

## **Consultation Paper – Case for Change**

### **Joint Faith Based Provision for North Denbighshire**

#### Contents

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Background – Case for Change**
- 3 Options for Change**
- 4 How changes will impact on ethos of the school**
- 5 School Performance and the Educational Argument for Change**
- 6 Financial Implications**
- 7 Evidence – Condition of Buildings and Sites**
- 8 Pupil Place Planning**
- 9 Impact on 3-11 Education / Post 16 Provision**
- 10 Next Steps**

## **1 Introduction**

The churches and the state have been partners in the provision of education for young people for well over two hundred years, and all parties in North Denbighshire are committed to continuing this partnership and to seeing the provision of education thrive. In particular, the Anglican Diocese of St Asaph and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Wrexham are pleased to have had an effective and positive working relationship with Denbighshire County Council for some years in developing schools with a religious character.

The Dioceses of Wrexham and St Asaph are committed to joint action to sponsor the potential development of a new secondary school offering Catholic and Anglican education for the families who seek it in Rhyl and north Denbighshire. This provision is intended to be provided in partnership with St Brigid's Trust. With it comes the desire to offer the highest standards of education and to ensure good outcomes for all young people in Wales. We believe that this school will assist in answering a real need for further educational provision in the north Denbighshire area, particularly in the light of new potential residential developments; as well as answering demand from families in both religious traditions and others for education with a Christian religious character in north Denbighshire. It is particularly important to continue to make provision for families opting currently for Catholic education in Rhyl, and for those parents who are expressing preference for the education with a Catholic and Christian character in the present St Brigid's School, and to maintaining the character and quality of education currently provided.

## **2 Background – Case for Change**

### Review of Provision

Across Wales there is a clear need for changes in the way education is delivered to ensure that school buildings and facilities are inspirational learning environments that meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wales. It is recognised by Denbighshire County Council together with the Diocesan authorities that locally we have to change and modernise education provision in the county, as improvements in education cannot be sustained without changes to the way education is provided. We have a responsibility to ensure that our schools are sustainable and fit for purpose. Schools need to be able to provide the best possible learning experience so that children and young people in Denbighshire have the widest opportunities available to them and are able to reach their full potential.

The way that we use school buildings has changed and will continue to change. New curriculum requirements (for example the development of the 14-19 network which has enabled an increase in suite of qualifications available to learners under the Learning and Skill Measure) and developments in ICT (for example the use of whiteboards and wireless technology) and the potential for community use mean that our schools have to change and we need to keep pace if we are to meet the needs of modern life. The way of working with schools has also changed with an increased emphasis towards partnership working and a multi – agency approach requires schools to have additional facilities available for this way of working; conference rooms, support rooms; office space for other agencies etc.

In order to improve all existing school buildings so that they meet the definition of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century School we would need to invest significant capital over the coming years. The Welsh Government have made it clear that local authorities will not be able to attract capital funding unless the issue of empty places is dealt with. We are also mindful that in the current financial climate no guarantees can be made regarding revenue funding for schools. A number of schools are already suffering from budget pressures due to low pupil numbers and high levels of unfilled places, a situation that could become worse over the coming years.

Denbighshire County Council has a responsibility, working with partners, to ensure that there is an educational system in place that is sustainable over the next 15-20 years. We want successful thriving schools that provide the best possible learning environments and facilities for our children and young people.

In order to do this we have to review education provision across the county.

### Secondary Faith Based Provision in Denbighshire

The provision at both Blessed Edward Jones Catholic School and St Brigid's needs to be considered in the context of Denbighshire's Modernising Education Policy Framework and in particular the specific policy regarding "Models for Secondary School Organisation".

