



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru  
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Yr Is-bwyllgor Datblygu Gwledig  
The Rural Development Sub-committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 25 Mehefin 2008  
Wednesday, 25 June 2008**

**Cynnwys**  
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Inquiry into Rural School Reorganisation

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,  
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.  
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Alun Davies	Llafur (Cadeirydd yr Is-bwyllgor) Labour (Sub-committee Chair)
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Mick Bates) Welsh Liberal Democrats (substitute for Mick Bates)
Alun Ffred Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Brynle Williams	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Lorraine Barrett	Llafur Labour
Matt Dix	Cyn Riant-lywodraethwr Ysgol Mynyddcerrig ac Is-gadeirydd Fforwm Ysgolion Cynradd Sir Gaerfyrddin Previous Parent Governor of Ysgol Mynyddcerrig and Vice-chair of Carmarthenshire Primary Schools Forum
Ffred Ffransis	Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg

**Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol**  
**Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance**

Joanne Clinton	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Claire Morris	Clerc Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 11.18 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 11.18 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon**  
**Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

- [1] **Alun Davies:** Galwaf y cyfarfod hwn o'r Is-bwyllgor Datblygu Gwledig i drefn. Mae angen i mi wneud y datganiadau arferol. Gobeithio bod pawb wedi diffodd eu ffonau symudol a'u BlackBerrys. Nid ydym yn disgwyl prawf larwm tân y bore yma, felly os oes larwm, bydd rhaid inni adael yr ystafell.
- Alun Davies:** I call this meeting of the Rural Development Sub-committee to order. I will begin with the usual announcements. I hope that everyone has switched off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys. We are not expecting a fire alarm test this morning, so should we hear an alarm, we will need to evacuate the room.

11.18 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Ad-drefnu Ysgolion yng Nghefn Gwlad**  
**Inquiry into Rural School Reorganisation**

- [2] **Alun Davies:** Dyma'r trydydd cyfarfod i drafod dyfodol ysgolion bach yng
- Alun Davies:** This is the third meeting to discuss the future of small schools in rural

Nghymru wledig ac ad-drefnu ysgolion. Yr ydym eisoes wedi trafod hyn gyda sawl mudiad a sefydliad. Y bore yma, byddwn yn treulio rhywfaint o amser yn trafod tystiolaeth Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.

Wales, and school reorganisation. We have already discussed this with several organisations and bodies. This morning, we will spend some time discussing the evidence from Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.

[3] Croesawaf chi i'r cyfarfod y bore yma, Mr Ffransis. Mae Aelodau wedi cael cyfle i ddarllen eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig. A fyddai moddi ichi dreulio rhyw ddwy funud yn nodi eich prif sylwadau? Yna, bydd Aelodau yn gofyn cwestiynau i chi am tua 40 munud. Deallaf fod Mr Dix ar ei ffordd yma hefyd.

I welcome you to the meeting this morning, Mr Ffransis. Members have had an opportunity to read your written evidence. Could you spend a few minutes noting your main points? Members will then ask questions of you for around 40 minutes. I understand that Mr Dix is on his way here too.

[4] **Mr Ffransis:** Diolch am y cyfle hwn. Mae Mr Dix ar ei ffordd—mae mewn cyfarfod yn rhinwedd ei waith sydd o'r pwysigrwydd mwyaf, ond bydd yn cyrraedd yn ystod y cyfarfod i ateb cwestiynau yn benodol ynglŷn â'i dystiolaeth am astudiaeth achos Mynyddcerrig.

**Mr Ffransis:** Thank you for this opportunity. Mr Dix is on his way—he is in a meeting pertaining to his work, which is of the greatest importance, but he will join us during the meeting to answer questions specifically regarding his evidence on the Mynyddcerrig case study.

11.20 a.m.

[5] Yr wyf yn ddiolchgar am y cyfle am fy mod yma'n gwisgo dwy het, mewn ffordd. Yr wyf nid yn unig yn llefaru ar ran Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, yr wyf hefyd yma fel tad i saith plentyn a fu drwy ysgol bentref. Yr wyf wedi bod drwy'r holl emosiynau. Yn ôl yn 1987, llwyddwyd i gadw'r ysgol ar agor, yn groes i'r rhagolygon, a dwy flynedd yn ddiweddarach, aeth nifer y plant yn yr ysgol o naw i 31, sy'n dangos effaith rhoi sicrwydd i ysgol. Fodd bynnag, yn 2002, wedi i'r olaf o'm plant adael yr ysgol, fe'i caewyd, ac yr wyf wedi mynd drwy sawl emosiwn wrth weld yr effaith a gafodd hynny ar y pentref. O fewn chwe mis, gwelais y siop a'r swyddfa bost yn cau, ac er bod pobl canol oed yn cymdeithasu o hyd, yr ydym wedi colli'r plant a'r bobl o'r oedran i fod yn rhieni ifanc. Yr wyf wedi gweld 12 car gwahanol yn mynd â phlant i ysgol arall. Gwelaf chwalfa'r gymuned.

I am grateful for this opportunity as I am, in some respects, wearing two hats today. Not only am I speaking on behalf of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg but I am also here as the father of seven children who have gone through a village school. I have run the gamut of emotions. Back in 1987, the campaign to keep the school open succeeded, contrary to expectations, and two years later, the number of children at that school had gone from nine to 31, which shows the effect that certainty can have. However, in 2002, after the last of our children left the school, it was closed, and I have felt many emotions upon seeing the effect of that on the village. Within six months, I saw the shop and the post office close, and although middle-aged people continue to socialise, we have lost the children and people of the age to be young parents. I have seen 12 different cars taking children to another school. I see the breakdown of a community.

[6] Mae fy nhystiolaeth yn seiliedig ar fy mhrofiadau fy hun o ymgyrchu gyda phobl mewn gwahanol siroedd. Mae'r ddogfen bolisi hon wedi tyfu yn ymateb i'r profiadau.

My evidence is based on my own experiences of campaigning with people in various counties. This policy document has grown in response to those experiences.

[7] Hoffwn rannu â chi yr un gair sy'n crynhoi profiad yr 20 mlynedd diwethaf yn y

I want to share with you the one word that sums up the experience of the past 20 in this

maes hwn: 'rhwystredigaeth'. Rhwystredigaeth ydyw i glywed o hyd mai addysg a lles y plant sydd bennaf ond pan welwn fod mwyafrif yr ysgolion hyn yn llwyddo'n academaidd a bod dim rheswm addysgol dros eu cau, a phan fydd rhywun yn gwyllo'r ffilm am Ysgol Mynyddcerrig ac yn gweld yr effaith drawmatig a gafwyd ar y plant o gau'r ysgol.

[8] Rhwystredigaeth hefyd yw gweld canllawiau adran addysg Llywodraeth y Cynulliad yn cael eu hanwybyddu'n llwyr, heb astudiaeth lawn yn yr un o'r achosion hyn o effaith cau'r ysgol ar addysg y plant, ar y gymuned leol, ac ar y Gymraeg. Mae asesiadau'r awdurdodau sir wedi bod yn wael o ran eu safon, ac eto mae'r awdurdodau wedi cael mynd yn eu blaenau i gau ysgolion.

[9] Mae rhwystredigaeth oherwydd, yn groes i'r canllawiau, ni cheir byth asesiad nac astudiaeth o'r opsiynau eraill. Mewn gwirionedd, mae pawb yn deall mai esgus gwneud y pethau hyn y mae rhywun. Yr oedd rhwystredigaeth hyd at yr wythnos diwethaf gyda phobl yn teimlo nad oedd pwynt mynd drwy'r broses ymgynghori hyd yn oed gan nad oes dim byd byth yn cael ei newid, ac am nad yw apêl byth yn newid dim. Newidiodd hynny yr wythnos diwethaf ac mae hynny'n galonidd mawr i bobl, oherwydd mae pobl yn colli ffydd. Maent yn colli ffydd am eu bod yn colli perchenogaeth ar eu hysgol ac ar ddyfodol addysg eu plant. Maent hefyd yn colli ffydd yn y broses ymgynghori ddemocrataidd, ac mae hynny'n beth peryglus. Felly, rhwystredigaeth sy'n nodweddu hyn oll.

[10] Yn olaf, mae rhwystredigaeth oherwydd bod yr atebion mor amlwg. Mewn ardal wledig a chanddi adnoddau a phoblogaeth brin, rhaid cydlynu gwasanaethau. Rhaid datblygu ysgol gynradd yng nghyd-destun cyffredinol gwasanaethau'r ardal. Mae pawb yn esgus cefnogi hyn, ond mae meddylfryd adrannau'r Llywodraeth yn golygu na all neb gydweithio i gael gwared ar y broblem hon yn gyfannol. Dyna bwysigrwydd yr ymchwiliad hwn. Am y tro cyntaf, dyma bwyllgor nad yw'n bwyllgor addysg a gall edrych ar y darlun cyfan. Felly, diolch ichi am gael dod yma ac

area: 'frustration'. It is frustrating to hear over and again that the education and welfare of children is paramount but to see that most of these schools are succeeding academically and there is no educational reason for closing them, and when you watch the film about Ysgol Mynyddcerrig and see the traumatic effect that the school's closure had on the children.

