

Leighton Andrews AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-376
Ein cyf/Our ref LA/05504/12

William Powell AM

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

Dear William,

21 March 2012

Thank you for your letter of 12 March about a petition received from Sarah Wheeler of Powys.

I believe that the concerns about 6th form provision at Builth Wells High School have arisen because of 2 separate but related consultation exercises recently conducted by Powys. On 29 November 2011 the local authority issued, for consultation, plans for secondary schools and sixth forms which were based on an expectation that schools would be retained but that they would collaborate to raise standards. The plans also suggested that commissioning arrangements would be put in place to coordinate provision and that 2 secondary schools, one of which was Builth Wells High, would become designated Welsh medium post-16 providers. This consultation was followed by a wider consultation on the local authority's Welsh Education Strategic Plan, and this exercise was completed in mid February. This plan reflected the earlier suggestion that Builth Wells High would provide Welsh medium education at post-16. I understand that the local authority does not plan to make this change in the very near future, but that change by 2015 is under consideration.

The inclusion of this target for Builth Wells High in the strategic plan does not render the change inevitable, and there is no specific mechanism for the plan to be called in at present. The Welsh Education Strategic Plan has in any case been submitted to Welsh Ministers and will be scrutinised by the Welsh Language Unit in my department and feedback on its content will be provided to the local authority before Easter.

Under current legislation, even if a regulated change forms part of a plan such as a Welsh Education Strategic Plan, it would still be necessary to undertake statutory procedures under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The change from dual stream provision to Welsh-only provision would be a regulated change at the sixth form at Builth Wells School. The statutory procedures include consultation on proposals and the publication of notices with the opportunity for objection. Such proposals currently come to me for determination where objections arise. When I am required to determine proposals to make changes to schools, I take account of all relevant factors, including the views of objectors, before deciding whether or not to approve them.

I hope that this explanation provides some reassurance that appropriate mechanisms are in place when changes to schools are under consideration. I will ensure that when the local authority is provided with feedback on its Welsh Education Strategic Plan, they are reminded that statutory procedures would be necessary for a number of the changes contained within the plan, including that in view for Builth Wells High School.

Yours sincerely



Leighton Andrews AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills