

Following an application for 21st Century Schools Programme funding, Gwynedd Council received confirmation in December 2011 that the Welsh Government's Department for Education and Skills has approved, in principle, to co-finance the establishment of a new School for pupils with more complex Special Educational Needs in Gwynedd. This application represents an investment of £12.4 million to establish a modern provision of the highest quality central to Meirionnydd and Dwyfor for children with more complex Special Educational Needs and their families.

## Questions and answers following consultation meetings

During October and November a number of meetings were held with school staff and governors as well as open days arranged especially to talk to parents and the public in Dolgellau, Pwllheli, Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The main purpose of these meetings was to update interested parties of the progress of the project and share with them the options under consideration for the future of special education needs in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor and plans for the new special school we are hoping to build in Penrhyndeudraeth.

It was good to see so many people turning up to the meetings and hearing their support for our plans for the new school as well as having the chance to answer their questions.

As not everyone was able to attend the meetings it was agreed to share the commonest questions and answers so that everyone who is interested in this exciting development are clear about the plans.

Here are the main questions that were asked:

### **Q: Where will the new special school be located?**

A: We hope to locate the new School at the Snowdonia Business Park in Penrhyndeudraeth but must ensure suitability of the land and the site before the final decision is taken. The Welsh Government has already agreed to lease the land to us to develop a school and have no objections to changing the use of the land. However we still need to:

- a) Ensure the Planning Department's agreement to the 'change of use' for the land (currently the land has been set aside for industrial use only)
- b) The Property Department will work to ensure that building on the land will not be too difficult or too costly.

### **Q: When will the school open?**

A: We are working to complete the building of the school by April 2016 in order to allow the children to visit and become familiar with the new school during the summer term, prior to transfer in September 2016.

### **Q: Will Ysgol Hafod Lon, Tŷ Aran and Tŷ Meirion units close?**

A: Currently there are 4 possible options. It will require further work on the 4 options before a decision is made on the final option. The final decision on this option will then depend on the outcome of a statutory process and Welsh Government agreement.

The options under consideration are:

- Do nothing
- New school and close Ysgol Hafod Lon, Tŷ Aran and Tŷ Meirion.
- New school and close Ysgol Hafod Lon only; continue with Tŷ Aran and Tŷ Meirion.
- New school and close Ysgol Hafod Lon and Tŷ Aran; continue with Tŷ Meirion.

**Q: Will staff from the SEN school and units that close get work at the new school?**

A: We envisage the need for more staff in the new school so the hope is that there will be enough job opportunities for existing staff to apply for. In accordance with staffing regulations it is the governing body that has the responsibility for deciding on the staffing structure. This means that they will decide on the number of teachers and assistants that are needed in the new school and the way the posts are filled. The Education Department will be pressing the governing body to give the present staff fair consideration and encourage the governors to offer interviews to staff at any school/unit which will close.

The Education Department's Catering and Cleaning Services will give the present staff who wish to work in the new school fair consideration and offer them an interview for the posts they apply for.

**Q: How many children will be able to attend the new school?**

A: The original proposal was for 84 children, but because of increased demand and following consultation with other local authorities and visits to other similar new schools, we hope to cater for up to 100 children and young people.

**Q: How many beds will be in the residential and short break unit?**

A: The unit will have 6 beds for residential and short term care.

**Q: When will the short break provision be available?**

A: There are a number of possible models for short break provision and we need to consider them all further before coming to a final decision. Among the options we will be considering are the possibility of opening over weekends and school holidays.

**Q: What facilities will be in the school?**

A: Of course the national building standards for special schools will influence this discussion but we anticipate that the following facilities will be available:

- Hydrotherapy pool
- Sensory rooms
- General therapy rooms
- Rebound therapy room
- A hall with a stage
- A kitchen, dining room and cafe
- Classrooms containing essential equipment
- A stimulating and sensory external environment
- All-weather sports court
- A suitable play area (including football)

The architect is busy developing plans for the new school and has been discussing the needs with people who work with children with special needs, teachers and the children themselves. Early plans for the school received a very positive response during the open days in October and November and the comments that we received have been shared with the architect.

**Q: Will the resources such as the hydrotherapy pool, sensory room and hall be available for use by the public outside school hours?**

A: It is intended to promote the use the specialist facilities by the public in collaboration with partners such as social service and health.

**Q: Will children with special education needs have to go to the new school?**

A: We do not foresee any change to the present policy and the well- established co-operation already in place between parents and the Education Department (i.e. when fulfilling statutory requirements for the naming of a school within a pupil's Statement of Special Educational Needs).

**Q: Will children who go to the new school be entitled to transport from home?**

A: Children will continue to receive transport according to Gwynedd Council's policy for transporting pupils with Special Educational Needs.

**Q: Will the children going to the new school be able to attend mainstream school for some lessons?**

A: This will continue as is currently the case, with the assessment of individual needs forming the basis for a decision about dual placements with mainstream schools.

**Q: Will there be a stage in the hall?**

A: One of the most popular wishes expressed by pupils at Ysgol Hafod Lon is to have a stage in the hall for performing, therefore a stage in the hall is at the top of the list.

**Q: Will there be a place to play football in the new school?**

A: Once again a very popular demand from the children at the present school is somewhere to play football and it is the intention to provide a suitable area for this on the new school site.

**Q: Will there be enough parking spaces for families when concerts are held?**

A: The plan is currently for 70 vehicles including minibuses. If there is not enough space during busy times there are enough parking spaces on other parts of the business park.

**Q: Can the building be extended in the future if the need arises?**

A: planning of the new school site allows for some further expansion in the future if the need should arise.

**Q: Will special needs services, such as music therapy, be offered from the new school?**

A: Decisions about the services that will be offered at the school will be based on consultations between the Education Department and other providers.

**Q: Will any other agencies be working from the school?**

A: It is hoped to offer a base at the new school for other agencies to work from, for the benefit of children with special needs in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor.

**Q: Will there be collaboration between the school and businesses and other organisations in the area e.g. Seren and businesses on the business park?**

A: Developing opportunities for collaboration between the school and local businesses and organisations will be valuable and it is anticipated that discussion to promote this will take place closer to the opening of the school.

**Q: What will happen to the building following closure of Ysgol Hafod Lon?**

A: Gwynedd Council has a policy of offering the opportunity for the local community to apply for ownership of any school site following closure. If the community does not want the site then the site will be sold on the open market.

## The next steps

<b>January</b>	Welsh Government assess and decide on stage 1 business case
<b>February – March</b>	Work on stage 2 business case
<b>March</b>	Cabinet approves the right to statutory consultation
<b>April - May</b>	Statutory consultation Welsh Government assess and decide on stage 2 business case
<b>June</b>	Cabinet approves decision following statutory consultation Work on stage 3 business case
<b>July</b>	Welsh Government assess and decide on final stage business case Statutory notice period
<b>September - October</b>	Final decision by Cabinet (or other)
<b><u>New school construction</u></b>	
<b>January - November 2014</b>	Design of new school, planning permission, tender for a contractor to build the school
<b>January 2015 – March 2016</b>	Build and furnish the new school

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