

# Transforming Education in Powys: A vision for Powys schools

## An analysis and response

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In this paper, we will aim to assess and analyse the documents which form the new “vision for Powys schools” and where appropriate will provide data to support our response. We have taken into consideration all the documents since the Engagement Document alone provides rather more vision than plan, and lacks sufficient detail with which to engage.

### **“A deep scepticism” [page 9, *Case for Change*]**

Estyn in July 2019 identified a clear pattern of failure to take hard decisions or robust action by local councillors and the education services department.

Estyn identified that:

“self-evaluation processes and improvement planning are weak... There are many areas of the authority’s work causing significant concern such as those relating to school organisation, financial management.”

“The quality of reports presented by officers to scrutiny varies, and the lack of candid reporting has meant elected members are generally unsighted to the gravity of issues and their implications. Often, reports lack sufficient detail to provide scrutiny with confidence that necessary actions are being taken. However, the quality of reports presented by officers to scrutiny varies, and the lack of candid reporting has meant elected members are generally unsighted to the gravity of issues and their implications. Often, reports lack sufficient detail to provide scrutiny with confidence that necessary actions are being taken.”

“Over many years, elected members have been reluctant to take robust enough action on a number of important issues, such as around the provision for post-16 education and on secondary school reorganisation.” [ESTYN: A report on Powys County Council July 2019]

As the current Powys engagement documents state:

“Engagement with schools’ staff ... has revealed a deep scepticism amongst the profession regarding the council’s political commitment to schools and to the delivery of the improvements that are needed.”

We were therefore reassured that a clearer understanding of the issues which impact Powys schools and in particular their funding is shown throughout the relevant documents. Data presented is clear, though unfortunately only for one year thus failing to show year on year trends. The conference was clearly challenging for all participants.

## **“Lack of candid reporting” [ESTYN, July 2019]**

We remain sceptical however that this understanding of the issues is permeating its way into current council decision-making.

*Example: Brecon High School and Ysgol Bro Hyddgen*

It was recently stated by PCC chief executive, Dr Caroline Turner that: “The capital programme continues and we have plans that have been agreed in recent years that continue under the 21st Centuries. The schools in Welshpool and Bro Hyddgen (Machynlleth) will continue, they won’t be affected.” [*Powys County Times*, Feb 3rd 2020]

Powys is building schools for much larger numbers of students than are ever forecast to attend. An example is the recently opened new build at Brecon High School.

Building capacity: 750 students  
Current size of student body: less than 450 students  
Surplus places: in excess of 300  
Occupancy rate: 59%

We therefore query the wisdom of building a school for 620 students in Machynlleth when the current population of that school is 387 students, and there have not been more than 600 students in primary and secondary education in Machynlleth in any given year for nearly 20 years.

2002-2003 combined students Machynlleth C.P. School and Ysgol Bro Ddyfi: 558  
2012-13: 552  
2015-16 First full year Ysgol Bro Hyddgen: 542  
2016-17: 496  
2017-18: 478  
2018-19: 470  
2019-20: 387

[All data from StatsWales website generated from Powys Section 52 statements]

We are concerned that, in reports of discussions in council meetings, the actual numbers of students attending these schools rarely, if ever, appear.

QUESTIONS: How candid are officers being with councillors about the reality on the ground? What are council estimates for the number of surplus places in Brecon and Machynlleth in the future, and what is the council’s assessment of the associated financial impact on the sustainability of Powys schools?

## **“Not a popular opinion but needed” [page 16, *Engagement Report*]**

While it is clear that all stakeholders who took part in the Schools Conference are aware of the many problems that face Powys, it is less clear that those same stakeholders are able to face clearly needed solutions. Many suggestions for improvement are woolly: “ensure learners have a fantastic world class education in Powys”, “schools to provide much more than just education”. Others are not credible given the poor financial situation for the county’s education services. Indeed the “What do we Need to do?” pages read in many ways like wishlists, which require substantial additional funding to be realistic—bring back nursery provision, reinstate ALN support services, new computers etc. School closures and reorganisation were clearly discussed but reluctantly and not with unanimous recognition of the need.

**“providing for less variation in the costs of educating each pupil across schools” [page 6, Engagement Document]**

Every local authority funding formula is an exercise in redistribution of funds and it should be based on a prescribed system of weighting in accordance with Welsh Government regulations (free school meal rates, ALN, age, language medium.)

Money coming into the authority is based on factors of scarcity and social deprivation and therefore Powys receives one of the highest per pupil funding rates in Wales. Money is also based on pupil numbers, so Powys’ share of the Welsh budget will decline, as its share of the school population declines.

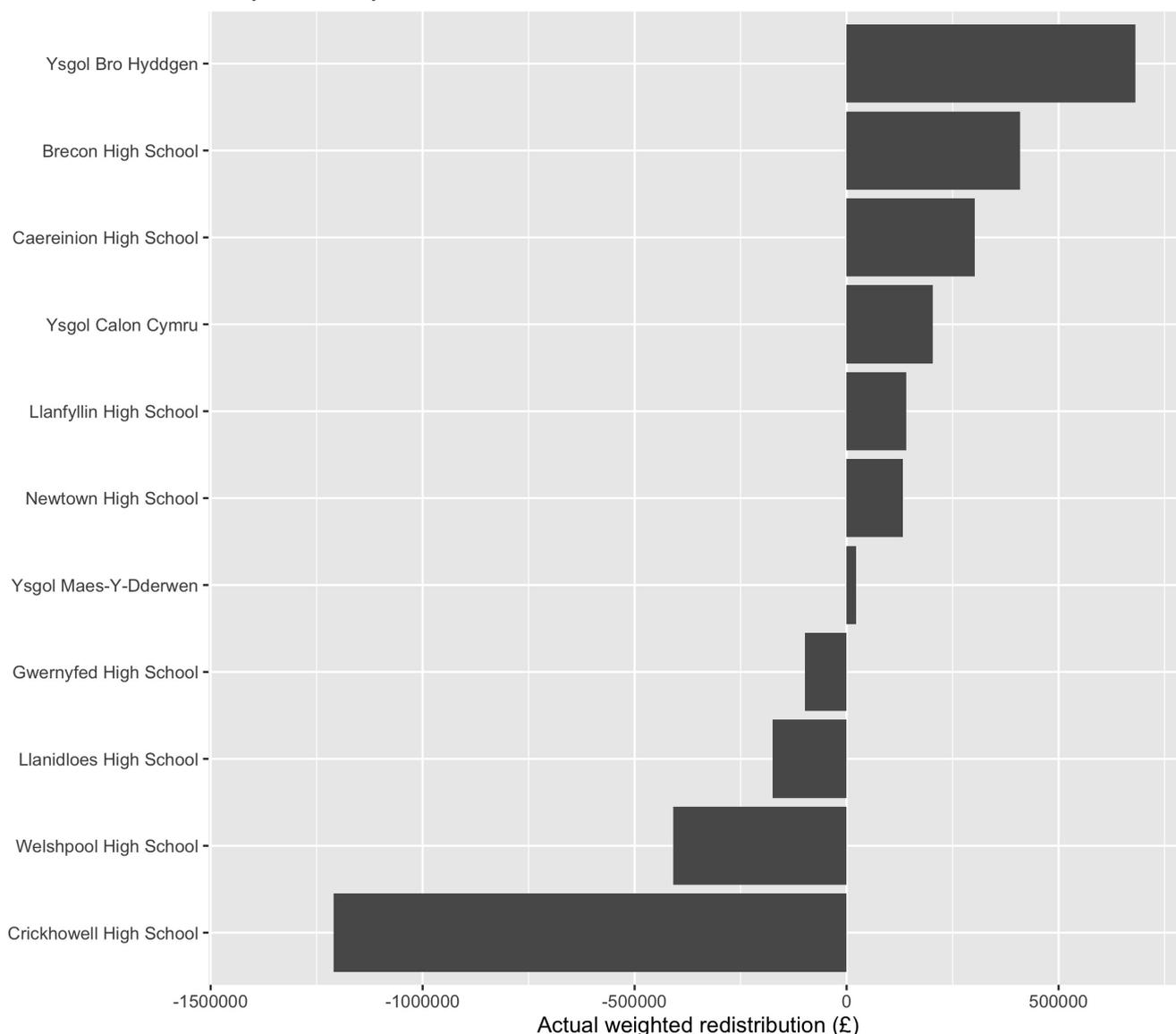
In essence there is a limited sum available each year, and there will be winners and losers, based on decisions made by the local authority within its funding formula.

