

"Impact Assessment Study and
Implications for Neath Port Talbot Council
and County Borough Regarding the
Consideration of Re-establishing a 3–11-
Year-Old English-Medium Primary School
in Godre'r Graig Village in the Upper Part
of the Swansea Valley"

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LinguaNi Ltd

Paragraph	Contain	Page
	Context	3
	Main Conclusions and Recommendations	3
1	Statutory context	4
2	Why commission a linguistic assessment?	6
3	Assessment area	6
4	Godre'r Graig Village and School	7
5	Linguistic background to the Swansea Valley	9
6	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan	11
7	Welsh language promotion scheme: Neath Port Talbot	11
8	Planning for the future	12
9	Census data	13
10	Schools in the area	13
11	Implications of opening a new school	14
12	Data: PLASC	15
13	Cross-Border Travel	18
14	The Future of Ysgol Godre'r Graig	18
15	Conclusions	19
16	Recommendations	23

Context

An impact assessment of the re-establishment of a 3–11-year-old English-medium primary school in the village of Godre'r Graig in the upper Swansea Valley.

In considering the future of Godre'r Graig Primary School, Neath Port Talbot Council has commissioned a linguistic impact assessment study on the proposed re-establishment of a primary school in Godre'r Graig in a new building in a suitable and purpose-built site in the village.

The assessment will focus on this potential development in light of the fact that the Swansea Valley, and upper Swansea Valley in particular, is classed as an area of 'linguistic significance' according to Council documentation in relation to the Welsh language and in the context of the targets agreed with the Welsh Government in the *Neath Port Talbot Local Authority Welsh in Education Strategic Plan* document

The impact assessment study will focus specifically on the area around Godre'r Graig, however in taking note of further linguistic issues, the review will cover the area from the villages of Cwmllynfell to Ystalyfera and down the Swansea Valley to Trebannws, and over to Rhos and to Rhyd-y-fro.

The recommendations of this assessment are based on a study of the data collected regarding the linguistic and educational situation in the upper Swansea Valley and on discussions with a broad cross-section of stakeholders in the area. Many of the comments made in this study are based on the opinions of those surveyed and on the author's professional interpretation of the linguistic and educational situation in the Upper Swansea Valley.

Main conclusions and recommendations

- The main purpose of this linguistic assessment is to evaluate the potential impact on the Welsh language, of the reopening of an English-medium school in a new build in Godre'r Graig village in the upper Swansea Valley. Following discussions with a wide range of stakeholders and analysing data regarding the Welsh language's increasingly fragile status in the area, **it must be concluded that reopening Godre'r Graig Primary School in a new building would negatively affect the viability and development of Welsh in the Swansea Valley.**
- Introducing a newly built school facility in the Upper Swansea Valley would significantly alter parents' school selection patterns and would influence

decision patterns between Welsh-medium and English-medium education. The existing trend of parents not choosing the local Welsh or English-medium schools is already substantial, and establishing educational provision in a new build would likely further exacerbate this pattern.

- While acknowledging the strong community sentiments in Godre'r Graig about the village's challenging educational history, **the financial and strategic rationale for reopening the school in a new building warrants serious scrutiny**. There is a high probability that establishing a new school with state-of-the-art facilities could lead to the closure of Llangiwg Primary School, located approximately one mile southwest of Godre'r Graig. With careful planning, all pupils from both schools could potentially be accommodated within the existing Llangiwg Primary School buildings.

1. The statutory and public policy context of this impact assessment

This study is conducted in the context of the document ***Welsh 2050: One million speakers*** and also specifically in terms of the expectations set out in ***the Welsh (Wales) Bill 2011*** which outlines the expectation for public bodies in Wales to assess policy decisions and take action in terms of the impact those decisions have on the Welsh language.

The expectations are set out below:

The Welsh Language (Wales) Bill 2011 is the legislation that underpins the Welsh language standards.

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/1/pdfs/mwaen_20110001_we.pdf

The standards are intended to promote and facilitate the Welsh language and to ensure that Welsh is not treated less favourably than English in Wales.

Institutions are expected to comply with standards in the following areas:

- Service delivery
- Policy making
- Operate
- Promote
- Record keeping

Policy making standards in education

The policy-making Standards in the Welsh Language Bill 2011 specifically mention the need to consider the Welsh language, and how the use of Welsh can be promoted, in formulating new policy or modifying existing policy, doing so in a way where Welsh is not treated less favourably than English.

The policy-making standards relate to the way a body considers the effects of its policy decisions on the Welsh language.