The policy considers that “It is not feasible for a secondary school with fewer than 600 pupils (plus 150 in 6th Form where appropriate) to provide the facilities described in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Secondary Schools vision. Therefore the Council accepts that the minimum size for any new secondary school will be a four-form entry school providing 600 11-16 places. In order to ensure that all secondary schools provide the best possible learning environments for children and young people, whilst providing the widest opportunities available the authority reserves the right to review schools with fewer than 600 11-16 pupils or more than 1500 11-16 pupils. Any review of secondary school provision will take into consideration the Learning Pathways available to pupils within the area.” The policy then clearly articulates that “Where a secondary school falls below 600 pupils (11-16) for three years in succession, the authority reserves the right to review the school.”

At present there are 8 secondary schools within Denbighshire, with 2 of the 8 schools considered to have a religious character. Both of these schools have at present below 600 pupils.

Blessed Edward Jones is a Catholic School 11-16 based in Rhyl. The school is comprehensive and a Voluntary Aided School within the designation of the Diocese of Wrexham. The school in January 2012 served 480 pupils against an overall capacity of 649 places, which equates to a surplus of 26% places.

St Brigid’s is recognised as a Voluntary Aided Trust School based in Denbigh, which presently serves pupils across the age range of 3-19 and includes the provision for boarders. The principal activity of the School is set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust Body, being “the advancement of education of children between the ages of 3 and 19 by making provision for a Voluntary-aided Roman Catholic School or School for the education of Roman Catholic Children, either with or without other Christian or non-Christian children.” The school as of January 2012 served 374 pupils as an 11-18 school against an overall capacity of 344 places, which equates to a deficit of 8.7% places.

Denbighshire County Council is clearly of the view that there is a need to review the sustainability of both schools to ensure that the provision of faith based secondary education in Denbighshire is secure and can meet the changing needs of the modern curriculum.

The Council considers that there are significant challenges which both schools would need to address to continue to maintain existing provision in the short to medium term should no change occur. In particular the challenges surrounding leadership and management of two small secondary schools, the adequacy of existing facilities to deliver both the existing curriculum and the requirements of the changing curriculum and the financial implications for both schools as a consequence of their current size should not be underestimated. These issues could pose a significant risk for both schools to maintain their existing standards and could undermine future developments.

### **3. Options for Change**

This initial consultation will provide the opportunity for pupils, parents, governors, staff and the local communities to put forward their views as to what the long term solution should be for faith based secondary provision in Denbighshire.

At present Blessed Edward Jones is the only formally recognised faith secondary school by the Catholic Diocese in Denbighshire. St Brigid's provides faith education in accordance with their articles of association whilst not being formally recognised by the Diocesan authority. The consultation will need to seek views from existing and potential pupils of these schools to understand the impact of any transition from a solely Catholic teaching for existing pupils.

In seeking to move forward there is a need for all parties to consider the wider demand for faith education in the area of North Denbighshire and to understand the views as to the potential impact for both the Church in Wales and Catholic Communities and their family of schools of any proposal for change.

There is also a need to fully understand potential issues around accessibility should the case for change be accepted. In particular the need to consider how provision is accessible to all families that seek a faith-based provision.

The opportunity to potentially strengthen this provision via the inclusion of the Church in Wales diocese in partnership with the Catholic Diocese and St Brigid's Trust could provide a stronger platform for the future provision.

### **4 How the development of a joint faith ethos will impact on the school**

The potential change to a joint Catholic / Church in Wales religious designation will mark a new school strengthened by the experience of the two traditions and of working together with a common vision. This will give breadth to the school's mission. The ethos will be inclusive of all abilities and require the best outcomes for pupils, aiming to remove any barriers to success. The two faith groups intend to build a strong learning community with Christian values and high aspiration to serve the common good. The ethos will be collaborative and generous in its outreach.

### **5 School Performance and the Educational Argument for Change**

In terms of assessing the performance and achievements of both schools basic comparisons are difficult. Factors which influence this include the gender difference between the two cohorts, school admissions policies, levels of free school meals take up and pupils with Special Education Needs.