By comparing the difference between a school’s share of Powys’ total pupil numbers and its share of the total delegated school budget for those schools, we can determine how the redistribution works, and to what degree.

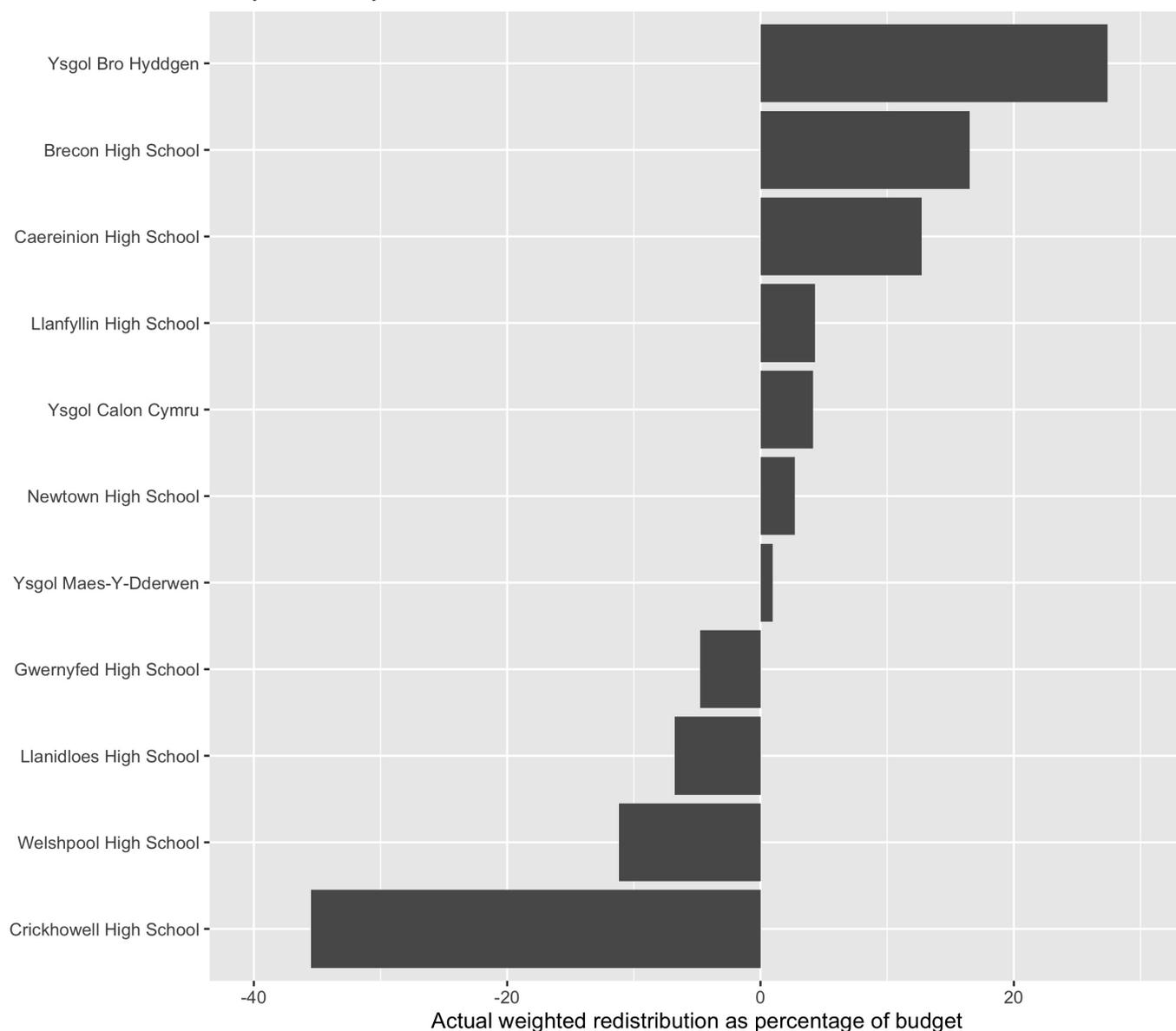
Our analysis of secondary school funding shows us that Powys has the greatest levels of redistribution of funds compared with all other local authorities in Wales. In other words, schools in Powys receive much more or much less than they would in other LAs—the differences are more extreme in Powys than in any other local authority.

The following two bar charts show the differences.