Main Principles of Policy Making Standards

- **Welsh must not be treated less favourably than English, whether those are positive or adverse effects. (as set out in Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011)**
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/1/contents/enacted/welsh>
- **'A conscience effort' must be put into the process of considering the impact of a policy decision on the Welsh language and evidence must be shown that that has happened.**
<https://www.comisiynyddygymraeg.cymru/sefydliadau-cyhoeddus/cyngor-a-chymorth/safonau-llunio-polisi>

Also providing a backdrop to this study is the Draft **Welsh Language and Education Bill which is currently being discussed in the Senedd.**

Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill

It is stated in the White Paper published by the Government that:

The Bill will take steps to enable all pupils in Wales to become confident Welsh speakers through the statutory education system.

Key proposals include:

- *Reflecting the target of one million Welsh speakers in law*
- *Establish a statutory system of categorising maintained schools by medium of language*
- *Over time, increasing Welsh language provision in maintained schools that are not already dedicated Welsh-medium schools*
- *Reforming how local authorities plan Welsh language provision in schools to meet targets set by the Welsh Ministers*
- *Requirements on local authorities to proactively promote Welsh-medium education, including late immersion provision.*

2. Why commission a linguistic impact assessment?

Policy decisions usually have a direct or indirect impact on people in their daily lives. This will include Welsh speakers as well as English speakers. Around one in five of the population of Wales, on average, speak Welsh. This percentage is usually higher in areas perceived as being of 'linguistic significance or sensitivity'. Therefore, while the proposal to consider building a new building for the village of Godre'r Graig relates specifically to the future of an English-medium primary school, consideration must also be given to the possible knock-on effect of this decision on the Welsh language and Welsh-medium education in the wider area.

The method of assessing the impact of the potential development

This impact study was conducted through discussion and consultation with

- all primary school headteachers in the area
- Headteachers of secondary schools in the area
- several county councillors
- representatives from Welsh-language organisations
- Welsh Government officials
- residents of Godre'r Graig who were randomly consulted

3. Geographic area of the linguistic impact assessment

This study considers the impact and implications of building a new build English-medium 3–11-year-old primary school in the village of Godre'r Graig at the upper Swansea Valley. This follows the decision to demolish the existing school building amid fears of landslides in the area.

The focus of this study in the first instance is to consider the linguistic implications of this development in an area considered to be an area of linguistic sensitivity or significance. In undertaking this study, considerations relating to education arrangements and the nature of communities in the Godre'r Graig area are also considered.

This study follows two major decisions by Neath Port Talbot Council. The first is the decision not to go ahead with the plan to establish a new 3-11 English-medium school and specialist learning support centre in purpose-built buildings in the town of Pontardawe. The intention in establishing this new school was to include pupils from the catchment areas of Godre'r Graig, Alltwen and Llangiwig primary schools in one school which would accommodate up to 720 pupils in Pontardawe town centre.

The second decision, which to an extent predates the above decision, was the decision by the local authority to temporarily move pupils at Godre'r Graig Primary School from the school in the village to a temporary location and buildings on the site of Cwmtawe Community High School. This decision followed a warning from experts

that there was some risk of a landslides behind the school building which could be life-threatening.

4. Godre'r Graig Village and School

The scattered village of Godre'r Graig is at the upper end of the Swansea Valley and northeast to the town of Pontardawe. The electoral ward of Godre'r Graig, part of the community of Ystalyfera, comprises the villages of Cilmaengwyn, Pantffynnon and Godre'r Graig itself. The village developed with the growth of the Tarenni coal mine in the area. It is an extended village with one part of the village on the side of Mynydd Allt-y-Grug connecting to Cilmaengwyn and also extending down the valley to Ynysmeudwy. The other part of the village is on the floor of the Swansea Valley and is bordered by the A4067. This area is called Graig Newydd and is an area adjoining the river Tawe, an area considered a floodplain. The main village is part of an unbroken section of dwellings stretching from Pontardawe to the far reaches of Godre'r Graig. The population of Godre'r Graig itself, according to the 2021 census, was 1993 people.

Godre'r Graig Primary School was built in 1908 with a capacity to educate 320 children. In 2019 a decision was made to move the school from the village of Godre'r Graig to Ynysderw Park near Cwmtawe Community School as a result of tests undertaken by geology experts in the vicinity of the school. The experts concluded, after carrying out bespoke experiments, that there was a potential risk to property and life in the event of a landslide into the schoolyard from a mound of waste material from a nearby quarry which lies to the northwest of the school. In September 2021, a further report was received stating that the waste was now moving and that the landscape was being designated as 'unstable'. It was subsequently noted that it was unsafe for pupils to return to the school building from their new location in Pontardawe. As a result of this report the local authority in April/ May 2024 undertook the demolition of the school buildings at Godre'r Graig.