The most recent comparator of the relative performance of both current schools would be the Banding exercise undertaken by the Welsh Government and published in December 2011. This assessment used four groups of data, namely; level 2 threshold including

English/Welsh and Mathematics; capped points score; attendance and E/W and mathematics average points scores. Within each data group, relative performance is measured to take account of a selection of actual performance, progress over time and performance relative to context and cohort. This enabled all Secondary Schools to be placed in five bands according to their relative performance, Band 1 schools are those whose data show good overall performance and progress across the measures whilst Band 5 schools are those where performance and progress are weak relative to other schools.

The assessment placed St Brigid's Secondary School as a Band 2 school whilst Blessed Edward Jones Catholic School was placed as a Band 3 school.

In respect of comparative performance for 2012 Key Stage 3 Core Subject Indicator, which demonstrates performance against the mixture of core subjects, analysis demonstrates that both schools were categorised as performing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Quartile. In this measure both schools have demonstrated an improvement in standards.

At Key Stage 4 the trends for the Core Subject Indicator demonstrate the rate of progress by Blessed Edward Jones from 18% in 2010 to 39% for 2012. During the time period there was a minor decline at St Brigid's from 75% in 2010 to 72% in 2012. However the performance for St Brigid's is still above the Denbighshire and Welsh averages.

Another form of comparator is the findings of the Inspection Reports by Estyn. However the length of time since the previous published inspections for both schools, particular Blessed Edward Jones, clearly impacts on the validity of the findings as a comparator of standards. In addition there have been changes in the leadership and management arrangements at both schools. Inspections of schools are normally undertaken on a six yearly cycle. The last inspection of both Primary and Secondary provision for St Brigid's was undertaken in May 2010 whilst the last published inspection of Blessed Edward Jones was undertaken in 2006. A full inspection of Blessed Edward Jones was undertaken in October 2012 and the findings of the inspection will be published in early December. A summary of the inspection scores is detailed below whilst the full findings from the inspections can be found on the Estyn website:-

[www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

A summary of the inspection scores is detailed below.

<b>Key Question</b>	<b>St Brigid's Inspection grade - 2010</b>	<b>Blessed Edward Jones Inspection grade - 2006</b>
1. How well do learners achieve?	3	4
2. How effective are teaching, training and assessment?	3	3
3. How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?	3	3

4. How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3
5. How effective are leadership and strategic management?	3	4
6. How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?	3	4
7. How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?	3	3

To enable existing standards to be maintained and more importantly to be improved the restrictions placed by the learning environment at both schools raise important concerns to be addressed. In many areas whilst the basic learning environment can deliver the traditional curriculum there are significant restrictions for both schools to deliver successfully beyond this. In particular in areas such as Arts and Technology the provision of basic facilities limit the potential for innovative and flexible delivery of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century curriculum.

School Improvement Officers for Denbighshire County Council are of the view that improved joint working between the two schools would lead to clear education benefits for current and future pupils. These include ensuring the equality of entitlement to faith provision via an inclusive agenda where pupils have equal access to a faith ethos and faith delivery.

These include:-

- The development of a common leadership and senior and middle management structure across both schools providing increased opportunities for strong leadership, staff development and progression;
- Wider opportunities for enhancing the education of the pupils, e.g. joint school projects, shared teaching and develop learning resources;
- Further opportunities to share resources e.g. service providers, joint staff training, themed days, and transport to different venues and events;
- Enhanced staff expertise in specialist areas to enable a broader curriculum to be delivered e.g. Teachers working together to plan, prepare and assess;
- Enhanced opportunities for monitoring teaching across the two sites and for teachers to moderate and level pupil work;
- To more effectively address the statutory requirements of the 14-19 Learning and Skills Measure to meet the needs of all pupils.

## **6 Financial Implications of Change**

Any changes to Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's will have financial implications for the schools, the diocesan authorities, Denbighshire and the Welsh Government.

### Revenue Implications

Any proposals for change will have an impact on how the funding for the schools are calculated. At present funding for all schools is calculated on a formula basis which accounts for pupil numbers, floor space, special education needs of pupils and free school meal entitlement amongst others. These formula elements allow the local authority to allocate a delegated budget in the current financial year and indicative budgets for the 2 following years. Schools are then responsible for developing an expenditure plan.