Actual weighted redistribution of funding based on Powys formula (2019-20)  
Powys secondary schools



Actual weighted redistribution of funding based on Powys formula (2019-20)  
Powys secondary schools



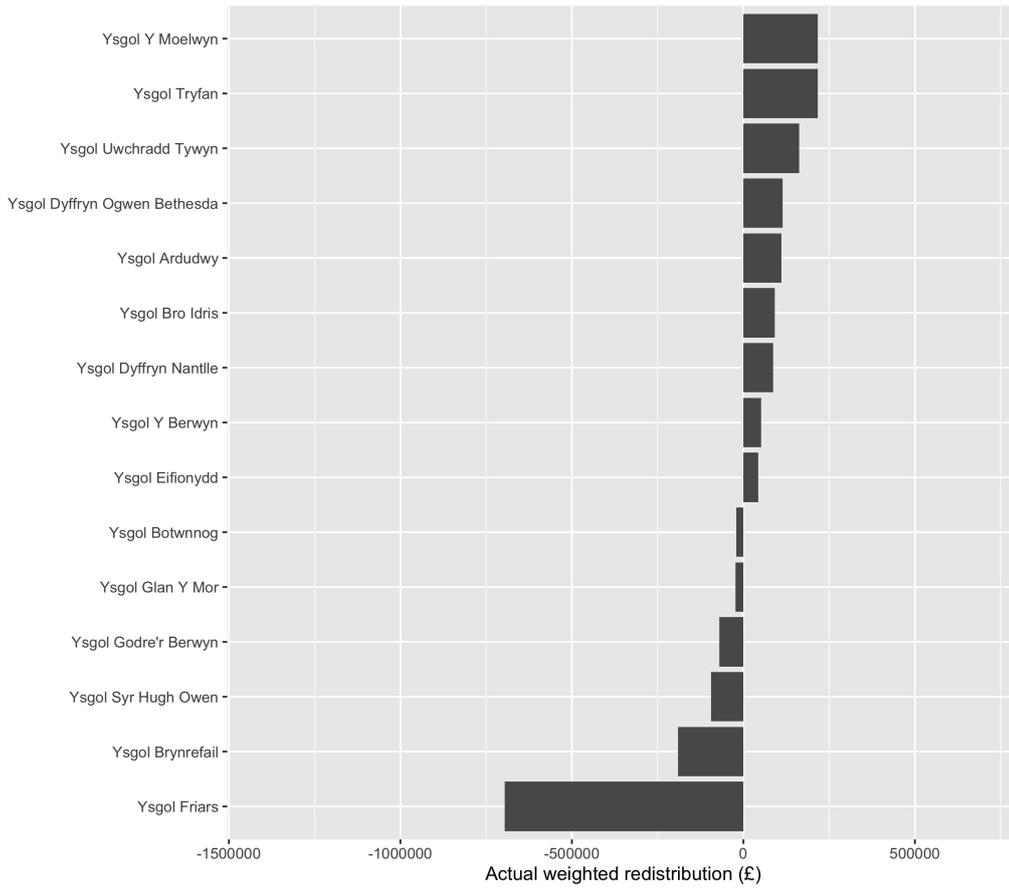
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen has 5.23% of the pupils (we've included all the students as we are unable to distinguish between primary and secondary funding/students) and receives 7.51% of the delegated budget to these schools. This translates into £700,000 in additional weighted funding. At the other end, Crickhowell High School has 13.4% of the students but only 9.89% of the budget, which translates into a negative difference of £1.2 million.

The second table shows the percentage of the budget that is made up of weighted funding—i.e. funding not based on pupil numbers. In the case of Ysgol Bro Hyddgen, it is in excess of 20% of its budget. And at the other end, Crickhowell High School has a gap worth over 35% of its budget between student numbers and budget share.

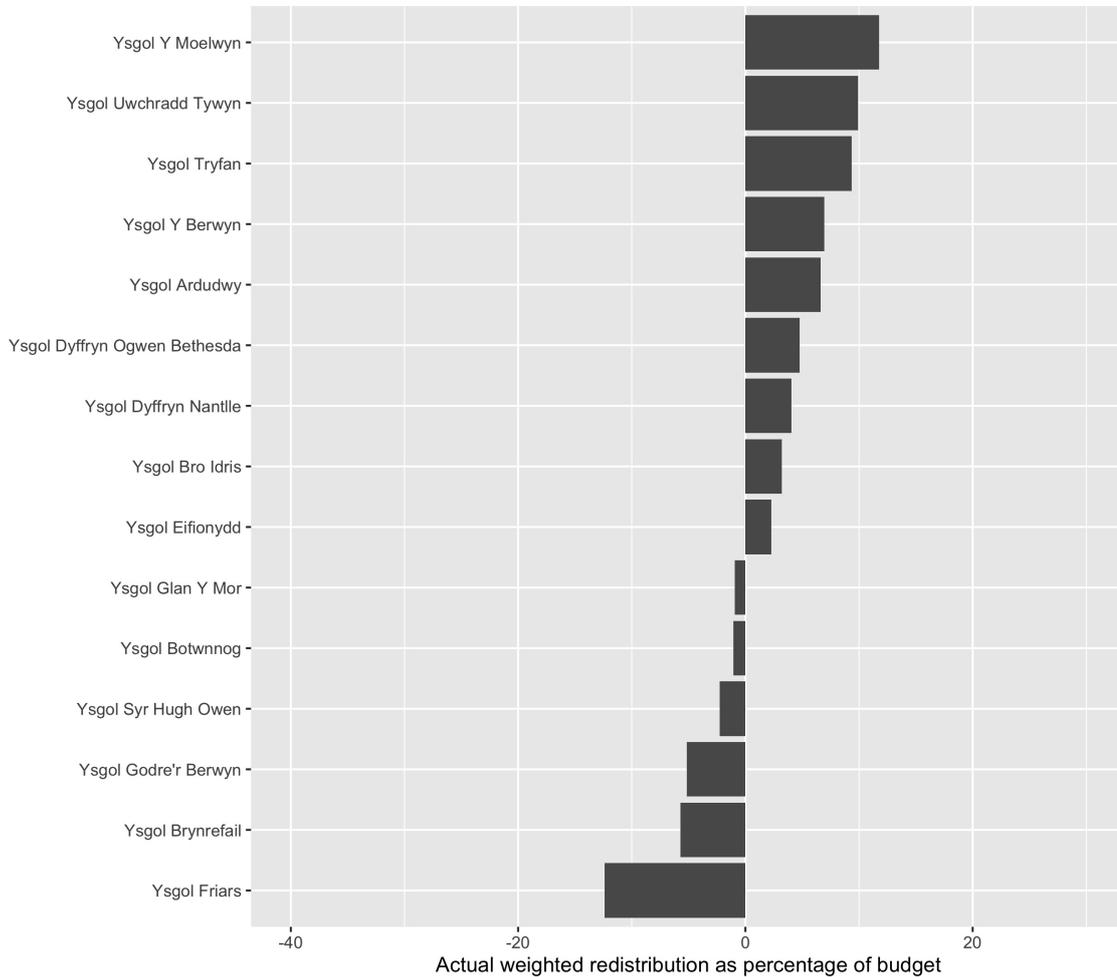
On the next page is the same illustration for Gwynedd, a similar authority with similar challenges of scarcity and many small schools. While one school (Ysgol Friars) is clearly a bigger “loser” than many of the others, the disparity between its share of the number of pupils and its share of the budget is not nearly so large. Indeed, no other authority in Wales has such an unequal redistribution of funding.