Godre'r Graig Primary school today

The school is presently housed in temporary buildings on the site of Cwmtawe Community School in Pontardawe. In the year 2023/24, according to the data provided by PLASC, 114 pupils of all ages attended school with 97 pupils in years 1 to 6. The last five years have seen a reduction in school attendance from 153 to 114 from all pupils' count and from 118 to 97 from pupil count in years 1 to 6. The biggest drop has been seen in most recent years and among the youngest aged pupils.

In terms of staffing levels, the school is served by 5 full-time teaching positions with one position shared by two teachers. The school also employs 6 classroom assistants, 1 Clerk and 1 Bursary.

The most recent report by Estyn on Godre'r Graig Primary School was published in November 2024. The report identifies that 28.8% of pupils are eligible for free school meals over a three year average, which is above the Welsh average of 22.9% and that 7.2% were identified as having additional learning needs, below the Welsh average of 11.1%. It was noted that 6.2% of pupils speak Welsh at home. In the context of this report, it is stated by Estyn (in the language of the report):

Leaders have identified Welsh as an area for development and have provided training for staff and pupils. Pupils enjoy speaking Welsh and younger pupils are eager to try out their Welsh language skills with visitors, but this work is at an early stage of development

Plans for the future of Godre'r Graig Primary School

In November 2023 it was noted on the Neath and Port Talbot Council's website

<https://beta.npt.gov.uk/council/newsroom/press-releases/article/?id=7324>

On November 20th, 2023, Neath Port Talbot Council's Cabinet agreed to seek permission – via council education officials - for ambitious new school project submissions to be included in the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning funding programme (formerly known as 21st Century Schools).

The proposed new submissions are:

- **A new-build, English-medium, £17m replacement for Godre'rgrraig Primary School** at Gnoll Road, Godre'rgrraig, providing 210 full-time and 30 part-time nursery places.
- **A £10m extension to Ysgol Maes Y Coed Special School in Bryncoch** allowing it to take in 40 extra pupils who will benefit from the specialist facilities already existing there.
- **A replacement, single-site school for Ysgol Hendrefelin Special School (£17m)** which is a maintained community special school currently on three sites. It provides for pupils aged 3-16 who have moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), and long term and complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).
- **Complete refurbishment of the vacated Education, Library and Resource Service (ELRS) building at Reginald Street, Velindre, Port Talbot, (£9m)** to create a new central hub offering a range of skills-based learning and vocational opportunities for pupils across Neath Port Talbot. It will expand and enhance current internal provision and promote a wide range of subjects for a more cohesive vocational learning experience for young people.

Under the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme, the Welsh Government provides 75% funding of special school projects and 65% for all others, with the remaining funding provided by the council.

Education officers will now submit a variation request asking for the additional schemes to be included in the council's capital programme, and for the original Swansea Valley schools scheme to be removed following the determination in March 2023 not to progress the project.

If the request is then approved by Welsh Government, each new scheme will need to be developed in more detail, with a full business case submitted before any funding is agreed.

5. Linguistic background of the Swansea Valley

In 2003 a study was commissioned by Professor Colin Baker of Bangor University, one of the world's leading experts on bilingualism and statistics, to look at data provided by the 2001 census and to identify those areas of Wales where Welsh was under severe pressure and in steep decline.

From census data, and from information from previous censuses, it was very clear that the linguistic change in Wales was shifting from east to west. It was decided to identify these areas where Welsh was in a period of linguistic change as areas of 'linguistic significance or sensitivity'.

The first area to be identified as particularly challenging was the Aman Tawe area. This was decided as it appeared from the data that it was in the Swansea Valley and in the Amman Valley that linguistic change appeared to be at its most rapid. The concept of areas of 'linguistic sensitivity' is by now used to define those areas of Wales that need additional support for Welsh as a community language.

The report of the Welsh Language Communities Commission set up by the Welsh Government has now published its report on communities with a high density of Welsh speakers (August 2024).

<https://www.llyw.cymru/sites/default/files/publications/2024-08/grymuso-cymunedau-cryfhaur-gymraeg.pdf>

It is stated in the report:

3.4 The principle of designating areas of linguistic significance

The Commission supports the designation of areas of linguistic significance to support Welsh as a community language. Without doing so, the likelihood is that Welsh will continue to decline in those communities with a higher density of Welsh speakers. That will in turn weaken Welsh as a living national language throughout Wales.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should designate 'areas of higher density linguistic significance' in Wales.

The report recommends that areas with over 40% of the population speaking Welsh should be identified as areas of higher density significance. It also states that areas

somewhat below that threshold should be coupled with areas of higher density significance.

These are set out in the table below in the Commission's report in the context of the Neath Port Talbot area.

