gwynedd and indeed the western world, the number of children has fallen significantly which has consequently affected the number of pupils on the register. Society has also changed, and for many years now parents have had the right to consider educating their children in a school of their choice. I believe it is important to thank the staff for their dedication in challenging circumstances, and for providing both pupils with excellent and entertaining educational experiences.

I would like to draw attention to the opinion of the governing body which was submitted in the report to the Cabinet in February 2026 -

"Should the Council decide to close the school, I would like to strongly encourage you to consider restructuring the building as a specialist centre for pupils who have trouble settling in mainstream schools, but are not eligible for a Special Learning Needs School."