



Eich cyf/Your ref 139477
Ein cyf/Our ref ARD/00116/17

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Thank you for your correspondence about the recent decision by Carmarthenshire County Council to discontinue Llangennech Infants and Junior Schools and establish a Welsh-medium primary school on the existing sites.

As you know, the responsibility for the planning of school places rests with local authorities. Local authorities have to keep under review the extent to which their existing pattern of school provision meets current and forecast demand for school places and the requirements of delivering the modern curriculum. The Welsh Government does not normally intervene directly in the planning of school places.

However, I am aware on 5 September 2016 Carmarthenshire County Council published a statutory notice to close Llangennech Infant and Llangennech Junior Dual Stream Schools and establish a new Welsh medium primary school. The full Council met on 18 January and approved the decision to proceed with the proposal.

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (the 2013 Act) created a new process for determining school organisation proposals which receive objections. Previously, all such proposals came to the Welsh Ministers for determination. Under the 2013 Act a proposal approved or rejected by a local authority can be referred to the Welsh Ministers for consideration if certain limited parties decide to take this step. The 28 day period in which a referral can be made has now ended and no referral was received.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Welsh Ministers cannot reconsider the decision of the Carmarthen County Council to approve this proposal without such a referral.

As regards your constituent's point about the possible effect on children, I understand that such issues were raised during the consultation period. The local authority's response was set out in the Objection Report which was among the documents before Council members when the decision to proceed was taken.

For the Welsh Government's part, we set out our vision of a bilingual Wales as far back as 2003 and which we reiterated in our Welsh-medium Education Strategy in 2010. Our aim is to have an education and training system that responds in a planned way to the growing demand for Welsh-medium education, reaches out to and reflects our diverse communities and enables an increase in the number of people of all ages and backgrounds who are fluent in Welsh and able to use the language with their families, in their communities and in the workplace.

This is why the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act also requires local authorities to prepare Welsh in Education Strategic Plans which set out, among other things, how they plan to expand Welsh-medium provision in their area as a means to bringing about that vision of a bilingual Wales.

The advantages that bilingualism can bring are well documented. These range from the direct advantages of being able to use particular languages (for example to communicate with family members and wider social networks or to enhance career opportunities) to the more general advantages of promoting cognitive skills, increasing mental agility and broadening speakers' range of cultural experiences. Research in Canada reveals that bilingualism enhances attention and cognitive control in children and older adults, and in 2007 highlighted the impact of bilingualism on delaying the onset of dementia symptoms. Other research findings suggest that speakers of two languages found it easier to focus on a range of tasks, blocking out potential distractions. Providing opportunities for speakers to develop their bilingual skills through education therefore makes a valuable contribution to a broad range of social and cultural experiences.

In August 2016 I launched a consultation on a further draft strategy to create a million Welsh speakers by 2050. It is clear that to achieve this aim we must secure a significant increase in the number of children and young people educated through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. The proposed developments in Llangennech are entirely consistent with that aim.

Alun Davies AC/AM

Gweinidog y Gymraeg a Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language