LSAO (Lower Layers Super Output Area) crosses the 40% threshold

Name	%
Cwmllynfell	53
Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen 1	52
Lower Brynaman	51
Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen 2	42

LSAO that do not cross the 40% threshold but have a cohort of Welsh speakers above 25%

Name	%
Ystalyfera 2	38
Ystalyfera 1	33
Trebannws	31
Pontardawe 3	28
Pontardawe 1	27
Godre'r Graig	27

A great deal of information regarding areas of 'linguistic significance' is already contained in documents compiled by Neath Port Talbot Borough Council:

Local Development Plan 2011-2026: Areas of linguistic sensitivity and land use.

Policy SP22

Welsh language

The Welsh language will be protected and promoted in the following language-sensitive areas:

- 1. Amman Valley.*
- 2. Swansea Valley.*
- 3. Pontardawe.*
- 4. The Crescent Community in the Dulais Valley.*

LDP Objective: OB 25

The document then sets out the rationale involved in this decision

*5.28 Neath Port Talbot generally has a lower percentage of Welsh speakers than the Welsh average. **Nevertheless, there are areas within the County Borough where***

the language is an integral part of the fabric of society and an important element in its daily life. Although there are very high levels of Welsh speakers in these areas, the erosion of the language in recent years has been a major concern in these communities.

6. Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plans (WESP)

The Welsh Language in Education (Wales) Strategic Plans Regulations 2019 now require local authorities to plan their provision for the Welsh language over a 10-year period. In the Welsh Government's policy document **Welsh 2050: Million Speakers** a specific target is set at national level for increasing the number of pupils receiving Welsh language education from 22% (as recorded in 2015/16) to 30% by 2032.

To meet the target agreed with the Welsh Government for pupils in Welsh-medium education by 2032, Neath Port Talbot Council will need to increase the number of pupils in Welsh-medium education in Year 1 by between 10% and 14% +. In terms of the number of pupils, this, in terms of actual numbers **means an increase from 288 pupils in Year 1 in 2022-23 to 460 pupils in 2031/32.**

7. Plan to Promote the Welsh Language in Neath Port Talbot

Neath Port Talbot Council has a comprehensive plan to promote the Welsh language within the Council area. Specific reference is made below to the theme relating to Education.

Three strategic themes are set out in Neath Port Talbot Council's current **Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2023-2028**

Theme number 1 is set out below which relates to increasing the numbers that speak Welsh and relate to ways of maintaining Welsh as a family and community language and also relates to the role of education in increasing the numbers of new speakers of Welsh.

Strategic Theme 1: Increasing numbers of Welsh speakers
<i>Vision: That more people speak Welsh</i>
Key areas of work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the implementation of CSGA 2022-2032 • Language transfer at home • Supporting people learning/speaking Welsh
Possible actions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the benefits of bilingualism/language awareness among young families and all NPT newcomers • Providing homework support for pupils of non-Welsh speaking families attending Welsh medium schools

- *Exploring the reasons for the limited uptake and access to Welsh/Welsh language education courses in specific communities*
- *Provide language awareness courses and training to teaching staff and others*

Why is linguistic erosion occurring?

There are many reasons why linguistic erosion occurs in areas with relatively high numbers and percentages of Welsh speakers. Several reasons are set out on the Menter Iaith Castell Need Port Talbot website:

<https://micnpt.cymru/>

The lack of linguistic confidence, however, is the dominant feature of linguistic erosion. Promoting higher levels of linguistic confidence therefore means paying particular attention to the language and providing positive discrimination at times.

8. Planning for the future

The Swansea Valley, following the analyses set out above is an 'area with a linguistic boundary' in terms of the Welsh language and has been recognised as an area of linguistic sensitivity.

Areas of linguistic sensitivity are generally in areas with communities where the language is going through a period of slow or rapid decline and where the local linguistic community may face many challenges in the everyday use of its language. Very often, however, they face many other challenges as well as a decline in the use of Welsh. This can relate to economic shortfalls, high levels of migration, both in and out and a shortage of easy transport links to facilitate the employment search process.

The 'linguistic boundary' in the Neath Port Talbot area roughly runs along the eastern side of the Swansea Valley between those communities with either more or less than 20% of the population speaking Welsh. This area lies between Alltwen and Rhos wards and then heads east along the eastern side of the valley. According to the 2021 census, 24.1% spoke Welsh in Alltwen, with 22% being Rhos. In the next wards eastwards, in the wards at Bryncoch, it has just over 10% of the population speaking Welsh.

