

# A Future with Bancffosfelen Primary School



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## Introduction

Bancffosfelen School is a village primary school that provides good standards of education. The children who attend the school benefit from good educational provision, and the school's important part at the heart of the community; with added value through additional support and strong engagement with parents and the wider community. The school faces significant challenges, primarily due to the condition of parts of the building. The Governing Body, with the support of parents, and friends of the school are eager to move forward - with the cooperation of the Local Education Authority- with innovative plans to solve the challenges and to develop a new model to maintain and develop the school.

Carmarthenshire County Council Education Department officers have informed the Governors of Bancffosfelen School of their intention to seek the Council's approval to undertake a consultation on the future of the School, and have stated that their preferred option is to close Bancffosfelen and to transfer the pupils and catchment area to Pontyberem School. On top of depriving the children and the village of the advantages associated with having high quality primary education at the heart of the community, there are many practical obstacles associated with that proposal.

This document presents an alternative option for consideration by Carmarthenshire County Council for the future of Bancffosfelen. It also includes an action plan which the Governing Body of Bancffosfelen Primary School wishes to implement as a business plan for a sustainable future for the school. With the cooperation of the Local Education Authority, the development has potential to be a pilot that may offer a new option in a constructive answer to the challenges faced by schools, communities, and education authorities in other parts of Carmarthenshire and beyond.



## **1. The Proposal – a New Way of Working with the Community**

This proposal is submitted on behalf of a group consisting of the Governors of Bancffosfelen School and wider representation from parents and the community. We realize that Councillors and officers of the Education Authority do not wish to implement school closures, but we understand also the need to find solutions to the challenges of maintaining a substantial ageing estate of school buildings with their maintenance requirements whilst ensuring a suitable environment for the latest educational demands within a context of scarce resources/finance. This proposal provides an opportunity for Carmarthenshire County Council to work with parents, governors and the wider community in the Bancffosfelen area to develop a truly innovative model - a trailblazing plan which may be of interest to communities and education authorities throughout Wales and further afield.

When a school closes, the County Council has a policy of offering the assets for use by the local community if the community is willing and able to maintain the location. In implementing this proposal, the transfer of the building and campus of Ysgol Bancffosfelen to a community charitable organization would occur without closing the school, and with the aim of maintaining the school at the heart of the plan. The community organization would take responsibility for developing the site in a manner that would provide suitable space for the running of a 21st Century school alongside wider community use.

This is not a scheme to be entered into lightly - we are fully aware of the substantial responsibility to be borne with the scheme. We are also aware of the need for further detailed work to be completed to confirm the governance and funding arrangements and to prove the viability of the scheme. However, with the Welsh Government encouraging the development of innovative schools and the desire within the local community to commit to supporting the proposed new way of working, there is a real chance that Carmarthenshire can succeed in finding an innovative new solution here.

We therefore call on the County Council to support these efforts and to shelve any consultation on plans for closure of the school in order to provide an opportunity for the Governing Body to work with Local Education Authority officers to refine details of this scheme and to hold the appropriate consultations over the next year on the proposals submitted here.

## 2. Action Plan for Executing Option 10

### 2.1 Year 1 – 2016/17 Financial Year

#### Discontinue Use of Unfit Classrooms

Following consultation with the Local Authority, the Foundation Phase class was relocated to another room in the building. In addition, the Cylch Meithrin (which has shared this part of the building) has also been relocated to the school hall. The only parts of the deteriorating rooms currently in use are the toilet facilities.

To ensure complete disuse of the unfit areas, some minor adjustments will be made to toilet facilities in other parts of the school for use by children in the Cylch Meithrin. In addition, a more permanent structure will be built in the school hall in place of the cabinets that are currently being used as a temporary partition for the Cylch. In turn, as a temporary measure, doors to disused areas will be sealed to ensure no persons can enter without supervision, or authorisation.

#### Developing the Foundation Phase Space and Resources

New resources will be acquired and minor works completed to redraw and improve the space used for the provision of the Foundation Phase, including outdoor provision.