It is frustrating to see the guidelines of the Assembly Government's education department being completely ignored, with no proper study in any instances of the effect of a school's closure on the children's education, on the local community, or on the Welsh language. Local authorities' assessments have been of a poor quality, and yet they have been allowed to proceed with closure.

It is frustrating because, contrary to the guidelines, no assessment or study of the alternative options is ever carried out. In all honesty, everyone realises that they are just going through the motions. There was frustration up until last week with people feeling that there was no point in bothering with the consultation process as nothing ever seems to change as a result of it, and an appeal never succeeds in changing anything. All that changed last week, which is heartening for people, because people lose heart. They lose heart because they are losing ownership of their school and the future education of their children. They also lose their faith in the democratic process of consultation, which is a dangerous development. Frustration, therefore, is what characterises this.

Last of all, it is frustrating because the answers are so obvious. In a rural area where the resources and the population are so scarce, services must be co-ordinated. The primary school must be developed in the context of overall service provision in the area. People pay lip service to this view, but the mentality of Government departments means that no-one can co-operate to find a holistic solution to this problem. Therein lies the importance of this inquiry. For the first time, this committee is not confined to education and it can look at the complete picture. So, thank you for allowing me to

am eich ymchwiliad. Nid diolch ichi o ran cwrteisi yn unig ydwyf, ond diolch yn bersonol oherwydd fy mhrofiadau ac oherwydd y posibilïad o gael gwardedigaeth a darganfod y ffordd ymlaen. Diolch am bwysigrwydd eich gwaith.

[11] **Alun Davies:** Diolch am hynny. Cyn imi wahodd Alun Ffred i ofyn ei gwestiynau, yr wyf am ofyn cwestiwn. Yr ydych yn dweud yn eich dogfen—ac yr wyf am ddarllen y cyfieithiad Saesneg ohoni—gan ei ailadrodd y bore yma, fod ysgolion bach, yr ysgolion lleiaf, efallai, yn dda iawn o ran addysg plant, gan eu bod yn cynnig yr addysg orau. Dywedwch,

[12] ‘There is a prima facie case for claiming that village schools are very successful educationally’.

[13] Yr ydym wedi clywed tystiolaeth gan Glyn Bramley a David Reynolds nad yw hynny bob tro yn wir, a bod cwestiynau i’w gofyn a yw’r addysg orau i’w chael drwy’r ysgolion lleiaf neu drwy ysgolion sydd ychydig yn fwy. A ydych yn derbyn hynny?

[14] **Mr Ffransis:** Dewisais fy ngeiriau yn ofalus iawn yn fy nghyflwyniad a dweud bod achos prima facie, sef achos i’w ateb, ac yr wyf yn weddol gyfarwydd, dan amgylchiadau eraill, â wynebu achosion llys. Yr achos hwnnw yw mai’r siroedd hynny sydd, at ei gilydd, yn meddu ar y canlyniadau academaidd gorau yw’r siroedd sydd â nifer helaeth o ysgolion gwledig. Yr wyf yn cydnabod bod pob math o resymau am hynny, ac mae’r ffaith bod y gymhareb athro i ddisgybl yn llai mewn ysgolion o’r fath o’r pwys mwyaf. Felly, byddwn yn dweud bod achos prima facie.

[15] Y pwynt yr ydym yn ei wneud yw nad yr agenda addysgol sy’n gyrru’r rhaglen o gau ysgolion, ac nid oes neb hyd yn oed yn honni hynny. Os bydd problem addysgol arbennig mewn ysgol, yr wyf yn barod i gydnabod—a gobeithiaf y bydd hyn yn help i’r pwyllgor—fod y broblem yn fwy os yw’r ysgol yn fach. Er enghraifft, os oes gan ysgol ddau athro, neu ddwy athrawes, ond nid oes arbenigedd chwaraeon na cherddoriaeth gan yr athrawon hynny, mae hynny’n fwy o broblem i ysgol fach nag y byddai i ysgol

appear before you and for your inquiry. I am not thanking you merely out of courtesy; I thank you personally because of my experiences and because of the possibility of finding a solution and a way forward. Thank you for the importance of your work.

**Alun Davies:** Thank you for that. Before I invite Alun Ffred to ask his questions, I want to ask one question. You state in your document—and I will read the English translation of it—and you have repeated this here this morning, that small schools, the smallest schools, perhaps, are excellent for children’s education, as they offer the best education. You say,

We have taken evidence from Glyn Bramley and David Reynolds that that is not always the case and that there are questions to be asked as to whether the best education is delivered through the smallest schools or through slightly larger schools. Do you accept that?

**Mr Ffransis:** I chose my words very carefully in my submission, and I said that there was a prima facie case, namely a case to answer, and I am fairly familiar, in other circumstances, with facing court cases. That case is that those counties that, on the whole, have the best academic results tend to be those that have a substantial number of rural schools. I acknowledge that there are all sorts of reasons for that, and the fact that the teacher-to-pupil ratio is smaller in such schools is of the greatest importance. So, I would say that there is a prima facie case.

The point that we are making is that it is not the educational agenda that is driving the programme of schools closures, and no-one is even claiming that. If there is a specific educational problem in a school, I am willing to acknowledge—and I hope that this helps the committee—that the problem becomes bigger if it is a small school. For example, if a school has two teachers and neither of them can specialise in sport or music, that is a bigger problem for a small school than it is for a large school. That is why we have said

fawr. Dyna pam yr ydym wedi dweud yn ein tystiolaeth nad ydym o'r farn bod y drefn bresennol yn gynaliadwy ychwaith, ond yr hyn sydd ei angen yw rhesymoli cadarnhaol, nid rhesymoli negyddol.

[16] Y ffordd orau o ddatrys y problemau hyn yw drwy sefydlu patrymau gwahanol sy'n gweddu i amgylchiadau lleol, a thrwy gydweithio rhwng ysgolion. Mae hynny'n golygu dod â phlant ysgolion gwahanol at ei gilydd ar gyfer gweithgareddau gwahanol, megis diwrnodau chwaraeon bob hyn a hyn, a bod athrawon sydd ag arbenigedd mewn cylch o ysgolion yn ymweld â holl ysgolion y cylch. Mae ffyrdd creadigol o ddatrys unrhyw broblemau addysgol o'r fath gan roi sicrwydd i blant oedran babanod y byddant yn cael addysg yn y gymuned, mewn adeilad y byddant wedi dod yn gyfarwydd ag ef oherwydd ei fod yn cael ei ddefnyddio at bwrpas meithrinfeydd a digwyddiadau cymunedol hefyd. Felly, mae modd cael y gorau o'r ddau fyd drwy resymoli yn gadarnhaol.

[17] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I ddychwelyd at y dechrau, yn eich diffiniad yr ydych yn sôn am 'ysgol bentrefol Gymraeg'.

[18] **Mr Ffransis:** Derbyniaf fod diffiniadau weithiau yn gallu bod o help ond weithiau yn rhwystr. Y gwirionedd yw bod rhaid, yn ôl y broses statudol, edrych ar bob ysgol yn ôl ei haeddiant a'i hamgylchiadau ei hun. Felly, mae categorïau yn gallu bod yn anodd. Fodd bynnag, at bwrpas creu rheoliadau, mae angen diffiniadau.

[19] Mae dwy ran i'ch cwestiwn, sef beth yw 'ysgol bentref' a beth yw 'ysgol bentref Gymraeg'. At bwrpas y rheoliadau, y diffiniad a ddefnyddir o 'ysgol bentref'—a dyna sydd o dan y chwyddwydr ar y funud—yw ysgol sydd â llai na 90 o blant mewn dosbarthiadau oedran cymysg ac sydd mewn ardal wledig. Mewn 'ysgol bentref Gymraeg', y Gymraeg yw prif gyfrwng yr addysg.

[20] Yr ydym yn dadlau mai dyna sydd fwyaf llwyddiannus. Er ein bod yn derbyn bod y Gymraeg yn gyfrwng yr addysg a geir mewn nifer o ysgolion mwy o faint, mae disgyblion yn fwy tebygol o fagu agweddau

in our evidence that we also do not believe that the current system is sustainable either, but that what we need is positive rationalisation, not negative rationalisation.

The best way to solve these problems is by finding different patterns to fit local circumstances, and by getting schools to co-operate. That means bringing children from different schools together to undertake different activities, such as sports days every now and then, and teachers who have a certain specialism within a catchment area could visit all the different schools in that catchment. There are creative ways of solving any such educational problems, which also give a reassurance to children of infant-school age that they will get their education in the community, hopefully in a building that they have become familiar with, because it is also used for nursery schools and for other community events. So, it is possible to have the best of both worlds using positive rationalisation.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** To return to the beginning, in your definition you talk about a 'Welsh village school'.