9. Census data 2001, 2011 and 2021

Community	% Welsh speakers 2001	% Welsh speakers 2011	% Welsh speakers 2021	% Change 2011-2021	% Change 2001 -2021
Ystalyfera	54.6	46.0	33.3	12.7	21.3
Cwmllynfell	68.2	58.8	53.6	5.2	14.6
Godre'r Graig	41.5	30.1	27	3.1	14.5
Alltwen	35.9	29.5	24.1	5.4	11.8
Trebannws	42.4	33.6	30.8	2.8	11.6
Pontardawe	37.4	31.0	26	5	11.4
Moor	28.6	24.7	21.5	3.2	7.1

10. Schools in the area

In carrying out the linguistic impact study of the opening of a new school in Godre'r Graig, consideration must be given to the nature of the other schools in the area adjoining the school itself, both in terms of catchment areas and in terms of the linguistic nature of those schools. As part of that consideration, discussions were held with the following schools:

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Cwmllynfell

Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera

Llangiwig Primary School

Alltwen Primary School

Rhos Primary School

Rhyd-y-fro Primary School

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Trebannws

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pontardawe

Cwmtawe Community School

Llangiwig, Alltwen, Rhos, Rhyd-y-fro and Cwmtawe Community School schools are English-medium schools.

Although Welsh is an integral part of the linguistic mix of the area, only some of the primary schools of the Swansea Valley area were designated as Welsh-medium schools. Despite the fact that there are similar percentages of Welsh speakers in many villages, some schools in the past have been designated as English-medium

schools. It is now difficult to trace why there is a Welsh language school in Trebannws and an English school in Godre'r Graig. In both villages about the same percentage spoke Welsh in 2001. It is very possible that the interest of the heads of the individual schools at some point in the past drove the school's linguistic choice.

One of the reasons some schools in the Pontardawe area were designated as English-medium schools was as a result of the establishment of a dedicated Welsh school in Pontardawe in 1969. As a result, most children who spoke Welsh at home attended Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pontardawe. This had the effect of anglicising the other schools in the town.

With the establishment of West Glamorgan County Council in 1974, schools teaching through the medium of Welsh were designated as either traditional Welsh schools or designated Welsh schools. The village schools were the traditional Welsh schools with the urban or area schools being the designated Welsh schools. This distinction between the different schools teaching through the medium of Welsh disappeared with the local government reorganisation in 1996 and all schools became Category 1 Welsh Primary School. This regime was strengthened with the guidance published by the Welsh Government on the categorisation of schools in 2007.

<https://www.llyw.cymru/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/diffinio-ysgolion-yn-%C3%B4l-y-ddarpariaeth-cyfrwng-cymraeg.pdf>

In the 1980s, although Ysgol Gynradd Trebannws and Ysgol Gynradd Y Wern in Ystalyfera had been designated as Traditional Welsh Schools by the local authority, they were by then teaching mainly through the medium of English. With the emergence of the new National Curriculum in the late 1980s the Governors of both schools decided to re-start teaching through the medium of Welsh and changed the medium of learning over the following years.

11. Implications of building a new school in Godre'r Graig

When discussing the implications of building a new school in the village of Godre'r Graig with the schools in the area, a range of possibilities and implications were discussed in relation to any possible decision by Neath Port Talbot Council. These included what the linguistic or structural impacts would be if the Council decided:

- To re-establish the school in the village of Godre'r Graig in a new building on a site opposite Swansea Valley Exhaust and Tyre Centre.
- Closing Godre'r Graig school and giving parents the option of sending their children either to Llangiwg Primary School or Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera
- The establishment of a new school which would be a combination of Godre'r Graig Primary School and Llangiwg Primary School. Location to be determined

The following response/opinions was received from the **Welsh Medium Schools** to these choices:

- There was unanimous agreement that the reopening of Godre'r Graig Primary School in a new building would have an impact on the number of parents sending their children to receive an education at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera. The result could be that fewer children would receive a bilingual education.
- The opening of a newly built school in Godre'r Graig would have little impact on Welsh medium schools further down the Swansea Valley.
- It was noted that investing in a new build English-medium primary school in an area considered to be of linguistic significance could contravene the NPT local authority's ambitious Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (CSCA)
- There was also agreement regarding the impact of establishing a new school in a new building which would combine Godre'r Graig and Llangiwg primary schools. The strong view was that the establishment of a new school combining the two schools would have a negative impact on Welsh language education in the area by drawing pupils from Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pontardawe and Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera (primary) schools.
- There were also comments on the assumption that the Swansea Valley was an area of linguistic sensitivity, but that little emphasis was placed on promoting the use of Welsh in the English-medium sector.
- The expenditure on a new school in Godre'r Graig, when there were surplus places at other schools in the area would not only have a detrimental effect on Welsh language education but would also unnecessarily reduce the funding available to improve the condition of all the other schools in the area.

