

## **Submission to accompany the Petition to the National Assembly: Save our Small Schools from closure**

As I am not part of a campaign group on this issue and nor I am affiliated with any union or other research body, my submission is merely some serious questions and doubts I have in my mind over the ongoing swathes of small schools being closed across Wales and whether the National Assembly is meeting the needs of the people of Wales by allowing, possibly even encouraging councils to make these closures by its adoption of certain policies and definitions. Therefore, this submission is neither information nor facts and figures but a summary of areas I would like the committee reviewing the petition to consider, and when considering the petition to ask themselves if sufficient rigour has been applied to these two main areas of concern when the National Assembly has formed any relevant policy and guidance.

I have two main areas of concern.

1. School closure and child welfare
2. Prioritisation of capital expenditure over revenue in maintaining education provision and how this meets the National Assembly's stated aim of ensuring sustainable development.

### **1. School closure and child welfare**

This is my biggest concern. I have witnessed first hand two small schools in neighbouring communities close.

I am concerned that school closures are being carried out illegally or at least without recourse to natural justice. In both school closures near me, the consultation period was shockingly brief and at no point were children in the schools to be closed consulted nor were the children (or parents) in the schools expected to take in the additional pupils.

No research has apparently been done on how children are affected by having a school closed, particularly schools where there has been a close community tie for generations.

There has been no research I can find that has taken a rounded and whole child view of how children fare both academically and emotionally in a smaller school compared to a larger school and what from a child's perspective is the most appropriate size for a school.

I would like to know how the National Assembly is monitoring the effect on children as young as four of being put onto buses and into taxis for long journeys at the start and end of each day and how their safety and welfare needs are being met. These journeys can mean they leave their houses as early as 8.00 am and not be home before 4.30 pm, an additional 2 hours on their day. These buses and taxis of children also have the little known affect of hindering children being able to cement friendships and visit each other freely at the end of the school day as the parents can't respond and agree plans easily with one another.

Has the National Assembly evaluated the impact of rural small school closures on low-income families and those without access to private transport to: participate in and make and maintain new friendships at new schools and to participate fully in school life, including the ability of their parents to socialise and to attend parents evenings and other events intended to ensure their child/ren's welfare.

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Has any study or welfare analysis been carried out into the disruptive influence of having a 'moved into' school increase by as much as a third or double to accommodate new pupils and how this has the potential to remove resources from existing pupils.

Finally, I would like to know what the National Assembly is doing to meet the welfare needs of my child and other children across Wales when the most important place outside the home is subject to the massive upheaval caused by a small school closure and if the Children's Commissioner for Wales has been invited to investigate and speak out on their behalf in these closures.

## **2. Capital vs. revenue expenditure on education and the National Assembly's commitment to Sustainable Development**

It is my understanding that the National Assembly was bound by its own charter / rules upon formation to act in a way that would promote and be in line with sustainable development. In my mind this includes ensuring the effective use of resources and considering the longer-term impact of policies.

I therefore question the wisdom of committing to new build of schools and the channelling of funding into new buildings when there are buildings with stored energy in the fabric of the building. I have a similar concern that the new buildings are made from unproven materials and are reliant on permanent space heating and cooling rather than the imbedded heat and air circulation found in older buildings.

I am concerned that not enough research has been done into how the moving and closing of school has on the transport choices of people and if these shift those affected and future generations into less sustainable and more polluting forms of transport when travelling to school (i.e. no longer being within walking distance of their schools). This move towards moving increasing numbers of children around the area does not seem to have taken into account the potential impacts on climate change nor the associated increase in revenue costs to tax payers as fuel prices rise.

The National Assembly does not seem to have taken enough care to take into account all the costs of closing a school. I have seen no attempts to quantify how school closures impact on these small, close knit communities with limited opportunities to meet and socialise, places where the elderly often look to the school as a way of staying in touch and making cross generational ties, where schools act as places for work experience for local teenagers, parent and toddler groups, out of term play spaces, positive examples of the living Welsh Language, small local charity fund and awareness raisers, child protection officers and social service providers. Who is going to pick up that a single mum is struggling now, if the teachers and other parents rarely see them? When making a judgement on how to spend money, have these less tangible benefits been considered?

I wonder when agreeing on using the definition of a school as small as found in the Audit Commissions, enough emphasis was given to the nature of communities across Wales and not just those found in the southern towns and cities. In this acceptance of the Audit Commissions definition of a small school, which does not reflect the geographic majority of Wales, the National Assembly seems to have failed in its obligation to meet the needs of all its citizens fairly and those considering the petition should ask if the guidance going to educational authorities is correct or if a moratorium on school closures should be put into effect until it can be demonstrated that child welfare is not being put at risk.