# Gwynedd bar charts for comparison

Actual weighted redistribution of funding based on Gwynedd formula (2019-20)  
Gwynedd secondary schools

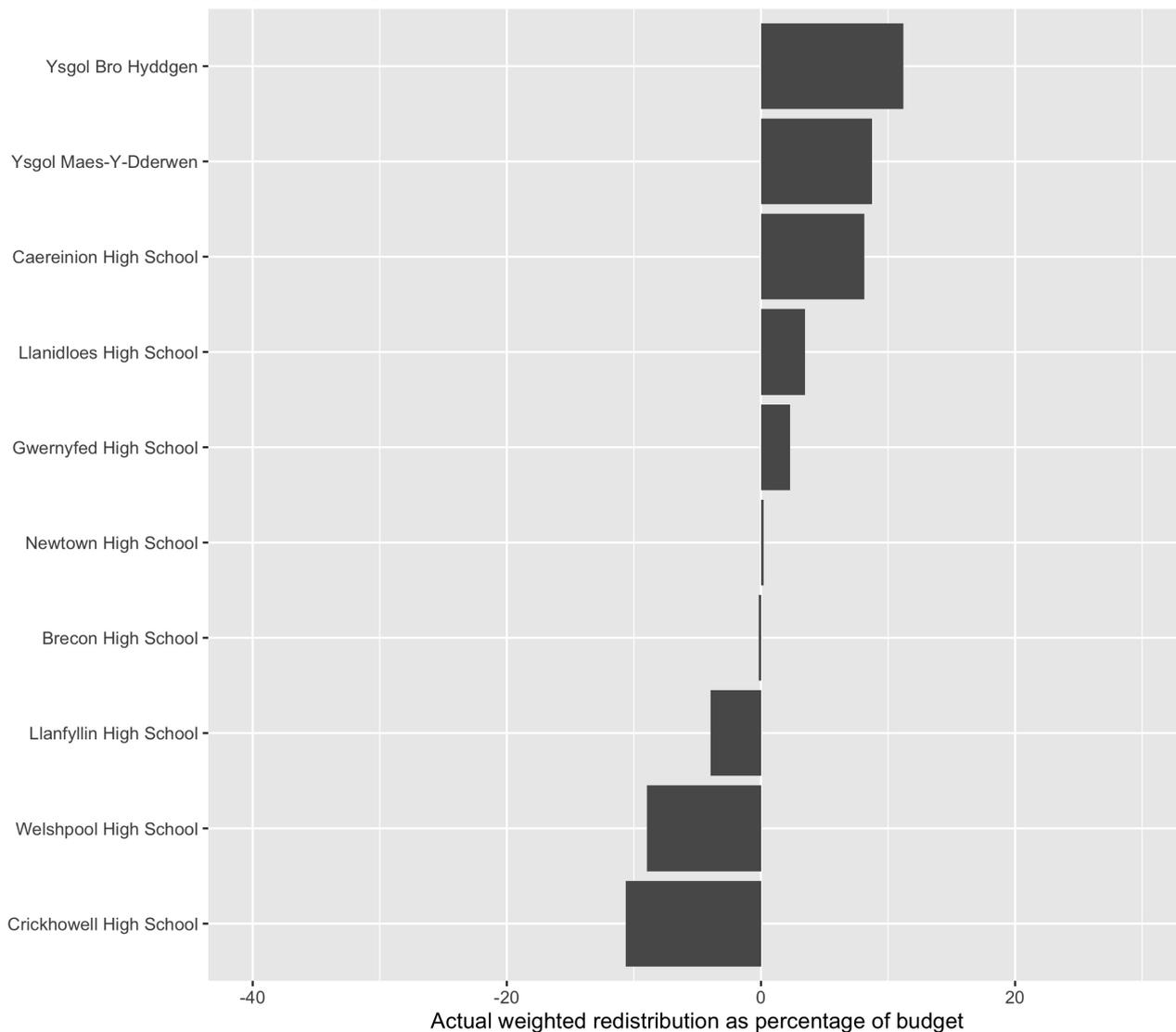


Actual weighted redistribution of funding based on Gwynedd formula (2019-20)  
Gwynedd secondary schools



## Actual weighted redistribution of funding based on Powys formula (2016-17)

Powys secondary schools



This situation has become more extreme since 2016-17 as can be seen from the illustration above for that year. Over the past four years, the burden of additional funding for the smaller schools with declining populations (e.g. Brecon High School and Ysgol Bro Hyddgen) has fallen almost completely onto one school (Crickhowell).

It is worth noting which schools have become “losers” with the introduction of the new funding formula. Note that the “losers” in 2016-17 were large schools. In 2019-20 however the “losers” are not necessarily the largest—Gwernyfed and Llanidloes have moved into that place. These schools are all single site schools, and mostly English medium. They do not necessarily have the lowest levels of free school meals or special needs. This illustration is therefore a good way to show where the priorities are for any given local authority in the distribution of its funding through its funding formula. In the case of Powys, it is clear that the effect of the new funding formula is to prioritise smaller schools with falling rolls, and dual sites and dual streams.

Lastly, we note that these four schools are all in fact the most successful in terms of support category.

Let us turn to the primary schools in Powys. Here we can see that while fewer schools are “losing” anything like the percentage of their budgets that Crickhowell or indeed Welshpool High Schools are, the “winners” are receiving very significant additional weighted funding.