English-Medium Schools within the upper Swansea Valley

In discussing with other schools what the knock-on effect of opening a new school in Godre'r Graig would be, it was noted that the most obvious side effect would be the impact on Llangiwg Primary School, and not Welsh language education as such. It was highlighted that Llangiwg Primary School had seen a significant reduction in pupil numbers recently falling to 89 pupils in years 1 to 6 in the year 2023/24. Llangiwg Primary School building was also identified as being quite substantial with up to 4 rooms which could be used as classrooms along with pupils' playgrounds over two sites

12. Pupil numbers in primary schools in the upper Swansea Valley (PLASC data 2023/ 2024)

Godre'r Graig Primary School

Number of pupils	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/23	2023/2024

All pupils	153	155	134	128	114
Yr 1-Yr 6	118	120	108	101	97

Llangiwg Primary School

Number of pupils	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/23	2023/2024
All pupils	136	124	125	101	103
Yr 1-Yr 6	107	95	97	82	87

Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera

Number of pupils	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/23	2023/2024
Yr 1-Yr 6	112	109	111	105	117

Alltwn Primary School

Number of pupils	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/23	2023/2024
All pupils	231	254	255	225	230
Yr 1-Yr 6	174	188	187	162	170

Godre'r Graig Primary School

From the data it appears that Godre'r Graig Primary School has lost a significant number of pupils since moving to its temporary accommodation in Pontardawe. A similar decline in numbers occurred at the closest English-medium school, Llangiwg Primary School. Checking with other schools in the area suggested that there was no significant increase in their numbers as the number at Godre'r Graig and Llangiwg schools decreased. Only one school reported that 6 children, 5 of whom were from one family, had moved from Godre'r Graig Primary School to Rhyd-y-fro Primary School. It is possible that due to the demographics of the area and the difficulty in building new houses due to the landscape, and houses slowly selling, that the population is more stable and fewer children are now born in these schools' neighbourhoods.

Llangiwg Primary School

Llangiwg Primary School serves an area to the east of the centre of Pontardawe which is a narrow housing development stretching from Pontardawe, through Llangiwg and Ynys Meudwy and extends into the village of Godre'r Graig which is 1 mile north east of the school. The school has seen a significant reduction in pupil numbers in recent years. The school is located on two sites not far from each other. There is real concern at the school that the low numbers will lead to the closure in

the near to medium future. There are currently at least 4 vacant teaching spaces in the school. The school has quite a substantial play area outside both buildings. As regards to the condition of the buildings, the Headteacher noted that the school was generally in a good condition.

Alltwen Primary School

Another school that could be impacted by the construction of a new school in Godre'r Graig would be Alltwen Primary School. However, the headteacher considered that to be unlikely, especially as the number of pupils at the school have remained at a consistent level over the past five years. The issue that concerned the headteacher was most the condition of the roof and the fact that the building had deteriorated significantly during the period of discussion on the opening of the new 3–11-year-old school in Pontardawe. In terms of the nature of the school and the community, interest was expressed in investigating further the opportunities that the new school categorisation regime would bring in terms of offering more educational provision bilingually.

Rhyd-y-fro and Rhos Primary Schools

Both headteachers did not foresee that the development at Godre'r Graig would have any direct impact on their schools. Rhyd-y-fro Primary School had recently received a small number of pupils from the Godre'r Graig area.

Cwmllynfell Welsh Primary School YGG Cwmllynfell

A significant percentage of Cwmllynfell schoolchildren speak Welsh at home. The school is now able to provide care to pupils between 8.00 and 15.30. Previously this was not possible and therefore the school had been losing pupils to Ysgol Dyffryn y Glowyr in Powys and schools in Carmarthenshire who offered this provision. But pupil numbers continue to dwindle in an area with an ageing population and with young people moving out of the area and fewer people speaking Welsh as a first language. The school, however, did not believe that any new developments at Godre'r Graig would have a direct impact on the numbers of pupils or the linguistic nature of the school.

Trebannws Primary School YGG Trebannws

The changes in Ysgol Godre'r Graig would have little impact on YGG Trebannws, according to the headteacher. But the school has concerns about their ability to provide sufficient before and after school care for pupils. The lack of transition to Welsh language education in the secondary sector is also a cause for concern. The school nevertheless feels they are now in a better position to deal with this issue as more support is coming from the local authority. Even more support, though, would be desirable in persuading parents to ensure that pupils continue to receive their education through the medium of Welsh following their time in primary.

13. Cross-border travel

Another issue affecting education in the area is the numbers of pupils moving from the area where they live to attending schools outside their natural catchment areas. It's recognised that this is an issue that affects all schools in the area. It was highlighted, using anecdotal evidence, that the underlying factors were that when travelling to the workplace, people placed their children in schools that were convenient for dropping them off at school and fetching them at the end of a day. Another factor in this context was the provision of before and after school care, which was also an important factor for parents in determining which school their children would attend.