For the 2011/12 financial year the total delegated budget for Blessed Edward Jones was £2.107m against an net expenditure of £2.163m. This equated to an in year deficit of £55k. For St Brigid's the total delegated budget was £1.512m against a net expenditure of £1.468m, which equated to an in year surplus of £44k. As at the end of the 2011/12 financial year the overall balances for both schools were a net deficit of £169k for Blessed Edward Jones whilst St Brigid's moved from a previous deficit position to an overall surplus of £29k.

The three year expenditure plans suggest that by 2014/15, Blessed Edward Jones would have a small surplus of under £6k whilst St Brigid's surplus would increase to £43k.

In considering the above information, it is also of note that the Council has commenced consultations on a revised Denbighshire Schools Funding Formula which will have implications for both schools.

## **7 Evidence – Condition of Buildings and Sites**

As part of the preparations for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme the Welsh Government commissioned external consultants to undertake school surveys to determine the condition of all schools in Wales. The findings for both Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's found the schools as Category C – "Poor".

The suitability of the respective sites can be assessed by comparing the range and size of facilities against the findings of Building Bulletin 98 (BB98), a standard which is used to assess the space requirements for secondary schools.

Overall for the St Brigid's site it is considered that the buildings are significantly below the areas recommended in BB98. In particular it is considered that many key category areas are significantly underprovided for, including basic teaching areas and halls. At present halls are dramatically underprovided with the single hall which serves all age groups also acting as a gym and sports hall. The current Secondary provision at St Brigid's is heavily reliant upon



the use of mobile accommodation to deliver the curriculum. Approximately half of the capacity of the school is within such temporary facilities.

For Blessed Edward Jones whilst there is more than sufficient site basic teaching areas in terms of space, in contrast the halls are below the recommended area. The main sports field area is detached from the main school site at Ffordd Derwen. These playing fields are approximately half a mile away from the main school campus in Cefndy Road and this separation has an impact for the delivery of this element of the curriculum as a consequence of the time taken for pupils to access this site.

In summary this analysis indicates that neither site in their current form would be considered to meet the standard described within BB98, which forms one of the initial basis for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools schools.

In considering the actual sites the findings from the assessment against BB98 suggest that within their present forms neither site would be considered to be of sufficient size to cater for an increase in pupil numbers to accommodate a secondary school for pupils in the region of 900 pupils in the current foot print of both schools.

## 8 Pupil Place Planning

In considering potential options there is a need to assess both previous pupil patterns and potential future pupil numbers.

Table 1 below details the pupil numbers attending Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigids 11-16 and 11-18 provision over the last 5 years. The post 16 provision at Blessed Edward Jones was closed in September 2010 as part of the proposals developed for the establishment of the Rhyl VI facility for post 16 education in Rhyl. Therefore both the 11-16 and 11-18 age range has been used in these examples to enable comparisons to be made.

		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Blessed Edward Jones	11-16	408	408	466	485	480
	11-18	455	463	481	0	0
St Brigids	11-16	281	284	283	281	286
	11-18	351	354	341	353	374
Total	11-16	689	692	749	766	766
Total	11-18	806	817	822	838	854

Over the last five years pupil numbers using the 11-16 age range as a valid comparator at both sites have increased: 17.6% increase in pupils at Blessed Edward Jones and a minor increase of 0.9% at St Brigid's. In considering pupil numbers at St Brigid's it is acknowledged that the school is presently over-capacity which limits any further growth in pupil numbers without an increase in the size of the school. Over the last 5 years there has been a 25%

increase in post 16 students at St Brigid's. As part of the Denbighshire Post 16 Transformation Programme, post 16 provision for St Brigid's students is delivered as part of the wider Dyffryn Clwyd partnership which also includes Ysgol Glan Clwyd, St Asaph; Denbigh High School; and Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin together with Coleg Llandrillo and Deeside College.