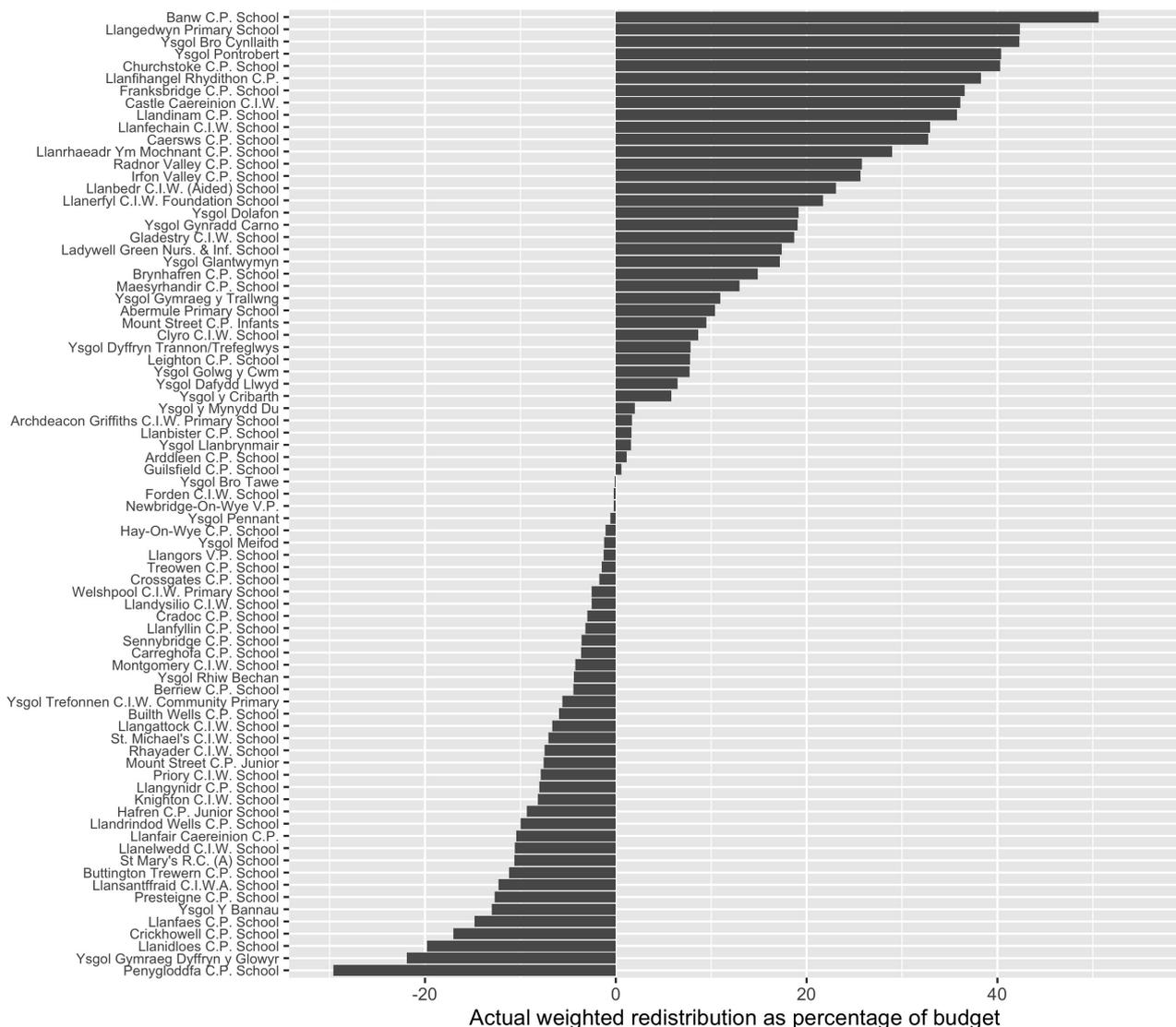
We are doubtful that the Powys funding formula can be compliant when schools are receiving in excess of 30% of their budgets as redistributed funding not based on pupil numbers. This funding no doubt disguises the fundamental fact that these schools are now unsustainably small.

The following schools are in this category:

- Caersws C.P. School (42 students, 41.18% occupancy, 32.74% weighted funding)
- Llanfechain C.I.W. School (37 students, 78.72% occupancy, 32.95% weighted funding)
- Llandinam C.P. School (37 students, 69.81% occupancy, 35.76% weighted funding)
- Castle Caereinion C.I.W. (32 students, 60.38% occupancy, 36.11% weighted funding)
- Franksbridge C.P. School (35 students, 85.37% occupancy, 36.54% weighted funding)
- Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. (31 students, 86.11% occupancy, 38.29% weighted funding)
- Churchstoke C.P. School (28 students, 32.18% occupancy, 40.30% weighted funding)
- Ysgol Pontrobert (31 students, 53.45% occupancy, 40.40% weighted funding)
- Ysgol Bro Cynllaith (31 students, 64.58% occupancy, 42.31% weighted funding)
- Llangedwyn Primary School (32 students, 78.05% occupancy, 42.35% weighted funding)
- Banw C.P. School (22 students, 30.56% occupancy, 50.59% weighted funding)

Figures for numbers of students are from Powys projections from 2019, as PLASC data is not yet available for January 2020.

Actual weighted redistribution of funding based on Powys formula (2019-20)  
Powys primary schools



## **“Different models for different areas”—a note of caution [p. 16 *Engagement Report*]**

In recent years, two models for schools have gained traction in Powys. The engagement documents mention both models as possible solutions.

### *All-through schools*

Ysgol Bro Hyddgen was created as a through school out of the primary and secondary schools in Machynlleth. As noted earlier, the population of the school has continued to decline and as nearby schools also have surplus places, this appears to be largely a factor of local population decline rather than an issue with the school itself.

Through schools are a relatively new model in Wales and not widely adopted. Most authorities do not have them—those that do, do not have significant numbers. The majority are probably created in order to save money, by combining resources. But does this work?

In the case of Ysgol Bro Hyddgen the answer is no. In 2016-17, 11.7% of the budget was additional to a share based on pupil numbers. In 2019-20 that had ballooned to 27.4%. Ysgol Bro Hyddgen now requires a much greater share of the budget than it did previously. Note for the purposes of comparison we have included Ysgol Bro Hyddgen with secondary not primary schools. Of course, primary schools generally have lower per pupil funding, but this is not the case with Ysgol Bro Hyddgen.

### *Dual site schools*

Powys has two dual site schools: Newtown and Ysgol Calon Cymru. They share leadership teams but students do not travel between them. In the case of Newtown this is particularly understandable since the sites are nearly an hour’s travel apart. Have savings been made since the mergers of the schools? Or do the schools actually take a greater share of the budget now than they did as separate schools?

The latter is the case.

In 2016-17, Builth Wells and Llandrindod Wells had a combined population of 14.32% of the secondary students in Powys, and a combined share of the budget of 13.83%.

In 2019-20, Ysgol Calon Cymru has a population of 13.55% of Powys students and a share of the budget share of 14.14%. In other words it has gone from being a “loser” to a “winner” and is now costing Powys a greater share of the budget than before the merger.

Newtown school has been receiving a greater % share of the budget year on year since its merger with John Beddoes and is now within reach of receiving the same share as it had in the last year before its merger. It will soon cost essentially the same to run as it did when it merged.

It is also worth noting that Ysgol Calon Cymru has a substantial deficit despite its increased share of funding. In addition it is hard to scrutinise the schools when figures for two sites are amalgamated into one. We can see that these schools are taking a greater share of the budget than previously, but we cannot see more. For example, do councillors know how many students are taught on each site? Where is the population decline in Newtown school —Presteigne or Newtown? How much does each site cost?