Another complicating issue, particularly at the upper end of the Swansea Valley in communities which are within Neath and Port Talbot local authority boundaries, is that many children cross the border into Powys to receive their education. That is a major factor in Welsh-medium primary education in the area, with children from the area choosing to cross the border to attend Ysgol Gymraeg Dyffryn y Glowyr. The fact that two Welsh language education providers for primary children, Ysgol Gymraeg Dyffryn y Glowyr, (an area school) and Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera (a village school) are literally within a stone's throw of each other, but in two different counties, complicates it in terms of parental choice and in terms of planning the provision. Ysgol Dyffryn y Glowyr provides a Breakfast Club at the school as well as an opportunity for pupils to start school at the age of 2. This is very attractive to parents especially considering that Ysgol Dyffryn y Glowyr is also very conveniently located.

In terms of the future, it would be useful for Neath Port Talbot and Powys local authorities to continue to hold discussions regarding how to provide and develop Welsh-medium primary and secondary education in the area given the numbers crossing the boundary between the two authorities for Welsh-medium education from 2/3 years of age and up to the age of 16/18. It is not only the Welsh-medium sector that identifies this as a major factor a number of pupils also cross the border to receive English-medium education in the primary schools in Ystradgynlais.

14. The Future of Godre'r Graig Primary School

The school buildings in the village have now been demolished. There are strong feelings in the village that a new school should be built in the village and there is also a feeling that this has been promised by the Council. It is felt that the village has been through some very difficult times over the years and that a possible landslide in the area has cast a shadow over the village and surrounding villages. Before the school was relocated to Ynysderw Park in Pontardawe, the school had received a good Estyn report and the school itself was thriving. In terms of facilities in the village, the school provided an after-school club, a Mother and Child group and a sports club for the children. This provision and the opportunity for parents to meet at

school at the end of the school day created a strong link between the school and the community. Now this was not possible as the children were over three miles from the village.

Many of the difficulties facing the Godre'r Graig community are set out in the community impact assessment produced during discussions on establishing a 3-11 English-medium school to replace Alltwen, Godre'r Graig and Llangiwig schools.

<https://media.npt.gov.uk/media/cclfag25/app-c-cia.pdf?v=20241029165833>

The report listed the facilities that were within easy reach of the pupils, facilities such as the numerous play parks in the village along with convenient community resources in the nearby village of Ystalyfera. The strongest feeling from the community is that a promise had been made that a new school would be coming to the village and that it would be built quite soon.

Regarding the school at its current location, it was noted that the number of pupils attending had increased in the period before the school was moved to the Ysgol Cwmtawe site. It was also emphasised that the numbers had fallen because of the relocation. The support from parents had been more evident when the school was in its old building as it was more convenient in terms of visiting the building and because of the feeling of community that existed there. The feeling now was that the beating heart had been removed from the village

The possibility of changing the school to a two languages school was discussed under the new school categorisation regime. It was noted that Godre'r Graig School offered an option for parents who did not want their children to receive a Welsh language education and that there were limited Welsh language skills amongst the school staff. It was noted that the real strengths of the school were that the school felt like one close family and that parents valued the ethos and values of the school and that the feeling of belonging was very strong there. In light of these sentiments, it is felt that a further period of engagement should take place with the residents of the village using the existing data regarding the school's situation and the current fiscal climate as the basis for the discussions seeking to reach agreement with the community on the possible next phase.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Linguistic impact assessment

In considering the possibility of providing a replacement new build school in the village of Godre'r Graig and the linguistic implications of that aspiration, it is crucial to recognize that a comprehensive assessment extends beyond purely linguistic

considerations. The linguistic issues, however, are sought to be addressed in this assessment. But at the same time other considerations must also be included if justice is to be done to the linguistic assessment itself because the Welsh language does not exist in vacuum when considering policy decisions or the need to be proactive.

2. Godre'r Graig Village

It must be acknowledged, based on the observations received from the majority consulted, that the village of Godre'r Graig has endured significant challenges over an extended period. Threats of landslides have persistently troubled the village's inhabitants for many years. Recent reports highlighting the instability of the land above the village prompted the relocation of the school to a temporary site in Pontardawe, more than three miles away.

Some village residents expressed scepticism about the official reports of landscape instability, with several residents noting an apparent lack of land or house movement. However, upon carefully examining the reports and their contents, it becomes clear that the Council's decision to relocate the pupils and provide them with a safer educational environment was the most prudent and responsible course of action.

3. Building a new-build school at Godre'r Graig

There was a recent statement from the Council stating the Council would apply for funding under the Sustainable Communities for Learning Funding Programme scheme. It was noted that the application would be made to the Welsh Government under the Sustainable Communities for Learning Funding Programme scheme and that the application sought matching funding to build a school for 210 full-time pupils and 30 part-time nursery places. The estimated cost of building the new building would be £17 million with the Welsh Government contributing 65% and Neath Port Talbot Council funding the rest. However, five years later the present school remains in temporary buildings and the village has lost the only major building in the village that provided a focal point and focus to the life of the village itself, as all other institutions have either moved or closed. It must therefore be recognised that this is a blow to the community life of the village itself.