#### Recalculate School Capacity

In the Measuring school capacity in Wales document 2011<sup>1</sup>, section 1.25, part (a) references the ability to recalculate school capacity “due to major changes to circumstances in the school”. Further to this, section 4.5 outlines circumstances where this might be appropriate. One such example is:

*“The need to remove unsatisfactory accommodation which it would not be cost effective to repair or replace and there are sufficient alternative suitable school places in the area. (This will most commonly apply to demountable classrooms but could apply in the case of unsatisfactory discrete blocks which could feasibly be removed).”*

Given the current state of disused classrooms in the school, the current school capacity does not reflect the current use of teaching spaces. The sections above outline a reasonable request and circumstances in which the Local Authority may complete this exercise outside of normal timescales.

### Re-Categorisation as a Voluntary Aided School

In order to address budgetary constraints, the Governing Body would propose to enter consultation to re-categorise Bancffosfelen as a Voluntary Aided school. With the Local Authority's support, this would allow the establishment of a community charitable trust that would enable fundraising in order to maintain and develop the school campus, thus ensuring a future for the school as well as resources for community use.

The Governing Body have already made contact with several possible patrons and sources of annual grant funding. Using this, the school believe they would satisfy requirements under section 1.10 of the School Organisation Code 2013<sup>2</sup>.

### Explore the Provision of Nursery Places

Under the Local Authority officers' current preferred option, the provision of Bancffosfelen Cylch Meithrin would cease. This would restrict the provision for 3-year olds in the area and would create a situation of insufficient spaces to meet the demand. The Governing Body wish to protect and further develop the nursery provision.

In this respect, the Governing Body would propose to enter consultation to add nursery provision for 3-year-old pupils in Bancffosfelen. The demand for provision for under-3s in the Cylch Meithrin and the viability of this provision would be an important consideration in this consultation. By adding the provision to Bancffosfelen School, the community of Bancffosfelen will still have both a school and a provision for 3 year olds. There are very few opportunities for 3-year-old children to receive a mainstream education in the Gwendraeth Valley. There are two nearby establishments (Cross Hands and Trimsaran) who provide this, but are 7 and 8 miles away (respectively) from Bancffosfelen School.

In the Local Authority's own words:

*"There are many advantages to attending a school which offers nursery provision, these include;*

- *Children that attend a nursery setting within the school find the transition to primary education from nursery easier and often 'settle' quicker than children who have not had access to nursery provision.*
- *Issues in relation to additional learning needs can be identified at an earlier stage before the child attends full time primary education.*
- *Studies have shown that children attending pre-school nursery enhance their cognitive and social / behavioural development compared to children not attending nursery.*

*Having a nursery within a village setting also benefits the school as parents tend to send their children on to the school that provides Early Years Education which improves the numbers attending the school*

### **Development and Implementation of a Capital Investment Programme**

Bancffosfelen will develop and implement a timetable for addressing issues with the school building, with consideration given to current and future budgetary constraints.

## **2.2 Year 2 – 2017/18 Financial Year (Or Earlier)**

### **Implementation of New School Status**

Bancffosfelen begins operation as a Voluntary Aided school.

### **Begin Admission of 3 Year Old Pupils**

Bancffosfelen can begin to admit 3 year old pupils under the new 3 to 11 status (subject to the results of the consultation).

### **Demolition or Redevelopment of Unfit Class Spaces**

Further to the proposed changes to the school and any potential impact it may have on projected pupil numbers, the Governing Body would pursue appropriate changes to the building where the unfit class spaces are situated.

### **Resolution of Temporary Head teacher Position**

The Governing Body will act to ensure a permanent resolution to the school Head role as this is key to the stability of the school moving forward. The current arrangement of sharing ahead with Pontyberem School has worked well over the past two years and the option of securing a permanent arrangement on that basis will be explored in addition to other options. Having a shared headship between schools is a common arrangement at this time and it is seen that Bancffosfelen school has much to offer and to gain from sharing a Head with another school. Therefore, although all options will be considered, it is expected that a shared Head will be part of the resolution.

