

# Rural Development Sub-committee

RDC(3)-11-08 (p1): 25 June 2008

## Annex F :

### Report on Governors' Visit to Ysgol Mynyddcerrig

Date of Visit: 15<sup>th</sup> May 2007

Classes visited: Mrs S Jones - J Griffiths

: Mrs E Gwynfor - M Dix

Duration of visit: 13.15 - 15.15

#### Abstract

There are many reasons why members of a governing body are obliged to visit the school on a periodic basis, not least to ascertain the impact that the strategic decisions they entertain have on the functioning and operation of the school. However, within all the guidance that has been issued, and within all the protocols for governor visits, there is an implicit assumption that the school is going to continue, and that progress can be achieved against stated objectives. This is obviously not the case with Ysgol Mynyddcerrig, the closure of which is now only weeks away.

As is extremely explicit within the guidance, this visit is not an inspection; a role for which we are neither prepared nor qualified to undertake.

#### Observations

##### Resources:

The governing body of Ysgol Mynyddcerrig has regrettably had greatly reduced budgets to work within over the last financial year and there was an identified need to assess the extent to which this might be impacting upon the quality and nature of educational provision within the classroom. It was therefore, extremely gratifying to note the innovative way in which the teaching staff employed those resources available, and the fact that both observers could determine little evidence, within the context of the afternoon in question, that budgetary constraints had negatively impacted upon the operational functioning of the classes observed. A variety of learning resources were made available during the lessons and the children seemed adept and confident in their use. These included:

##### Use of self:

It was of great interest to note how the teaching staff divided their time amongst the children, reflecting the individual needs of the children at any given moment and their requirement for support and input. We encountered no evidence that the mixed age/ability ranges within the classes presented any kind of barrier to teaching or learning, and were equally impressed to note the extent to which the children were actively supporting each others learning. We are however, prepared to acknowledge that this is greatly assisted and facilitated by the smaller class sizes in Ysgol Mynyddcerrig, and concede the point made by teaching staff that such an approach would be difficult to maintain in class sizes of 30+. It was also interesting to note that the small size of classes enabled the teaching staff to mark work on the spot. This not only appeared to aid the children's learning considerably, but also seemed to reduce the judgmental element inherent in marking, making the children more receptive to constructive criticism.

##### Use of written materials:

It was pleasing to note the availability of books available for lessons, with children generally having access to individual copies without having to share. Use of photocopies was restricted to worksheets, and again demonstrated an effective management of available resources.

##### Use of IT facilities:

The use of information technology facilities within the classroom was of particular interest to the observers, especially given recent assertions made by some parties that such facilities can only be effectively provided by the economies of scale inherent in larger schools. The confidence and skill demonstrated by both children and staff in their use would seem to challenge such assertions. Equally, we were particularly impressed by the skill demonstrated by some of the older children in the use of the Internet, and more specifically the way in which search engines were being used to elicit information. Use of the interactive whiteboard was also particularly effective in captivating the interest and participation of the children in their learning.

#### Inclusion and Community:

Ysgol Mynyddcerrig has traditionally enjoyed extremely close links with the wider community, with the school being regarded by many as at the very heart of the community. It was, therefore, with some dismay that that governing body responded to the statements made in the recent inspection report that there was little evidence of this relationship. As observers, we were therefore keen assess this for ourselves. We found significant evidence of the bond that exists between the village and the school that can be summarised as follows:

Industry: Evidence of extremely close relationship between the school and Torcoed quarry. The quarry have been extremely generous in their donations and gifts to the school in recent years, with many parents and ex-pupils of the school employed in the quarry. Many of the children of the village have visited the quarry on their open days.

Welfare Committee: For decades, the village welfare committee has been closely involved in supporting the school. The school has enjoyed free use of the committee's recreation ground that lies adjacent to the school. The committee also runs a weekly whist drive, a proportion of the income from which has generated thousands of pounds over the years for school funds.

Local Services:

Obvious links between the school and local service providers, notably Mynydd Mawr hospital and Ty Hafan. The school has embarked on a number of fund raising events in aid of these bodies, and have entertained representatives giving talks and lectures to the children.

Cultural/Spiritual:

The children's involvement in cultural activities was also in evidence. From participating and performing in local church and chapel services, to the more informal carol singing around the village Christmas tree, there is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate the strength of bonds between the school and the wider community.

Staffing:

It would be remiss not to note how many of the schools staff, past and present, are drawn from the village and the extent to which this reinforces the bond between school and community.

Global:

The lesson being observed in Mrs Gwynfor's class was entitled 'what do we know about Wales?' This commenced on a relatively introspective basis, focusing on the local community and Carmarthen as the county town. However, it was interesting to note how the children's own specific cultural and linguistic identity in no way precluded them from viewing themselves as citizens of the wider world, demonstrating the ability show some understanding of wider diversity and difference. This was evidenced in their apparent passion for geography, and their ability to draw parallels between their own lives and that of others. Thus 'what do we know about Wales?' easily and seamlessly progressed to a dialogue between the teacher and the children in relation to the peoples of Patagonia.

## **Conclusions and Acknowledgements**

This report is obviously restricted in its application given that the decision has been made to cease provision at Ysgol Mynyddcerrig. However, it does provide a snapshot of one afternoon at the school in which we as observers were able to witness at first hand the quality of education on offer. On a more personal level as parents and governors, both of the observers were delighted to be able to share in the magic their children have experienced over the last few years, albeit for a brief moment. It has vindicated the position of the overwhelming majority of the governing body that educational provision at Ysgol Mynyddcerrig was educationally valuable, socially reinforcing and therefore, worth defending. It is a position that we in no way regret.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the teaching staff at the school for allowing this visit to take place, and for the welcoming, friendly manner in which both they and the children received us.

M. Dix  
J. Griffiths