

Appendix H

Response from UCAC

The formal consultation on the proposal to establish a New Area School to replace Ysgol Clocaenog ac Ysgol Cyffylliog

1. UCAC, the national union of teachers in Wales, appreciates the opportunity to respond to this formal consultation on the proposal to establish a New Area School to replace Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog. We would be more than ready to elaborate on these comments and to discuss them at any time.

In writing this response, UCAC has consulted with its members locally and has drawn on the experience of those members who have experienced a similar reorganisation in fairly similar situations in other counties.

2. UCAC appreciates Denbighshire County Council's desire to protect education in rural areas and to ensure that it responds appropriately to local need for Welsh-medium education. We acknowledge that this proposal, if implemented fully and in a timely manner, fulfils these aspirations and attempts to tackle many issues that need to be addressed (Par. 5.4).

3. The data presented confirms without doubt that a larger school is needed in the Clocaenog area and post haste. Therefore, practical needs have led to forming the proposed two-phase plan with the intention to implement the First Phase – namely to create an Area School on two sites in September 2014 – being only a temporary answer to the problem.

4. However, UCAC has serious concerns about the lack of clarity in the Consultation Document regarding the Council's lack of full commitment to implement the Second Phase if the plan is approved. We are also concerned about the possible consequences for jobs during the whole process.

Throughout the document, there are clauses that raise 'doubts' that the Plan will be implemented fully:

.. on the condition that land is available and suitable (Par. 2.3).

.. discussions on land purchase (Par 17.5).

.. uncertain timescale.... unless Phase Two is approved (Par 17.10).

..dependent on ensuring that there are enough capital resources available (Par. 18.2).

5. As maintaining the new school on two sites will mean higher costs (Par. 16.3), it is essential that the funding source for purchasing the land and the building work is confirmed from the outset. Without this assurance, there is a real danger that parents will choose to send their children to other schools to avoid the situation whereby a family's youngest and oldest children will be at different locations. Any statutory notice, therefore, should include the full details of the two phases.

6. As it is the authority that will be funding this proposal in full, information is needed regarding to what extent the Council will be able to find the money to build the new building, especially in light of the recent threats to public spending. The funding should be ringfenced before moving forward to publishing a Notice.

7. The Union welcomes the intention to ensure that staff and pupils have input into the plans for the new school (Par. 10.3). The experience of many education authorities is that a new school attracts pupils; therefore, it is important that the new school will be large enough from the outset and that the plan allows for making additions to it easily if the need arises. We are also pleased that there is an intention to provide transport beyond the statutory need during the period of change and for a long period beyond that.

8. If the Plan is implemented, the Union is deeply concerned that the Temporary Governing Body will be established too late in the day. This has been the experience in other places unfortunately. This means that the Body will not have enough time to make critical staffing decisions. Therefore, there must be a tight timetable for establishing the Body and making decisions to be included in a Notice.

9. UCAC is very much of the view that jobs must be completely safeguarded by limiting them to staff within the two current schools. Temporary staffing needs also need to be considered in the First Phase alongside the more permanent needs in the Second Phase, which will ensure that every staff member will be assured about the nature of his/her contract from the outset. The Union would expect to be part of any discussions on the appointment process and any relocation needs that arise from this reorganisation.

Conclusion

UCAC acknowledges that the Proposal to establish a New Area School is an option for meeting the challenges that rural schools face today. If the Council decides to produce a Statutory Notice on the basis of the Formal Consultation, we would emphasise the need for it to consider the concerns raised in this response in order to protect the interests of staff and to protect the education of pupils locally.