The current capacity of the St Brigid's site is 344 which includes the sixth form provision. The current capacity of the Blessed Edward Jones site is 689. Based on the current capacity assessments there is a surplus of 169 places (which equates to 26%) at Blessed Edward Jones with a deficit of 30 places (which equates to 8.7%) at St Brigid's. On a regular basis St Brigid's has been oversubscribed and has regularly admitted via its admissions procedures in excess of its capacity.

Appendix A provides an illustration of the home locations of current pupils for both schools. These maps demonstrate the areas presently served by Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's.

In respect of future pupil projections it is currently forecast that the numbers attending the respective schools will remain consistent for St Brigid's, due to the limitations on growth as the school is already above its capacity, whilst there will be a decrease for Blessed Edward Jones. The main impact on Blessed Edward Jones at present is the reduced numbers at primary level in the main feeder school Ysgol Mair RC in Rhyl in comparison to previous years.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Blessed Edward Jones 11-16	490	486	433	395	410	394
St Brigid's 11-18	371	366	362	357	353	350

## 9. Impact on 3-11 Education / Post 16 Provision

The initial discussions have focussed on 11-16 secondary provision. At present St Brigid's is a provider for age ranges 3 – 19, including primary provision (3-11) and post 16 provision.

Clearly any proposal which may emerge regarding future Secondary provision will need to give due regard to any implications for primary provision and how post 16 provision for pupils wishing to receive a faith based education.

For Primary provision there is at present a small number of schools who deliver primary faith education. For Catholic provision, Ysgol Mair, presently serves the Rhyl and surrounding area. For the Church in Wales Ysgol Trefnant serves the village of Trefnant and its surrounding area.

An issue for consideration is whether any proposals for change which may emerge should include specific reference as to how Primary education should fit into any proposals.

Similarly there will be a need for discussions on how post 16 provision is delivered. The development of the 14-19 network which has enabled an increase in suite of qualifications available to learners under the Learning and Skill Measure, including consortium and partnership working and increase of vocational courses offered with specialist provision required has changed the way this element of education is delivered. The post 16 element of Blessed Edward Jones was closed as of September 2010 with Post 16 provision in the Rhyl area being delivered via the Rhyl and Prestatyn VI. St Brigid's post 16 provision is now delivered as part of the Dyffryn Clwyd partnership with neighbouring Schools and Colleges.

## **10. Next Steps**

Denbighshire's Cabinet approved this document for initial consultation on the 20th November 2012.

Initial consultation will take place on the options for the way forward.

The initial consultation period runs from 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012 to the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

A consultation letter and copies of the consultation documents will be sent to both schools. Summary copies will also be sent to the parents of pupils and members of staff employed at both schools. In addition copies of the documents will be sent to the relevant feeder primary schools together with other schools which may be impacted by the proposals. Also neighbouring authorities, local Councillors, constituency MP's and AM's, local community councils and other interested stakeholders.

Staff meetings will be arranged at each school during the second week of consultation to share information and discuss the consultation.

A general meeting for parents and governors will be arranged at each school in the week commencing 8<sup>th</sup> January to share information and discuss the consultation.

Sessions will also be held to enable the views of pupils presently attending both schools to be conveyed.

Local community councils and other stakeholder groups will be encouraged to respond to the emerging issues during the initial consultation period.

Following the end of the consultation period on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013 all views will be collated and considered by all parties in the decision making process including the Roman Catholic Diocesan Authority, the Church in Wales Diocesan Authority, St Brigid's Trust and Denbighshire's Cabinet.

It is anticipated that any decision on a preferred option would be undertaken in March 2013. Dependent upon what the preferred option was at this stage further extensive consultation would occur on the preferred option.

**Please return your comments no later than the  
29<sup>th</sup> January 2013 to:-**

Modernising Education Programme Team, Customers and Education Support,  
Denbighshire County Council,  
County Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin LL15 1YN

You can also email: [modernisingeducation@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:modernisingeducation@denbighshire.gov.uk)