**Mr Ffransis:** I accept that definitions can sometimes be of assistance and sometimes a barrier. The truth is that, according to the statutory process, each school must be looked at in light of its own achievements and its own circumstances. So, categories can be difficult. However, for the purposes of creating regulations, you need definitions.

There are two parts to the question, namely what constitutes a 'village school' and a 'Welsh-medium village school'. For the purposes of the regulations, the definition used for a small village school—which is under the microscope at the moment—is a school with fewer than 90 children in mixed-age classes that is in a rural area. In a 'Welsh-medium village school', Welsh is the main medium for education.

We are arguing that that is the most successful model. While we accept that Welsh is also the medium of education in bigger schools, pupils are more likely to adopt favourable attitudes towards the Welsh

ffafrïol at y Gymraeg mewn ysgol sy'n perthyn i'w cymuned a phan fyddant ymhlith y cyfeillion y maent yn eu gweld y tu allan i'r ysgol. Byddant wedyn yn gweld yr iaith yn gyfrwng cyfathrebu cymunedol ac nid yn gyfrwng cyfathrebu academaidd yn unig.

[21] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Felly, nid ydych yn diffinio hynny fel ysgol ar gyfer plant o gartrefi Cymraeg.

[22] **Mr Ffransis:** Na, dim o gwbl.

11.30 a.m.

[23] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Felly, mae'n iawn cyhyd â bod ysgol arall i lawr y lôn yn cynnig yr un peth. Mewn sawl sir, mae'r ysgolion i gyd o'r un categori, er nad yw hynny'n wir am bob sir. Felly, mewn gwirionedd, ni fyddai gwahaniaeth o ran ansawdd yr addysg a ddarperir yn y ddwy ysgol.

[24] **Mr Ffransis:** Yr wyf yn anghytuno â hynny. Credaf fod rhaid ystyried ansawdd addysg o ran meini prawf ehangach na dim ond canlyniadau academaidd. Credaf fod cefnogaeth gymunedol ac ymwneud rhieni ag ysgolion yn feini prawf addysgol o bwys.

[25] O ran yr effaith ar y Gymraeg, gobeithio y cewch gyfle i groesholi Matt Dix ynghylch astudiaeth achos ysgol Mynyddcerrig. Yr oedd y mwyafrif enfawr o ddisgyblion yr ysgol yn dod o gartrefi di-Gymraeg ond yr oeddent yn cael eu tynnu i mewn i weithgareddau cymunedol Cymraeg ac maent yn awr yn ystyried y Gymraeg yn brif gyfrwng cyfathrebu oherwydd eu profiad o fynychu'r ysgol. Pe baent wedi cael eu trosglwyddo i Ysgol Gynradd Pontyberem, byddent wedi cysylltu'r Gymraeg â'u profiad addysgol yn unig, yn hytrach na chyda'u profiad cymunedol.

[26] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A oes unrhyw dystiolaeth bod gan blant sy'n cael addysg mewn ysgolion bach Cymraeg ymagwedd wahanol i'r plant sy'n mynychu ysgolion Cymraeg mwy?

[27] **Mr Ffransis:** Mae'n ddrwg gennyf; mae'n siŵr nad wyf yn esbonio'r pwynt yn ddigon clir. I ddefnyddio'r enghraifft honno,

language in a school that belongs to their community and when they are among the friends whom they see outside school. They will then see the language as a community communication medium, not just an academic communication medium.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** So, you are not defining this as a school for children from Welsh-speaking homes.

**Mr Ffransis:** No, not at all.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** So, it is okay as long as another school down the road offers the same thing. In several counties, the schools are in the same category, although that is not true of all counties. Therefore, in reality, there would be no difference in the quality of the education provided at both schools.

**Mr Ffransis:** I disagree with that. I believe that the quality of education must be judged according to broader criteria than just academic results. I believe that community support and parent involvement in schools are important educational criteria.

On the effect on the Welsh language, I hope that you will have an opportunity to cross-examine Matt Dix about the case study involving Mynyddcerrig school. The vast majority of the schoolchildren came from non-Welsh-speaking backgrounds but they were drawn into Welsh-language community activities and they now consider Welsh to be their main medium of communication because of their experience of attending the school. Had they been transferred to Pontyberem Primary School, they would have associated the Welsh language with their educational experience only, rather than with their community experience.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** Is there any evidence that children who are taught in small Welsh-medium schools have a different attitude to those who attend larger Welsh-medium schools?

**Ms Ffransis:** I am sorry; I am probably not explaining the point very clearly. To use that example, Pontyberem school is a large school



mae ysgol Pontyberem yn ysgol fawr gyda 200 o blant, ac yr wyf yn siŵr bod profiad y plant sy'n mynychu ysgol Pontyberem yr un mor gyfoethog â phrofiad y sawl sy'n mynychu'r ysgol lai ym Mynyddcerrig. Fodd bynnag, mae problem o ran trosglwyddo plant o'u cymunedau ac i ffwrdd o'u cydnabod i ysgol arall. Dyna'r plant yr effeithir ar eu hymagwedd, gan eu bod yn cysylltu'r Gymraeg nid â'u cymuned a'r hyn sy'n digwydd ar y stryd ond â'r ysgol.

of 200 pupils, and I am sure that the pupils who attend Pontyberem school have as rich an experience as those who attend the smaller school at Mynyddcerrig. However, there is a problem with transferring children from their communities and away from their peers to another school. Those are the children whose attitude is affected, because they associate the Welsh language not with their community and what is happening on the street but with the school.

[28] Mae un pwynt o ran maint ysgolion sy'n arbennig o bwysig, a dyma un o fanteision dosbarthiadau oedran cymysg. Pan fydd brawd a chwaer, neu ddau frawd, yn mynychu'r un ysgol, fel sy'n digwydd yn aml, os ydynt yn yr un dosbarth oherwydd dim ond dau ddsbarth sydd yn yr ysgol a dim ond dwy flynedd sydd rhyngddynt, maent yn dechrau arfer siarad Cymraeg gyda'i gilydd, sy'n bwysig iawn. Gallwn gyflwyno tystiolaeth ar ffurf affidafid ar hyn, a gall Matt dystio bod hyn yn wir o ran ei blant ef, ac mae hyn yn wir mewn cymunedau ledled Cymru hefyd. Wrth gwrs, cytunaf yn llwyr y dylai fod llawer mwy o ymchwil. Mae'n warthus bod bwriad i symud ymlaen a gwneud newidiadau mor sylfaenol heb fod mwy o ymchwil yn cael ei wneud.

There is one very important point when it comes to school sizes, and this is one of the advantages of mixed-age classes. When you have a brother and sister, or two brothers, attending the same school, as is often the case, if they are in the same class because there are only two classes in the school and there is only a two-year age gap between them, they begin to get used to speaking Welsh with each other, which is vital. We can present evidence in the form of affidavits, and Matt can testify that this is true of his children, and it is true in communities throughout Wales. Of course, I completely agree that there should be more research. It is disgraceful that there is an intention to move forward to make such fundamental changes without more research being undertaken.

[29] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr ydych wedi honni—ac ni wn beth yw'r dystiolaeth—fod symud plant o un gymuned i'r llall yn ddrwg i'w datblygiad haddysgol. A fydech yn cytuno felly bod symud plant o un ardal i ardal arall hefyd yn ddrwg i'w datblygiad haddysgol hwy yn gyffredinol?

**Alun Ffred Jones:** You have claimed—and I do not know the evidence for this—that moving children from one community to another is bad for their educational development. Would you agree that moving children from one area to another is also bad for their educational development, generally?

[30] **Mr Ffransis:** Byddwn yn cytuno'n llwyr â hynny. Credaf y bu'r holl syniadaeth addysgol a ddaeth o Lundain yn ystod blynyddoedd y Prif Weinidog Thatcher yn ddinistriol iawn i addysg yn gyffredinol, sef y syniad o ryddid ffug, o symud pobl o gwmpas ac o drin ysgolion fel archfarchnadoedd y gellir dewis rhyngddynt. Byddai'n well o lawer pe bai pawb yn gweithio tuag at sicrhau bod ganddynt yr ysgolion cymunedol gorau posibl. Er mwyn gwireddu hynny, rhaid sicrhau bod yr holl gyfleusterau, megis meithrinfeydd, ar gael mewn ysgolion.

**Mr Ffransis:** I would agree completely with that. I believe that the whole educational ideology that emanated from London during the years of Prime Minister Thatcher was greatly detrimental to education in general, namely the idea of false freedom, of moving people around and of treating schools as though they were supermarkets that you could choose between. It would be far better if people worked towards ensuring that they had the best possible community schools. In order to realise that, we must ensure that all the facilities, such as nurseries, are available in schools.

[31] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Felly, byddech yn

**Alun Ffred Jones:** Therefore, you would

condemnio'r rhieni hynny sy'n symud eu plant o un dalgylch ysgol i ddalgylch arall.