### **Development of Community Functions Within the School**

In line with further integration of the school into the community, the Governing Body would aspire to develop a range of community functions at the school. Current opportunities under consideration include: all-weather sports facilities; courses and activities for adults; Ti a Fi; child care; meals for the elderly; and meeting and conference facilities. Plans will be developed in stages, with capital and revenue funding sources secured as necessary.

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## 3. Challenges to the Local Authority's Proposal

### 3.1 Decrease in Pupil Numbers

While the Governing Body accept that the school's pupil numbers have decreased in recent years, it can be argued that the Local Authority's public declaration of their intent to close the school has created a stigma of uncertainty for current and prospective parents.

Indeed, the school had 63 pupils on roll in January 2005. However, following the inclusion of Bancffosfelen in Carmarthenshire's 2006 announcement of their 10-year school modernisation plan, the 2007 census return saw pupil numbers drop to 35.

The proposal neglects to mention the increase in pupil numbers between 2008 and 2013<sup>3</sup>. Some of these places filled due to the Local Authority's decision to close Mynyddcerrig Primary School. This, we believe, is an interesting outcome given the allocation of Mynyddcerrig's catchment area (in the main) to Pontyberem.

While numbers at Bancffosfelen have since decreased, the fluctuating pattern suggests that the school are likely to see increased numbers in the next two years. It is our firm belief that giving a clearer future for the school, any doubts that potential pupil's parents have for choosing Bancffosfelen would be alleviated.

### 3.2 Delivery of Curriculum to Multi-Year Group Classes

The Local Authority can provide no evidence that the school is struggling to provide a sufficiently challenging curriculum. In fact, attainment at both the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 has either improved or remained above comparisons with the school's All Wales Core Data Set Family; the Local Authority; or Wales.

Granted, in some years, with small cohort sizes, the school's Foundation Phase Indicator or Core Subject Indicator has been at the mercy of less than a handful of pupils each year (including pupils with additional learning needs). However, it is testament to the quality of the delivery of the curriculum by teaching staff that these standards have continued to improve to, or remain at high levels.

It is also the opinion of this Governing Body that the delivery of the curriculum in multi-year group classes puts pupils at an advantage, opening greater scope for challenging More Able and Talented pupils; as well as providing greater class depth for pupils requiring additional learning support.

Furthermore, mixed year group classes are providing Bancffosfelen's pupils with greater opportunities to learn and exercise empathy and understanding

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A - History of Pupil Numbers at Bancffosfelen.

of other children across different age groups, capabilities, and backgrounds. Much of this would be lost in a larger school setting with one-year group per class; arguably narrowing pupils' perceptions.

### **3.3 Nursery Provision**

As outlined in the school's proposal, the Governing Body would further explore the future of 3-year-old places in Bancffosfelen. It is important to mention here, however, that following enquiry by the Governing Body, it has come to our attention that there will be insufficient places for pupils of Bancffosfelen Cylch Meithrin in the Cylch held at Pontyberem Memorial Hall, which is the venue they would be expected to attend under the Local Authority's proposed option.

## Appendix A – History of Bancffosfelen Pupil Numbers

Year	Age								Total
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
2003	4	6	4	8	12	8	7	5	54
2004	3	8	6	5	8	13	10	7	60
2005	4	7	10	6	5	8	13	10	63
2006	3	4	5	6	6	4	5	12	45
2007	2	5	4	3	6	6	4	5	35
2008	5	4	5	5	1	8	8	4	40
2009	1	8	5	5	4	1	7	8	39
2010	7	1	9	5	7	5	3	9	46
2011	7	8	1	10	5	7	5	5	48
2012	4	8	8	1	9	5	6	5	46
2013	0	8	7	9	1	8	6	6	45
2014	1	3	8	6	8	0	7	4	37
2015	1	5	2	7	6	7	0	7	35
2016	2	4	5	3	8	6	7	0	35