We would therefore suggest that a stronger financial case needs to be made before these models are adopted for other schools. Indeed we would suggest that a review is made to determine why these schools are costing Powys a greater share of the budget than they did previously.

## Guiding principles for the future...

Now let us turn in more detail to the *Engagement Document*. There is very little to disagree with in this document. That's largely because there's a lot of vision and no plan. Powys has been down this road before—there have been vision documents providing pathways to transformation. And yet here we are, after another failed Estyn inspection.

This document aims to provide a blueprint for transformation by the very ambitious date of 2025. We would have liked to see practical real-world outlines of how that transformation can take place, what it will look like in terms of numbers of schools, numbers of sites, staffing levels and funding levels. Unfortunately this is missing.

We have therefore taken the Personas in the appendix to be representative of what Powys CC want all children's experiences to be in the future and that they are not atypical or exceptional. In the following section we have used information gleaned from these "personas" to assess what changes need to take place to make these experiences possible, and thus raise questions as to the feasibility of the vision.

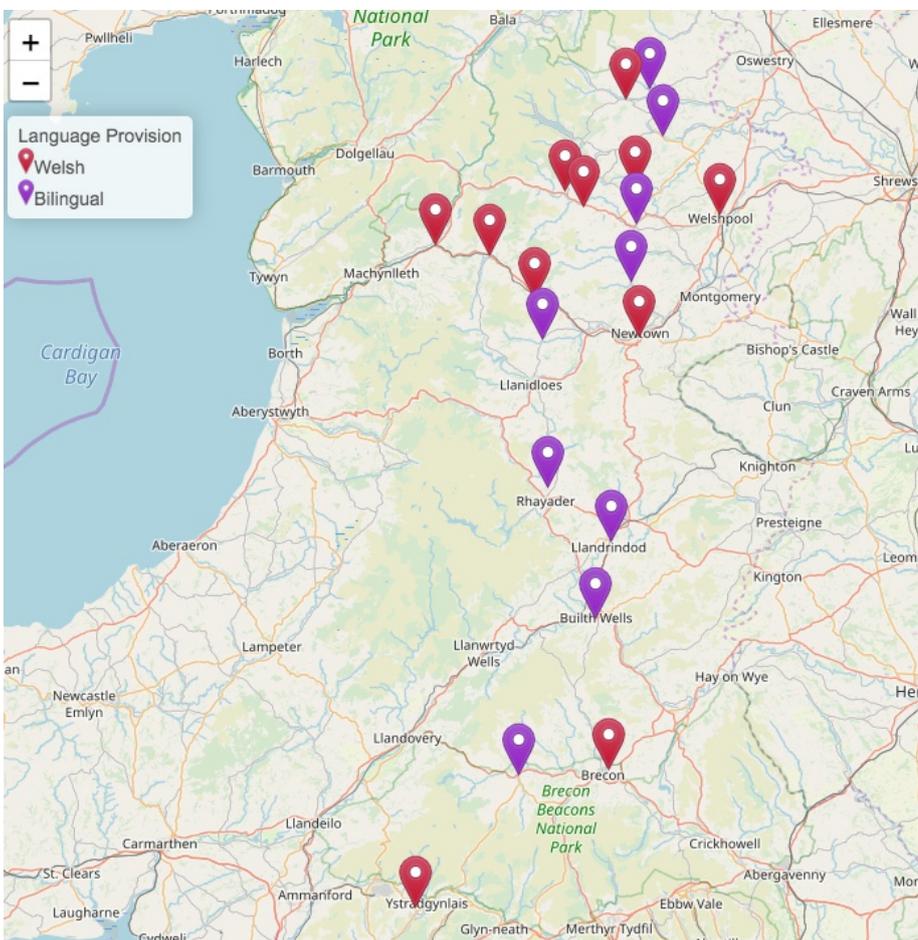
## Alys and Alun: two primary school pupils

*Alys' parents have been offered the choice of Welsh medium or bilingual education or an English medium education.*

By choosing Welsh medium, Alys' parents are in a minority in Powys at the present time. Out of 17087 students (StatsWales PLASC data 2019), 10393 (61%) are taught in English, a further 1264 students are taught in English with significant Welsh (7%), and 1428 are in dual stream schools (8%). This leaves just over 23% of children taught in Welsh or bilingually.

QUESTION: Has Powys set targets for numbers of children to be taught in Welsh medium?

The map below shows the distribution of Welsh medium primary schools in Powys. There are large areas without any Welsh medium provision.



QUESTIONS: Will Powys be converting schools to Welsh medium/bilingual or will they be offering transport to parents from areas that do not have any Welsh medium provision currently? What assessment as to demand for Welsh medium has been made in Powys?

Current occupancy levels in Powys Welsh medium primaries are lower (75%) than in English medium (79%) or dual (95%), and we have no information on occupancy levels for individual streams in dual schools.

Here is the list of current Welsh medium and dual medium schools with pupil numbers, occupancy levels and capacity in full.

#### *Welsh medium primaries*

Banw C.P. School (22 pupils, 72 capacity, 30.56% occupancy)  
Ysgol Gynradd Carno (43 pupils, 71 capacity, 60.39%)  
Ysgol Llanbrynmair (60 pupils, 70 capacity, 85.71%)  
Ysgol Pontrobert (31 pupils, 58 capacity, 53.45%)  
Ysgol Glantwymyn (63 pupils, 74 capacity, 85.14%)  
Ysgol Pennant (70 pupils, 78 capacity, 89.74%)  
Ysgol Y Bannau (119 pupils, 162 capacity, 73.46%)  
Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd (154 pupils, 210 capacity, 73.33%)  
Ysgol Gymraeg Dyffryn y Glowyr (322 pupils, 286 capacity, 112.59%)  
Ysgol Gymraeg y Trallwng (74 pupils, 72 capacity, 102.78%)  
Llanerfyl C.I.W. Foundation School (26 pupils, 44 capacity, 59.09%)

#### *Dual stream primaries*

Llanfair Caereinion C.P. (169 pupils, 167 capacity, 101.2%)  
Ysgol Dyffryn Trannon/Trefeglwys (120 pupils, 144 capacity, 83.33%)  
Llanfyllin C.P. School (147 pupils, 174 capacity, 84.48%)  
Builth Wells C.P. School (214 pupils, 246 capacity, 86.99%)  
Sennybridge C.P. School (134 pupils, 102 capacity, 131.37%)  
Ysgol Rhiw Bechan (151 pupils, 146 capacity, 103.42%)  
Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant C.P. School (71 pupils, 105 capacity, 67.62%)  
Ysgol Trefonnen Church in Wales Community Primary/Llandrindod Wells C.I.W. School (200 pupils, 189 capacity, 105.82%)  
Rhayader C.I.W. School (186 pupils, 213 capacity, 87.32%)

*Alys is part of a group of over 20 new pupils of the same age, who the staff can develop as a group of learners.*

Currently that puts her into a minority in Powys where over 72% of primary school children are taught in mixed age year groups.

The implication of this statement is that there are more than 20 in a class. How many more? Is the intention that Alys remains in a single age group throughout her time at the school?

It is interesting that the number is 20 since the current school funding formula provides for staff funding on the basis of multiples of 30.

Let's assume the school has classes of 25 children each (175 students in total). At the moment, the school would receive funding for 6 teachers including the head teacher. In order to ensure single age group classes, the school would need additional staff funding to allow for one extra teacher. Except...

*Miss Jones, the headteacher will only teach occasionally (which she will do mainly to release her staff to visit other schools....)*

So make that two extra teachers. And let's take a closer look at this. We took a look at the staff PLASC data for 2019 for all schools in Powys.

The following schools do not have a full-time equivalent headteacher or acting headteacher.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School (0.3) (29 pupils)  
Castle Caereinion Church In Wales School (0.3) (30 pupils)  
Ysgol Gynradd Carno (0.3) (43 pupils)  
Ysgol Llanbrynmair (0.3) (61 pupils)  
Ysgol Gynradd Glantwymyn (0.3) (63 pupils)  
Ysgol y Cribarth (0.4) (126 pupils)  
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith (0.5) (30 pupils)  
Llangedwyn C In W Primary School (0.5) (31 pupils)  
Irfon Valley C.P. School (0.5) (46 pupils)  
Llanfechain C.I.W. School (0.5) (39 pupils)  
Radnor Valley C.P. School (0.5) (52 pupils)  
Berriew C.P. School (0.5) (84 pupils)  
Llanelwedd CIW School (0.7) (102 pupils)

In addition to those schools, we believe that the following schools have headteachers with full teaching responsibility for a class. (We calculated the pupil-teacher ratio assuming the headteacher did teach, and then that they did not. We also assumed if a school had fewer than 4 teachers it was likely the headteacher had responsibility for a class.)

These schools have fewer than 4 FTE teachers including the headteacher

Ysgol Pontrobert (31 pupils, 2 FTE teachers)  
Gladestry C.I.W. School (43 pupils, 2 FTE teachers)  
Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Dyffryn Banw (22 pupils, 2.2 FTE teachers)  
Llandinam C.P. School (49 pupils, 2.2 FTE teachers)  
Franksbridge C.P. School (35 pupils, 2.3 FTE teachers)  
Churchstoke C.P. School (28 pupils, 2.3 FTE teachers)  
Caersws C.P. School (55 pupils, 2.4 FTE teachers)  
Llanbister C.P. School (51 pupils, 2.4 FTE teachers)  
Llanbedr CIW School (29 pupils, 2.4 FTE teachers)  
Ysgol Gynradd Llanerfyl (26 pupils, 2.6 FTE teachers)  
Brynhafren C.P. School (47 pupils, 2.6 FTE teachers)  
Ysgol Pennant (70 pupils, 3.4 FTE teachers)  
Forden C.I.W. School (74 pupils, 3.4 FTE teachers)  
Leighton C.P. School (76 pupils, 3.4 FTE teachers)  
Abermule Primary School (53 pupils, 3.4 FTE teachers)  
Ysgol Dolafon (55 pupils, 3.5 FTE teachers)  
Llandysilio C.I.W. School (79 pupils, 3.8 FTE teachers)

These are schools where the pupil teacher ratio would be well over 30:1 if the headteacher did not teach.

Hafren CP School (168 pupils, 5.8 FTE teachers)  
Newbridge-on-Wye CIW School (122 pupils, 4.4 FTE teachers)

In the case of Newbridge we know that the headteacher is teaching a class as the school website indicates

this to be the case. All over Powys many headteachers have teaching responsibilities: indeed in Crickhowell High School (991 pupils) because of budget constraints, the headteacher is now taking classes.

QUESTIONS: Does Powys CC know how many headteachers have teaching responsibility for a class in their primary schools? Has Powys CC made any assessment of the additional staffing costs that would be required for this scenario to be typical in Powys schools? What plans does Powys CC have to alter the current funding formula which works on multiples of 30 in a class, and which therefore does not work, in terms of allocating funding appropriate to create the staffing levels in this scenario?

*Alun is in a mixed class of learners but they are all of similar age to Alun, either his age or at most a year older.*

This means Alun is in a school of around 4 classes. Under the current funding formula the school would need more than 90 pupils to fund 4 teachers, and the head teacher would be one of the teaching staff.

QUESTION: How large a class does Powys intend Alun to be in? Current funding levels would suggest that classes would need to be more than 25 strong to get the necessary funding for the staff.

QUESTION: Is it Powys' intention to have mixed age group classes limited to two year groups in all its schools?

We have already identified 28 schools (out of the total 79) where there are fewer than 4 FTE teaching staff indicating that they have more than two age groups in a class.

23 schools currently have fewer than 70 students at present, and of those 14 do not have the capacity for 70 students, suggesting that they would not have the physical space to meet the criteria for a school like Alun's.

QUESTION: What are Powys plans for schools of this size? Closure or building expansion?

(Schools with less than 70 student capacity: Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P., Llangedwyn Primary School, Franksbridge C.P. School, Llanerfyl C.I.W. Foundation School, Llanbister C.P. School, Llanfechain C.I.W. School, Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Gladestry C.I.W. School, Castle Caereinion C.I.W., Llandinam C.P. School, Llanbedr C.I.W. (Aided) School, Ysgol Pontrobert, Irfon Valley C.P. School, Ysgol Dolafon).

*Alun is wondering if he could join an immersion class ...*

QUESTION: What does Powys mean by "an immersion class"? Would this be accessed in Alun's school or elsewhere? If elsewhere would transport be supplied? What assessment of additional funding and staffing needs has been made to ensure this is available county-wide?

*so that when he will be eleven, he could access his secondary education in Welsh.*

QUESTION: Will Alun be able to access a secondary education in Welsh wherever he lives in Powys? Will Powys pay for transport if that secondary education is not available nearby?

Currently 73% of secondary school students in Powys are taught entirely in English. Only 500 (7.6%) are taught in Welsh as the sole or main medium of instruction.

QUESTION: What numerical targets has Powys set for the future—how many pupils would they like to see in Welsh medium for their secondary education? Has Powys made any assessment of demand?

It is worth noting that occupancy levels in those secondary schools in Powys which are using Welsh as a teaching medium (bilingual categorisation of various kinds) are lower than for English medium schools (69% v. 80%). These schools also require much more support on average than those that teach in English (16 days versus 10). It is likely these two facts are related, that they are a significant barrier to parents choosing Welsh medium and that this will remain the case until those schools improve.