[32] **Mr Ffransis:** Nid fy lle i yw condemnio a mynegi barn am bobl; fy lle i yw creu cyfundrefnau sy'n helpu pobl i wneud y penderfyniadau gorau. Os gallwn sicrhau ein bod yn edrych, fel y gobeithiaf y byddwch yn ei wneud, ar ysgolion pentref mewn cyd-destun cymunedol ehangach fel eu bod yn cynnig amrywiaeth o wasanaethau, credaf y bydd yn haws i rieni ddod i'r casgliadau yr wyf fi a chithau yn gobeithio y byddant yn eu cyrraedd.

[33] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr ydych wedi haeru bod symud plant allan o'u cymunedau i gael addysg mewn cymuned arall yn ddrwg i'w datblygiad. Dyna a ddywedasoeh; mae hynny'n gywir, onid yw?

[34] **Mr Ffransis:** Yr hyn a ddywedais yw bod gennym broblem gyffredinol yng ngwledydd Prydain am fod addysg yn cael ei thrin fel rhyw arallfyd cyfochrog, fel rhywbeth ar wahân i fywyd. Byddai'n well o lawer, yn addysgol, pe bai addysg yn rhan o'r gymuned, pe bai llawer mwy o bobl o'r gymuned yn mynd i ysgolion, a phe bai ysgolion yn astudio materion yn ymwneud â'r gymuned leol. Mae cryfhau'r cyswllt hwnnw yn bwysig a dylai gwleidyddion wneud popeth posibl i hybu hynny. Mae hynny'n wahanol i farnu neu ddod i farn gyhoeddus ar benderfyniadau rhieni unigol o fewn cyfundrefn ffaeledig. Nid wyf yn fodlon mynd ar hyd y trywydd hwnnw.

[35] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Gadewch y condemnio, felly, ond gwnaethoch achos cryf iawn, o ran Mynyddcerrig, bod symud y plant hynny i ysgol arall—sut bynnag yr ydych yn ei ddiffinio—yn gwneud cam â nhw o ran eu datblygiad addysgol neu eu datblygiad personol. Yr hyn yr wyf yn ei ofyn, felly, yw a yw'r gwrthwyneb yn wir. A ydych yn teimlo bod plant sy'n cael eu symud i mewn i ysgolion, weithiau i ysgolion bach, yn cael cam am eu bod yn cael eu symud allan o'u cymunedau?

[36] **Mr Ffransis:** A gaf ateb mewn dwy frawddeg syml? Yn gyntaf, ac yr wyf yn falch o weld bod Matt wedi cyrraedd, nid

condemn those parents who move their children from one catchment area to another.

**Mr Ffransis:** It is not my place to condemn or to state my opinion of people; my place is to create regimes that help people to make the best decisions. If we can ensure that we look, as I hope you will, at village schools in a wider community context so that they offer a greater variety of services, I think that it will be easier for parents to reach the conclusions that you and I hope that they will come to.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** You have alleged that moving children from their communities to be educated in another community is bad for their development. That is what you said; that is correct, is it not?

**Mr Ffransis:** What I said was that we have a problem in general in the nations of Britain in that education is treated as some sort of parallel universe, as something that is separate to life. It would be much better, educationally, if education was part of the community, if many more people from the community went into schools, and if schools studied issues appertaining to the local community. Strengthening that link is important and politicians should do everything possible to promote that. That is totally different to judging, or coming to a public view on, the decisions of individual parents within a failed system. I am not willing to go down that route.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** Leave aside the condemnation, therefore, but you made a very strong case, in relation to Mynyddcerrig, that moving those children to another school—however you define it—had a detrimental effect on them in terms of their educational or personal development. Therefore, I am asking whether the opposite is true. Do you feel that children who are moved in to schools, sometimes to small schools, are detrimentally affected because they have been moved out of their communities?

**Mr Ffransis:** May I answer with two simple sentences? First, and I am pleased to see that Matt has arrived, that is not exactly what I

dyna'n union a ddywedais ynglŷn ag achos Mynyddcerrig. Dywedais y byddai eu symud i ysgol arall yn cael effaith ar eu hagweddu tuag at y Gymraeg, ond, fel mae'n digwydd, yr oedd y sefyllfa'n llawer gwaeth na hynny. Unwaith yr ydych yn colli ysgol eich union gymuned, er mwyn cyfleustra, ac am fod rhieni'n ceisio gwneud eu gorau dros eu plant, mae'r plant hynny'n cael eu chwalu i bob cyfeiriad, ac mae'r rhieni'n eu dilyn hefyd. Mae'r holl deimlad o gymuned ymhlith y plant a'r rhieni'n cael ei chwalu. Gan mai honno oedd y gymuned Gymraeg yn y pentref, mae'n niweidiol iawn i'r plant, i'r Gymraeg ac i'r gymuned.

[37] O ran symud plant i'r cyfeiriad arall, yr hyn yr wyf am ei ddweud—mae'n ddrwg gennyf fy mod yn ailadrodd fy hun—yw fy mod yn credu y byddai'n well pe baem yn gallu creu cyfundrefnau yn seiliedig ar gydweithio yn hytrach na chystadleuaeth, lle gallai pawb gydweithio tuag at sicrhau dyfodol ein hysgolion a'n cymunedau, a bod yr ysgolion hynny'r gorau y gallent fod a bod y plant yn mynychu'r ysgolion hynny. Dyna fyddai'r drefn fwyaf naturiol a'r drefn orau. Ein gwaith ni i gyd yw sicrhau trefn sy'n galluogi rhieni i wneud penderfyniadau o'r fath. Dan y drefn ffaledig bresennol, nid wyf am feirniadu penderfyniadau personol.

[38] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr wyf am ofyn un cwestiwn arall ynglŷn â beth sy'n gymuned a beth nad yw'n gymuned. Mae nifer o enghreifftiau bellach ar hyd a lled Cymru o'r hyn a elwir yn ysgol ardal. Yr ydych chi, i bob pwrpas, yn condemnio'r datblygiadau hynny, lle caewyd ysgolion llai. Yr wyf yn meddwl am Ffridd y Llyn ym Meirionnydd a Phentre Uchaf yn Llŷn, ac mae Llangernyw wedi'i sefydlu ers y 1970au. Hyd y gwyddoch, a oes unrhyw dystiolaeth—cymeraf eich bod wedi edrych ar enghreifftiau tebyg—bod plant a rhieni yn llai hapus neu'n anfodlon a bod y broses wedi cael effaith ar y pentrefi lle caewyd ysgolion?

[39] **Mr Ffransis:** Cewch fwy o oleuni ar y mater hwn yn ystod eich ymweliad â sir Benfro yr wythnos nesaf. Byddwch yn gallu holi'r union bobl yn hytrach na derbyn gwybodaeth ail-law gennyf i. Mae'r unig wybodaeth llaw cyntaf y gallaf ei rhoi yn

said about the case of Mynyddcerrig. I said that moving them to another school would have an impact on their attitudes towards the Welsh language, but, as it happens, the situation was much worse than that. Once you lose the school within your immediate community, for convenience's sake, and because parents want to do what is best for their children, those children are scattered in all directions, and their parents follow them too. The whole community feeling among the children and their parents is lost. As that was the Welsh community in the village, that is very detrimental to the children, to the Welsh language and to the community.

As regards moving children in the other direction, what I want to say—I am sorry that I am repeating myself—is that I believe that it would be better if we were able to create systems based on collaboration rather than competition, where everyone could collaborate to ensure the future of our schools and communities, and that those schools were the best that they could be and that the children attended those schools. That would be the natural order and the best system. Our task is to provide a system that enables parents to take such decisions. Under the current failed system, I do not want to criticise personal choices.

**Alun Ffred Jones:** I will ask one more question about what constitutes a community and what does not. There are now many examples across Wales of what is called an area school. To all extents and purposes, you are condemning those developments, where smaller schools were closed. I am thinking of Ffridd y Llyn in Meirionnydd and Pentre Uchaf on the Llŷn peninsula, and the school that was established in Llangernyw in the 1970s. As far as you are aware, is there any evidence—I take it that you have looked at similar examples—that children and parents are less happy or are dissatisfied, or that the process has affected the villages where schools were closed?

**Mr Ffransis:** More light will be shed on this matter during your visit to Pembrokeshire next week, when you will be able to ask the people involved rather than take second-hand information from me. The only first-hand information that I can give concerns my own

ymwneud â'm hardal fy hun. Mae'r gymuned o blant yn Llanfihangel-ar-Arth wedi chwalu'n llwyr wrth i'r plant gael eu hanfon i wahanol gyfeiriadau; nid oes cymuned yn eu plith, mae hynny'n sicr. Mae'n rhy gynnar i fesur canlyniadau academaidd, ond mae'n sicr o gael effaith, byddai rhywun yn tybio, ar addysg y plant, gan nad oes ganddynt yr un gefnogaeth gymunedol.

[40] O ran eich union gwestiwn am yr effaith ar y gymuned, genhedlaeth yn ôl, yr oedd pob math o gyfundrefnau yn cynnal cymunedau gwledig, fel ffermwyr ifanc, llwythi o bobl yn gweithio ar y tir, capeli a phob math o sefydliadau. Ond, erbyn hyn, mae ein holl gymunedau pentrefol dan warchae, dan ymosodiad o bob cyfeiriad. Felly, yn y sefyllfa bresennol, mae'n llawer pwysicach nag yr oedd genhedlaeth yn ôl, pan welwyd newidiadau yn Llangernyw a'r ardal honno. Mae'n llawer pwysicach yn awr bod gan y gymuned bentrefol adnodd cryf i sicrhau adferiad.

11.40 a.m.

[41] Byddwn yn eich gwahodd i ystyried, er enghraifft, faint o oedolion ifanc o bentref fel Pandy Tudur, sef un o'r pentrefi sydd yn bwydo ysgol yr ardal honno, sy'n prynu tŷ yno. Mae'r mwyafrif ohonynt yn dewis prynu neu adeiladu tŷ yn Llangernyw, lle mae'r ysgol ardal, yn hytrach nag yn y pentrefi eraill. Nid yw'r pentrefi hyn yn marw dros nos; mae'n ddedfryd ohiriedig o farwolaeth ar y pentrefi.

[42] **Alun Davies:** Cyn imi ddod â Brynle mewn, croesawaf Mr Dix i'r cyfarfod. Mr Dix, mae Mr Ffransis wedi gwneud sylwadau agoriadol, ac yr ydym yn holi cwestiynau yn seiliedig ar hynny ac ar y dystiolaeth ysgrifenedig sydd wedi'i rhoi inni. Teimlwch yn rhydd i gyfrannu i'r atebion.

[43] **Brynle Williams:** Yr ydych wedi cyffwrdd â rhywbeth yr wyf fi yn ei ystyried yn bwysig ofnadwy o ran ysgolion pentrefi bach. Oni fydddech yn cytuno mai'r rheswm nad yw pobl ifanc yn dod yn ôl i fyw yn y pentrefi hyn yw nad oes tai fforddiadwy ar gael iddynt, yn hytrach nag o achos yr ysgolion? Sut y bydddech yn datrys y broblem honno? Ai mater i ni, i'r cyngor sir neu i

area. The community of children in Llanfihangel-ar-Arth has been completely shattered as the children have been sent in all directions; there is certainly no community among them. It is too early to measure academic results, but it is certain to have an impact on the children's education, one would assume, because they are not receiving the same community support.

On your question about the impact on the community, if you go back a generation, there were many systems that sustained rural communities, such as young farmers, the many people who worked the land, chapels and all sorts of organisations. However, all our village communities are now under siege, under attack from all directions. Therefore, in the current climate it is much more important than it was a generation ago, when changes took place in the Llangernyw area. It is much more important now that the village community has a strong resource to ensure regeneration.

I would invite you to consider, for example, how many young adults from a village such as Pandy Tudur, which is one of the villages feeding that area school, buying a house there. The vast majority choose to buy or build a house in Llangernyw, where the area school is located, rather than in the other villages. These villages do not die overnight; it is a suspended death sentence for them.

**Alun Davies:** Before I bring Brynle in, I welcome Mr Dix to the meeting. Mr Dix, Mr Ffransis has made some opening remarks, and we are asking questions based on that and on the evidence presented to us. Please feel free to contribute to the answers.

**Brynle Williams:** You have touched on something that I consider as being very important in terms of small village schools. Would you not agree that the reason why young people do not return to live in these villages is that there is no affordable housing available, rather than because of the schools? How would you solve that problem? Is it a matter for us, for the county council or for

rywun arall yw hynny?

[44] **Mr Ffransis:** Mae hynny'n mynd at galon y mater. Beth yw'r cyfieithiad am sefyllfa iâr ac wy? Mae'r broblem yn mynd mewn cylch: nid oes digon o blant ar gyfer ysgolion oherwydd dirywiad mewn cymunedau o ran cyflogaeth, trafndiaeth gyhoeddus a diffyg tai, ond, unwaith eich bod yn tynnu'r ysgol o'r pentref, mae llai o bobl am ymgartrefu yno ac yn defnyddio'r gwasanaethau beth bynnag. Mae'n rhaid inni gael atebion cyfannol i'r broblem hon.

[45] Yr wyf yn gobeithio y gall eich ymchwiliad i ysgolion pentref fod yn wir flaengar. Yr wyf yn gobeithio y gall ysgolion gyfrannu at y math o atebion y byddwch yn pwyntio atynt o ran datblygu cymunedol, a gall yr atebion hynny fod yn bwysig hefyd i ardaloedd tra gwahanol o Gymru—i'r Cymoedd ac ardaloedd fel yr ardal lle cefais i fy magu. Cefais i fy magu ar stâd tai cyngor yn y Rhyl. Fel mae'n digwydd, nid oedd ysgol gynradd ar y stâd, a chafwyd pob math o broblemau cymunedol. Gallem ddefnyddio'r un math o atebion ar gyfer ardaloedd trefol. Yn hytrach na meddwl o hyd ac o hyd am ganoli ar safleoedd anferth, gallem feddwl am gael ysgolion trefol aml safle, lle byddai hynny'n ymarferol—byddai'n amrywio o gymuned i gymuned. Byddai rhoi safle ym mhob cymdogaeth yn ffordd o sicrhau cydlynw cymunedol ac ymdeimlad o berthyn i'r gymuned ymhlith y plant, a byddai meithrinfeydd a gwasanaethau eraill yno. Gobeithio y gallwn gael rhywbeth cyffrous iawn i Gymru gyfan o'r ymchwiliad hwn i ysgolion pentref.

[46] **Brynle Williams:** Your evidence clearly states that you support a presumption for maintaining Welsh-language community schools. Will you outline why you consider such schools to be more beneficial to rural communities?

[47] **Mr Ffransis:** Mae linc at ein gwefan yn y dystiolaeth. Un ymchwiliad sydd wedi'i wneud, a hwnnw gan Gymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg yn sir Gaerfyrddin i effaith gwireddu cynlluniau'r cyngor sir i gau hyd at 40 o ysgolion pentrefol Cymraeg. Unwaith eich bod yn tynnu'r ysgol bentrefol Gymraeg o bentref yn sir Gaerfyrddin—mae hyn hefyd yn wir am siroedd megis Conwy, Ceredigion, Dinbych a Phowys, er fy mod yn cydnabod

someone else?

**Mr Ffransis:** That goes to the heart of the matter. What is the Welsh translation for a chicken and egg scenario? It is a cyclical problem: there are not enough children for schools because of deterioration in communities in terms of employment, public transport and a lack of housing, but, once you remove the school, fewer people want to settle and use the services in those villages anyway. We must have holistic solutions to this problem.

I hope that your inquiry into village schools can be truly innovative. I hope that schools can contribute to the kind of solutions that you will point to for community development, and those answers can also be important for very different parts of Wales—for the Valleys and areas such as that in which I grew up, for example. I was brought up on a council estate in Rhyl. As it happens, there was no primary school on our estate, and there were all sorts of community problems. We could implement the same kinds of solutions in urban areas. Rather than constantly thinking about centralising on huge sites, we could think about having multi-site urban schools, where practical—it will vary from community to community. Having a site in each neighbourhood would be a way of ensuring community cohesion and a feeling of belonging to the community among the children, and there would be nurseries and other services there. I hope that we can get something very exciting for the whole of Wales from this inquiry into village schools.

**Mr Ffransis:** There is a link to our website in the evidence. There has only been one inquiry, by Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg in Carmarthenshire into the impact of the implementation of the county council's plans to close up to 40 Welsh-medium village schools. Once you take the Welsh-medium school out of a village in Carmarthenshire—this is also true of counties such as Conwy, Ceredigion, Denbighshire and Powys,

nad yw yr un mor wir am y rhan fwyaf o Wynedd—mae'r rhieni sydd wedi symud i'r ardal yn gorfod gwneud penderfyniad ymwybodol am ble i anfon eu plant. Mae'n bosibl y byddant, yn naturiol, heb feddwl, os ydynt yn dod o gefndir di-Gymraeg, yn chwilio am ysgol Saesneg ei chyfrwng a mynd â'u plant gyda nhw i'r dref lle maent yn gweithio.

although I recognise that it is not as true for most of Gwynedd—the parents who have moved into the area have to make a conscious decision as to where they send their children. It is possible that they will, naturally, without thinking, if they come from a non-Welsh-speaking background, look for an English-medium school and take their children to the town where they work.

[48] Bu inni gyfrif y gallai 500 o blant gael eu colli i addysg Gymraeg yn sir Gaerfyrddin drwy gau ysgolion pentref. Nid oedd y cyngor sir wedi gwneud unrhyw asesiad o'r fath. Mae'n warthus bod y materion hyn yn bwrw ymlaen heb unrhyw asesiad o'r math hwn. Felly, mae'n bwysig am y rheswm hwnnw o golli plant i addysg Gymraeg, a hefyd o ran gweld addysg Gymraeg fel rhan o wead cymunedol Cymraeg a bod plant yn cysylltu'r Gymraeg â'r gymuned, nid yn unig â chyfrwng yr addysg.

We worked out that 500 children could be lost to Welsh-medium education in Carmarthenshire if village schools were closed. The county council had made no such assessment. It is disgraceful that these matters are going on without such assessments being carried out. Therefore, it is important for that reason of losing children from Welsh-medium education, and also in terms of seeing Welsh as part of the fabric of the community and for children to link the Welsh language with the community, and not just with the medium of their education.

[49] **Lorraine Barrett:** I have a few questions on Assembly Government guidance. In your evidence, you criticise the application of the guidance on school closures by local authorities. Can you say something about the merits of a wider focus for the intended audience of the guidance and whether the guidance could be issued in conjunction with other Ministers, maybe the Minister with responsibility for communities or the Minister for Rural Affairs?

[50] **Mr Ffransis:** Mae hwnnw yn awgrym gwerthfawr ofnadwy. I fod yn deg—

**Mr Ffransis:** That is an extremely valuable suggestion. To be fair—

[51] **Lorraine Barrett:** I was just asking for your view on that.

[52] **Mr Ffransis:** Yr wyf yn meddwl fod hynny yn bwysig, ond yr hyn yr oeddwn yn mynd i'w ddweud oedd fy mod yn credu bod hynny, i fod yn deg, yn y canllawiau presennol. Hynny yw, dylai awdurdodau lleol ymgynghori â'r gymuned ehangach ond nid ydynt yn gwneud hynny. Nid oes llawer yn bod ar y canllawiau eu hunain, ond, hyd yr wythnos diwethaf, beth bynnag, nid oedd adran addysg Llywodraeth y Cynulliad erioed wedi mynnu bod awdurdodau lleol yn cadw at y canllawiau. Mae hon yn enghraifft dda. Yr hyn sydd yn digwydd ym mhob cyfnod o ymgynghori statudol yw bod yr awdurdod yn trefnu cyfarfodydd am 4 p.m. gyda staff yr ysgol, am 5 p.m. gyda'r llywodraethwyr, ac am 6 p.m. gyda'r rhieni; mae'r gymuned ehangach yn cael ei chau allan. Wedi tair awr, mae cynrychiolwyr yr awdurdod wedi gorffen eu gwaith. Nid wyf yn gwybod a

**Mr Ffransis:** I think that that is important, but what I was going to say was that, to be fair, I believe that that is included in the current guidelines. That is, local authorities should consult with the wider community, but they never do so. There is not much wrong with the guidance as it stands, but, up to last week, at least, the Assembly Government's education department had never insisted that local authorities stuck to that guidance. This is a good example. What always happens in a period of statutory consultation is that the authority organises a 4 p.m. meeting with school staff, a 5 p.m. meeting with governors, and a 6 p.m. meeting with parents; the wider community is excluded. In three hours, authority representatives have completed their work. I do not know whether you would like to hear Matt's response to the question of wider

hoffech glywed ymateb Matt, sydd newydd fod drwy'r broses hon, i'r cwestiwn am ymgynghori â'r gymuned ehangach. community consultation, as someone who has just been through that process.

[53] **Mr Dix:** The consultation with the wider community in Mynyddcerrig in Carmarthenshire was constrained to an opportunity to write a letter. When we had the meetings that Ffred just referred to, as a parent, I was afforded an hour to make my objections, but the wider community was deliberately excluded from those meetings, irrespective of some of the strong connections that members of the wider community had with the school. I am thinking specifically of one gentleman who attended the school, as had his children and grandchildren, and now his great-grandchildren were pupils there. I would assert, respectfully, that his voice should have been heard in the consultation process, but he was excluded. Various references were made at a later point by the authority to his opportunity to write a letter. I would suggest that that is simply not good enough. Some people's ability to write, particularly in English, is constrained, and the community did not have adequate representation or consultation on the closure plans.

[54] **Lorraine Barrett:** Do you think that an all-Wales document, such as the existing guidance, can deal with the particular circumstances of rural schools?

[55] **Mr Ffransis:** Mae hwnnw'n gwestiwn diddorol ac yn un, mae'n rhaid imi gyfaddef, nad wyf wedi rhoi unrhyw sylw iddo. Yr wyf wedi dod yma i ddysgu yn gymaint ag i roi tystiolaeth. Nid wyf yn siŵr a ddylai fod canllawiau gwahanol i ysgolion gwledig. Yr wyf yn tueddu i feddwl bod gwersi y gallwn eu dysgu am sut i drin ysgolion gwledig, oherwydd mewn ardal bentrefol, gyda phoblogaeth denau, mae'n rhaid cael diwylliant o gydweithio ac o gydlynw gwasanaethau, ond gallai hynny fod yn addas hefyd ar gyfer ardaloedd eraill o Gymru; efallai y byddai'n gwrthweithio rhywfaint ar y diwylliant cystadleuaeth sydd wedi bod yn ein system addysg ers yr 1980au.

**Mr Ffransis:** That is an interesting question and one, I must admit, to which I have given no consideration. I have come here to learn as much as to give evidence. I am not certain whether there should be different guidance for rural schools. I tend to think that there are lessons that we can learn as regards how to treat rural schools, because in village locations, with a sparse population, you must have a culture of collaboration and of co-ordinating services, but that could be appropriate for other parts of Wales; it could, perhaps, mitigate a little of the culture of competition that has been in our education system since the 1980s.

11.50 a.m.

[56] Felly, nid wyf yn hollol sicr, ond mae'n bwynt diddorol i'w ystyried ac yr wyf yn falch o weld eich bod yn ystyried cwestiynau blaengar o'r fath.

Therefore, I am not totally sure, but it is an interesting point to consider and I am pleased to see that you are considering such innovative questions.

[57] **Michael German:** One issue in small schools, of course, is mixed-age classes, to which you referred earlier. In terms of education, which is what matters, could you both tell us what are the educational advantages of mixed-age classes?

[58] **Mr Ffransis:** Yr ydym yma er mwyn cyflwyno safbwynt, ond os ydym i gyd yn hollol onest, mae dwy ochr i bob ceiniog. Wrth gwrs, bydd rhai addysgwyr yn dweud bod rhywfaint o fanteision mewn dysgu dosbarth cyfan o un oedran yn unig. Nid oes angen treulio amser ar y pwynt hwnnw, gan

**Mr Ffransis:** We are here to put forward a point of view, but if we are all totally honest, there are two sides to every coin. Of course, some educationists will say that there are some advantages in teaching a whole class of the same age. There is no need to spend too much time on that point, because the

fod y manteision yn weddol amlwg. Fodd bynnag, nid yw'r dadleuon i gyd ar yr un ochr. Yn fy marn i, un o'r manteision yw mentora—nid yw hynny wedi cael sylw yn yr asesiadau ac adroddiadau a wnaed—lle mae plant hŷn sydd wedi bod drwy'r broses addysgu yn mentora plant iau. Mae hynny'n fwy naturiol yn y gymuned tu allan i'r ysgol, lle nad yw plant yn cymysgu gyda phlant o'r un oedran yn unig. Mae hefyd yn bwysig o ran magu agweddau cyfrifol yn gymunedol. Yn union fel ag y mae cael merched a bechgyn yn yr un dosbarth yn beth da, mae cael rhai o wahanol oedrannau yn yr un dosbarth hefyd yn beth da.

advantages of that are self-evident. However, not all the arguments are on the same side. In my view, one of the advantages is mentoring—that has not been mentioned in the assessments and reports that were undertaken—where older children who have been through the education process mentor younger children. That is more natural in the community outside the school, where children do not only mix with those of the same age. It is also important in terms of nurturing responsible community attitudes. Just as it is a good thing to have girls and boys in the same class, having those of different ages in one class is also a good thing.

[59] Ar yr anfoneision—er enghraifft, nid oes digon o blant o'r un oedran i ffurfio tîm pêl-droed neu i gymysgu o ran pethau eraill mwy arbenigol—yr ydym yn dadlau bod modd goresgyn yr anfoneision hynny, nad ydym yn eu gwadu, drwy ddulliau mwy cadarnhaol o ddod ag ysgolion at ei gilydd i gydweithio. Ni wn a yw Matt eisiau ychwanegu at hynny.

On the disadvantages—for example, not enough children of the same age to form a football team or to mix in more specialised activities—we argue that it is possible to overcome those disadvantages, which we do not deny, through more positive means of bringing schools together to co-operate. I do not know whether Matt wants to add to that.

[60] **Mr Dix:** I can only speak for Mynyddcerrig, because that is the sole basis of my experience. I acknowledge that teaching a class of 30 children with mixed age ranges would be challenging. That was not the situation in Mynyddcerrig, where both classes had fewer than 10 children, which allowed time for the teacher to give of themselves to the different ages in the class at the time. On Ffred's point about there not being enough children of the same age and the difficulties in forming football teams and so on, I would suggest that that represents an ideal opportunity for the use of IT and for children to video-conference with other schools. In my view, and certainly in the experience of Mynyddcerrig—I have witnessed this first hand on many occasions—the presence of IT in the classroom allowed the children to network outside their school and gave them a wonderful sense of perspective in terms of community, on the micro level, and the world beyond that community, on the macro level. Much of the criticism levelled at small schools and the lack of opportunity therein can be overcome by the innovative use of IT facilities.

[61] **Michael German:** I will come in a minute to how best small schools could co-operate, but if you have very small schools, then you will have one class with children aged from five to 11 in it, whereas the school that you described had two classes, presumably one for younger children and the other for older children.

[62] **Mr Dix:** Yes.

[63] **Michael German:** Is there a boundary line for having mixed-age classes? Is it inappropriate to have five and 11-year-olds in the same class or do you think that that is manageable with appropriate teaching?

[64] **Mr Dix:** Again, I would have to refer to Mynyddcerrig. I have not seen examples of schools in which there were classes that included children aged between five and 11. So, it remains quite a difficult example to comment on. However, in my view, the question is what



defines a small school and at what point does it no longer remain a credible institution. I have struggled, personally, to reach an answer to that question. On a subjective level, I can tell you about my school, and why I felt that it was a credible educational and community unit. However, in all the guidance that I have read and among all the people to whom I have spoken, there does not seem to be any kind of universally accepted definition of what constitutes a small school.

[65] **Michael German:** This is your chance to have a stab at it.

[66] **Mr Dix:** Again, in terms of Mynyddcerrig, it was credible to have two classes, teaching infants and juniors. I observed no detrimental effects, in terms of my children's education, of their being in mixed-age ranges, and indeed mixed-ability ranges.

[67] **Michael German:** What was the total school size?

[68] **Mr Dix:** Sixteen pupils.

[69] **Mr Ffransis:** Ar y pwynt hwnnw, os ydych eisiau darllen mwy, ymhlith yr atodiadau mae adroddiad olaf y llywodraethwyr ar Ysgol Mynyddcerrig. Yr oedd Matt yn un o'r llywodraethwyr ddau fis cyn cau'r ysgol, a bydd mwy o ddeunydd i chi yn y fan honno.

**Mr Ffransis:** On that point, if you would like some further reading material, in the appendices there is the final governors' report on Ysgol Mynyddcerrig. Matt was one of the governors two months prior to the closure of the school, and there will be further material for you there.

[70] A gaf gyfeirio eich sylw at enghraifft ddiddorol, a fydd efallai yn ein harwain at y pwyntiau yr oedd Mike eisiau cyfeirio atynt o ran dulliau o gydweithio rhwng ysgolion? Hoffwn sôn am astudiaeth achos Ysgol Carreg Hirfaen yn sir Gaerfyrddin. Yr oedd gennym sefyllfa yn niwedd y 1990au lle yr oedd dau bentref—Llan-y-crwys a Ffarmers—a dim ond milltir rhyngddynt, â naw o blant mewn un ysgol, ac 19 yn yr ysgol arall; bedair milltir i ffwrdd yr oedd ysgol Cwmann. Sefydlwyd ffederasiwn o'r tair ysgol. I ddangos sut mae modd bod yn greadigol a defnyddio dychymyg a gweddu i anghenion lleol wrth greu ffederasiwn, yr hyn a ddigwyddodd oedd fod Cwmann yn cynnal dosbarthiadau drwy'r gwahanol oedrannau, ond yn y ddau bentref bach a oedd yn agos at ei gilydd, cronwyd y plant ynghyd, a chael cyfnod allweddol 1 o'r ddau bentref ar un safle, a chyfnod allweddol 2 ar safle arall. Amrywiwyd amser dechrau a gorffen y diwrnod hefyd, o 10 munud, fel bod rhieni yn gallu gollwng plant mewn un ysgol, ac wedyn mynd i'r llall, a'r un peth ar ddiwedd y dydd.

May I draw your attention to an interesting example, which will perhaps lead us on to the points that Mike wanted to refer to regarding collaboration methods between schools? I wish to refer to the case study of Ysgol Carreg Hirfaen in Carmarthenshire. We had a situation at the end of the 1990s where two villages—Llan-y-crwys and Ffarmers—with only a mile between them, had nine children in one school, and 19 in the other; four miles away we had Cwmann school. A federation was formed of the three schools. To show how it is possible to be creative and imaginative and to fit in with the local need in creating a federation, what happened was that Cwmann held classes for all the various age ranges, but in the two small villages close to each other, they brought the children together and formed a key stage 1 class from both villages on one site, and a key stage 2 class on the other. They also staggered the start and finish times by 10 minutes so that parents could drop off children in one school, and then go to the next, and the same at the end of the day.

[71] Mae hynny'n dangos sut mae modd, gydag ewyllys da, fel yr oedd yn sir Gaerfyrddin ar y pryd, ymateb i anghenion a

That demonstrates that it is possible, with goodwill, as existed in Carmarthenshire at the time, to respond to local needs and situations,

sefyllfaoedd lleol, a chreu atebion sy'n gweddu i'r gymuned leol. O ganlyniad, tyfodd yr ysgol ffederal honno o 82 o blant ddiwedd y 1990au i tua 125 o blant heddiw. Nid oes yn rhaid i mi ddweud wrthyhych beth sy'n digwydd yn sir Gaerfyrddin ar hyn o bryd—gallwch ddyfalu: mae'r cyngor sir yn ceisio cael gwared ar y ffederasiwn a chanoli popeth, fel y mae'n ei wneud ym mhob achos, drwy gael ateb *one-size-fits-all* mewn un ysgol ardal.

[72] Mae hynny'n drueni ofnadwy. Yr wyf yn dod yn ôl at y gair a ddefnyddiais ar y dechrau, sef 'rhwystredigaeth'. Lle mae gennych, fel sydd yn yr ardaloedd hyn, rieni sy'n gwirioneddol bryderu am ddyfodol addysg eu plant, eu hysgolion, a'u cymunedau, mae angen i wleidyddion canolog a lleol weithio gyda phobl felly, yn hytrach na rhoi slap yn eu hwynebau. Mae Ysgol Carreg Hirfaen yn enghraifft dda o hynny.

[73] **Michael German:** There is a range of federal and co-operative models that we could use; we have just heard about one, and you have mentioned some more. Do you believe that we make full enough use of these models, and do you believe that Wales has had experience of all the range of models that we could possibly have to bring schools together in these federal or co-operative ways?

[74] **Mr Ffransis:** A bod yn deg, mae adran addysg y Cynulliad yn gweithio ar ganllawiau newydd ar hyn o bryd. Mae gwrthwynebiad mewn rhai mannau yng Nghymru—yng Ngwynedd yn benodol—i greu ffederasiynau. Mae cymdeithas yr iaith yn cydnabod, fel ag y mae gwleidyddion canolog a lleol, bod ceidwadaeth naturiol mewn nifer o gymunedau gwledig. Yn aml, mae pobl eisiau cadw pethau fel ag y maent, nes eu bod yn anghynaliadwy a bod popeth yn torri lawr, a'i bod yn rhy hwyr. Yr ydym yn cydnabod bod angen rhesymoli, cyn belled â bod hynny'n cael ei wneud yn gadarnhaol.

12.00 p.m.

[75] Gyda'r sefyllfa bresennol o ran ysgolion ffederal, mae llawer o fodolau posibl. Y gwendid yng Ngwynedd oedd bod y cyngor sir wedi ceisio gorfodi un model arbennig o ffederasiwn ar bob man. Gallwch, er enghraifft, gael safle canolog ag ysgolion ategol, neu ddatblygiad cyfalaf i gyd ar un

and create solutions to suit the community. As a result, that federal school grew from 82 children at the end of the 1990s to 125 children today. I do not need to tell you what is happening in Carmarthenshire at the moment—you can guess: the county council is trying to get rid of that federation, and trying to centralise everything, as it does in every case, with a one-size-fits-all solution, in one area school.

That is a dreadful pity. I come back to the word that I used initially—'frustration'. Where you have, as in these areas, parents who are truly worried about the future of their children's education, their schools, and their communities, central and local politicians need to work with these people, rather than slapping them across the face. Ysgol Carreg Hirfaen is a good example of that.

**Mr Ffransis:** To be fair, the Assembly's education department is currently working on new guidelines. There is opposition in some parts of Wales—particularly in Gwynedd—to creating federations. Cymdeithas yr iaith acknowledges, as do central and local politicians, that there is a natural conservatism in a number of rural communities. Often, people want to keep things exactly as they are, until they become unsustainable and everything breaks down, and it is too late. We recognise that rationalisation is needed, as long as that is done positively.

With the current situation in terms of federated schools, there are a number of possible models. The weakness in Gwynedd was that the county council had tried to impose a single model of federation on all areas. You can, for example, have a central site with satellite schools, or a capital

safle canolog. Mae pob math o fodelau. Ar hyn o bryd, fodd bynnag, mae'n rhaid mynd drwy broses statudol o gau ysgolion unigol er mwyn ail-agor ysgol ffederal. Unwaith eich bod yn gwneud hynny, nid oes rhaid mynd drwy broses statudol i gau safle ffederasiwn. Fe'i gwelwyd, yng Ngwynedd yn arbennig, fel dull cyfrwys o gau ysgolion: mynd drwy'r broses, creu ffederasiynau, ac yna wasgu ar y gyllideb nes gorfodi llywodraethwyr i gau'r ysgolion.

development on one central site. There are all kinds of models. Currently, however, you have to go through a statutory process of closing individual schools in order to reopen a federated school. Once you do that, you do not have to go through the same statutory process to close a federated site. This was perceived, principally in Gwynedd, to be a sneaky way of closing schools: go through the process, create federations, and then squeeze the budget until the governors are obliged to close the schools.

[76] Felly, mae o fudd i bawb erbyn hyn—yr ydym ni, Cyngor Gwynedd ac adran addysg Llywodraeth y Cynulliad yn meddwl ei fod yn beth da—ein bod yn llunio ystod ehangach o bosibiliadau, lle mae modd cael clystyrau strwythuredig gydag ysgolion yn cadw'u hannibyniaeth a'r sicrwydd statudol na ellid eu cau ar chwarae bach, fel nad yw rhieni mor ofnus o'r broses, ond yn rhannu, er enghraifft, brifathro, corff llywodraethu neu gyllideb. Yr ydym i gyd yn edrych ymlaen at weld y posibiladau newydd, ac mae'n bwysig bod ystod eang o bosibiliadau yn cael eu cyflwyno, ac yna yn cael eu trafod ym mhob cymuned.

So, it is now of benefit to all—we think that it is a good thing, as does Gwynedd Council and the Assembly Government's education department—that we draw up a wider range of possibilities, allowing for structured clusters in which schools could keep their independence and have the statutory certainty that they could not be closed without consultation, so that parents are not as apprehensive of the process, but share a headteacher, a governing body or a budget. We all look forward to seeing the new possibilities emerging, and it is important to have a wide range of possibilities that communities can discuss.

[77] **Alun Davies:** Gwelaf fod Aelodau yn awyddus i ddod i mewn, ond mae'r Cyfarfod Llawn yn cychwyn mewn 30 munud. Yr wyf yn awyddus i ddod â'r sesiwn hon i ben, ond mae gennyf un cwestiwn olaf ichi. Yr ydych wedi sôn y bore yma ac yn eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig am effaith cau ysgol ar gymuned leol ac ar sefyllfa'r iaith yn y gymuned honno. Sut fydddech chi'n mynd ati i fesur yr effaith honno ar yr iaith ac ar y gymuned?

**Alun Davies:** I see that Members are eager to come in, but Plenary starts in 30 minutes. I am keen to bring this session to a close, but I have one final question to you. You have mentioned this morning and in your written evidence the impact that a school closure can have on a local community and its language. How would you go about measuring that impact on the language and on the community?

[78] **Mr Ffransis:** A gaf ateb mewn dwy frawddeg, ac yna roi'r cyfle i Matt siarad am ei brofiad o'r effaith ar ei gymuned ef?

**Mr Ffransis:** May I answer in two sentences, and then give Matt the opportunity to talk about his experience of the impact on his community?

[79] Symboleiddiaeth yn unig yw'r canllawiau presennol o ofyn i gynghorau lleol fesur effaith cau ysgol ar gymuned a'i hiaith, neu hyd yn oed ar addysg, heb fod yr adran addysg yn cynnig methodoleg i gynghorau lleol fesur y pethau hyn. Un o'r argymhellion pwysicaf y gallech ei wneud yw y dylid creu methodoleg i fesur yr effaith.

It is merely tokenism for the current guidelines to require local councils to measure the impact of a school closure on a community and its language, or even on education, without the education department offering a methodology for local councils to use to do so. One of the most important recommendations that you could make is that there should be a methodology for measuring the impact.

[80] O ran yr effaith ar gymuned, cewch gyfle i weld hynny yn sir Benfro. Gall Matt adrodd are ei brofiad ynglŷn â'r effaith ar y gymuned leol ac ar yr iaith ym Mynyddcerrig. With regard to the impact on a community, you will have the opportunity to see it in Pembrokeshire. Matt can give his experience of the impact on the local community and the language in Mynyddcerrig.

[81] **Mr Dix:** The impact of the closure on Mynyddcerrig has been multidimensional in character, and you perhaps need to break it down into smaller segments to understand it, while simultaneously acknowledging the relationship between the different segments.

[82] As a newcomer to Wales, and referring to your point about the price of local property being one of the primary factors, I think that the two are linked, certainly for me. Part of the reason for moving to a rural community in Wales was that we were starting a family and that we had previous experiences of small Welsh rural communities. My wife and I chose specifically to bring our children up in a small community because of the kinds of values that they espouse. That was instrumental in our decision to move to Mynyddcerrig.

[83] The impact on the community is significant at the moment, and it is likely to become more so in the future, especially with regard to the notion of community identity. For successive generations in Mynyddcerrig, children have grown up together, with strong links to the local community—teachers live in the same village, as do dinner ladies and ancillary staff—and there was not much distinction between language, community and social networks generally, as things overlapped to a great extent.

[84] Now, contrary to the wishes of the authority, children go to different schools—each of the 16 children have spread out and they go to a number of different schools. They no longer retain any kind of social contact, which is unfortunate. My own children go to a school that is several miles away—we take them there every morning. It is a reasonable school and I have no overt criticism of it, other than my fear that Welsh is increasingly being seen as the language of the classroom rather than the language of the community. I have personally observed—I can only speak for my own children—a decline in the extent to which they use Welsh among themselves at home, and I attribute this to the fact that they are not seeing their friends any more. It would be a mistake to dismiss this as a case of childhood friends moving on and finding other interests and other social networks, which, after all, is a normal part of development. This is something separate and is quite artificial.

[85] The impact of the school closure has also adversely affected a number of other community institutions, which is detailed in my written evidence, so I will not reiterate it.

[86] To conclude, Dostoyevsky said that the measure of any civilisation could be ascertained by looking at the way in which it treated prisoners. To twist that a little, I would suggest that the mark of any democracy can be gauged by the way in which it treats minorities. Mynyddcerrig is undoubtedly a very small village, and no Government will fall as a result of our dissent. Ultimately, policy-makers have carte blanche to trample over us, if they so choose. One of the more disturbing elements that I have found in trying to raise support for a campaign to save the village school is the extent to which people felt disillusioned that the legitimate channels open to them were very much restricted. They were not prepared to engage in the defence of the school. The sentence that I heard uttered over and over again was, 'We always expected this when we were being ruled from London, but we did not expect it from devolution'. I would respectfully suggest that the impact of school closures has undermined people's confidence in local democracy.

[87] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Er gwybodaeth— **Alun Ffred Jones:** For information—I do

nid wyf yn gweld y ffeithiau yn eich not see the facts in your evidence—how  
tystiolaeth—faint o blant ysgol Mynyddcerrig many of the Mynyddcerrig pupils came from  
a oedd yn dod o gartrefi lle mai'r Gymraeg homes where Welsh was the first language?  
oedd iaith y cartref?

[88] **Mr Dix:** I could give two responses to that. In the official documentation, when parents responded to that question, they invariably wrote that they were English-speaking families. However, I know from personal experience that this is not the case; it is more of a reflection of their lack of confidence in what they consider to be 'proper' Welsh that they would rather describe themselves as English-speaking. That belies the fact that Welsh is used. The majority of children come from Welsh-speaking homes in Mynyddcerrig, but for reasons that are complex, they feel too intimidated to describe themselves as Welsh speakers, because they felt that their Welsh was not good enough.

[89] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Intimidated by whom?

[90] **Mr Dix:** By the culture in general, such as the Welsh media. Most of these people find watching S4C a struggle, because of the colloquial nature of the Welsh that is used.

[91] **Alun Ffred Jones:** You say that most of them spoke Welsh but said that they did not.

[92] **Mr Dix:** Yes. They would rather be seen as an English-speaking household because they lacked confidence—

[93] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Do they speak Welsh to the children?

[94] **Mr Dix:** Yes. The difference between the situation of the majority and my situation as an incomer needs to be emphasised in that regard. My experiences are perhaps more unique, inasmuch as we are incomers and relied upon the village school for the process of assimilation in our community.

[95] **Alun Davies:** Diolch yn fawr a diolch i chi am eich dystiolaeth y bore yma—yr ydym yn ei werthfawrogi'n fawr. Bydd trawsgrifiad ar gael i chi yn ystod yr wythnos nesaf. **Alun Davies:** Thank you and thank you for your evidence this morning—we very much appreciate it. A transcript will be made available to you in the coming week.

[96] Cynhelir cyfarfod nesaf yr is-bwyllgor ddydd Mercher nesaf, 2 Gorffennaf. The next meeting of the sub-committee will be held next Wednesday, 2 July.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.09 p.m.*

*The meeting ended at 12.09 p.m.*