QUESTION: Has Powys CC factored in the timescales needed to improve these schools, given that it is likely that many parents will still choose an English medium education until they do.

### **Lynfa and Griff: two students needing additional support**

We welcome the “vision” related to the experiences of Lynfa and Griff and the aspiration on the part of Powys to provide the necessary support to allow children with significant additional learning needs access to a mainstream education.

QUESTION: Has Powys made any financial assessment of the cost implications of such support? We ask this, as the current funding formula has no factor for children such as these who would in the past both have received statements. Schools with children with statements and with other additional learning needs are now having to find funding from an allocation which has been largely based on criteria such as school size rather than specific calculations based on levels of need within a school population.

*Griff especially loves school on Tuesdays and Fridays when he is taught to prepare basic meals. The secondary school has a specially designated area for those activities...*

QUESTION: Is it the intention to adapt all secondary schools in this way? Or to provide facilities as needed? How many school sites have the space to provide such facilities?

### **Alberto in secondary school**

*He has been given a choice of 6 subjects in each of his 3 option columns.*

In 2016, Crickhowell High School offered four columns of options. In 2018, this had been reduced to three columns and in 2019, it was two plus triple science. Crickhowell is one of the largest secondary schools in Powys. This year for the first time, non-specialist teachers are teaching years 7 and 8 at Crickhowell, and we have already mentioned that the headteacher is also teaching.

QUESTION: How many secondary schools in Powys are able to offer 6 subjects in 3 columns at the present time? How many staff and students would be needed in a school to make this possible, realistic or sustainable?

*Because he has chosen some vocational options, he will have some involvement with the local college...*

QUESTION: How many secondary schools are local to a college site? Will transportation be provided?

We understand that where this has been attempted in the past, issues have arisen where secondary schools have had to design their entire timetable for all students around the very few students attending college, as the college is unable to be flexible.

QUESTION: What lessons has Powys learned from this? What assessment have they made as to the feasibility of such a plan?

*Alberto decided to pursue his subjects in Welsh*

72% of students currently learn in English in Powys. Occupancy rates at English medium schools are higher than at Welsh medium schools. There is limited access in the county to a Welsh medium education and no indication in this document as to how that access will practically be improved. There is no indication of how standards of leadership and teaching will be raised in the bilingual secondary school sector in Powys.

QUESTION: What is Powys CC vision for the majority of its students who learn in English? Why is there no vision outlined in this document for these students?

## **Gwenno and George: sixth form students in Powys**

*Gwenno was given a choice of 18 A level subjects along with a choice of 3 vocational areas in school and the Welsh Bacallaureate.*

We are assuming that the 18 subjects are separate subjects, not nine in English and Welsh. This is not an offer that is currently made in the majority of sixth forms throughout the county.

When we requested information on numbers of students on courses across the county, we were told by Powys CC that there were courses funded that had no students. We were also told that the number of students made no difference to funding levels. Currently students are transported between schools to follow particular courses during the day, and funding for those students is not provided to the school which is teaching them.

*Gwenno is part of a sixth form of over 240 learners.*

The problems in sixth forms in Powys are well known. Too many students leave to study out of county, especially at the large sixth form colleges at Hereford and Shrewsbury. Data was given in the accompanying reports on Shrewsbury college but not for Hereford. It is worth noting therefore that a 58 seater coach is currently taking students collected on a route from Builth Wells, via Talgarth and Hay to Hereford colleges. It is likely that there is therefore an additionally high proportion of students travelling into Hereford from Powys.

According to the PLASC data there were fewer than 1000 students in sixth form in Powys in 2019. Retention of students in some schools is very poor. To have sixth forms of over 240 learners, eight would have to close.

Clearly in order to make Gwenno's scenario a reality, a radical restructuring of sixth form provision will have to take place, yet as we understand it, Powys CC is still only implementing the relatively minor short term solutions outlined in its sixth form review. QUESTION: What progress has been made in developing the detailed business case considering the cost-benefit implication and impact of longer term structural changes outlined in the recent sixth form review.

*A growing number of learners in the school are utilising a range of courses in partnership with the college and the reverse is also true.*

We refer back to our comments on Alfredo and the issues with working with local colleges. QUESTIONS: Would this offer be available county-wide for students? What assessment of the practical issues and costs associated has been made?

## **Conclusion**

At one point in these documents, it is stated that Powys CC wishes to engage in an open and transparent process of change.

The documents we have evaluated here were developed in response to the latest Estyn inspection which determined that Powys Education Services were causing significant concern. We acknowledge that Powys CC is determined to address these concerns and has therefore developed an ambitious vision for substantial change to occur by 2025.

What is that vision? What changes are needed? We have deconstructed the Personas in order to determine what a typical educational experience will be in Powys in 2025. We have done this because they are the only part of the engagement document substantive enough to give a practical view of the Powys vision. If they aren't typical, then this vision is not detailed enough to gauge its credibility or feasibility.

If they are typical, then the distance between the current pattern of education in Powys—72% children in mixed age group classes, many headteachers with teaching responsibilities, very small sixth forms, 73% children in English medium education, 7/10 secondary schools in deficit, a very high rate of surplus places, huge disparities in per pupil funding—and the vision is enormous.

Can this be achieved by 2025?

Last year there were multiple meetings of the council to agree the merger of two very small schools (Banw and Llanerfyl) into one very small school. After the merger, the school will still have more than 25% surplus places. The process was painful and has taken over a year. If this new vision is to be a reality, then officers and councillors need to be prepared for many similar meetings to discuss multiple closures. Are they?

This year, the council has decided to continue with the build of a school at Machynlleth which will have (with current numbers) nearly 40% surplus places when complete. Perhaps this is the correct and unavoidable decision but there's no evidence that the issue of population decline and school size was discussed or reviewed in making this latest decision. Was it? What mitigation will be in place to ensure the new school is sustainable?

Powys has had ambitious visions before but have found themselves unwilling to take hard decisions when needed.

So is this latest vision credible? Perhaps. But in order for the deep scepticism felt in the county to dissipate, we believe there should have been much more specific detail in these documents.

What will the average school size be in 2025?

What will staffing levels be like and what adjustments to funding will be needed?

What is an appropriate level of surplus places and how will this be achieved?

How many more children does Powys want to see in Welsh medium education?

What are appropriate distances for children to travel to primary and secondary school and will this have to change with school reorganisation/closures?

How will the current funding formula have to change in order to reduce disparity of funding and what impact will that have?

Five years. Either Powys already knows what reorganisation practically needs to take place in which case this vision is credible but not open and transparent. Or it doesn't, in which case it probably isn't credible.