4. Schools in the area

Since 2019 the educational and linguistic situation in the upper Swansea Valley has changed. There has been a reduction in the number of pupils attending Godre'r Graig Primary School at its new temporary site and a similar reduction has been seen at

the nearest school, Llangiwig Primary School. It could be argued that parents in this context are looking for more stability for their children than the current situation at Godre'r Graig Primary School offers and choosing to send their children to schools outside the village. But there is little evidence that that has happened. It must therefore be concluded that the numbers at the current site of Godre'r Graig Primary School are roughly equivalent to the numbers that would be at the school if the school continued at Godre'r Graig itself.

5. Census 2021

In 2023 the results of the 2021 Census were published, revealing a concerning picture of the Welsh language's status in the upper Swansea Valley. That census data shows very clearly that the Welsh language situation has worsened substantially in the area with a significant loss in speaker numbers continuing to occur at the upper end of the Swansea Valley. Speaker numbers as a percentage of the population have been reduced by over 10% over the past twenty years. When viewed against the Welsh Government's ambitious vision to achieve one million Welsh speakers by 2050, the linguistic landscape of the upper Swansea Valley presents a distinctly discouraging outlook.

6. Response from Welsh-medium school headteachers

There was unanimous agreement amongst the headteachers of Welsh-medium schools in the area that Welsh remains in a very perilous and fragile state and that its strength as a community language and an everyday language of children was under constant threat. They strongly believe that the reopening of Godre'r Graig school in a new building would cause problems for Welsh language provision in the area. In terms of planning for the development of Welsh language provision in the area, it was noted that the fact that the upper end of the Swansea Valley area is a boundary area in terms of local authorities presented difficulties and there was a need for further communication and discussion between the various authorities about the provision of Welsh language education.

7. Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera

It was observed that the primary section at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera was experiencing modest growth, though its long-term sustainability remained precarious. Being part of a larger organisation is certainly an advantage to the primary department in terms of resources and support. The fact that the primary section is housed within a larger institutional framework further complicates its identity as the traditional Ystalyfera village school, casting doubt on its distinctive local character and autonomy. Also, the fact that Ysgol Gymraeg Dyffryn y Glowyr and

its highly visible site further complicates the situation of the primary section in Ystalyfera. Those surveyed had no doubt that the opening of a brand-new school in Godre'r Graig would have an impact on the numbers attending the primary section of Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera. It was observed that providing new buildings for the secondary part of the school has had a positive effect on the levels of transfer from primary to secondary. It is acknowledged that new buildings have an impact on educational standards and on parents' choices for a period after these buildings are adopted.

Representatives of the Welsh-medium sector also agreed that opening a new school which would be a combination of Godre'r Graig and Llangiwig schools would also cause difficulties for the Welsh-medium sector as it would affect the number of parents choosing a Welsh language education at Ysgol Gymraeg Pontardawe. They did not foresee a similar response if the two schools were integrated into one new school in a building which is currently in use.

8. Pupil numbers

Data available from PLASC figures for 2023/24.

Godre'r Graig Primary School

The numbers of pupils at Godre'r Graig Primary School were:

2019/2020	2023/2024
All pupils 153	All pupils 114
Years 1-6 118 pupils	Years 1-6 97 pupils

This is significantly less than the estimated numbers stated by Neath Port Talbot Council when it noted that funding would be applied for from the Welsh Government to support the construction of a new school in the village for 210 children with 30 in the nursery department.

Llangiwig Primary School

Nearest English-medium school to Godre'r Graig

The numbers of pupils at Ysgol Llangiwig were:

2019/2020	2023/2024
All pupils 136	All pupils 103
Years 1-6 107 pupils	Years 1-6 87 pupils

According to Council data Llangiwg Primary School has capacity for 53 nursery and 147 full time pupils, a total of 200 places. With 103 pupils on roll at PLASC 2023/24 the school has 97 surplus places, approx.48%. When Llangiwg Primary School was visited during this review it was noted that there were four empty teaching rooms and that a second site was part of the school which could be further developed if called for. Given this data it can be concluded that Ysgol Llangiwg is in a situation in terms of number, where, in the relatively near future, the closure of the school could be considered due to continued declining pupil numbers.

Recommendations

9. Discussion with the community in Godre'r Graig and Llangiwg

When discussing the situation of Godre'r Graig Primary School with residents and people who work in the area, one of the recurring themes was the need for further discussions to be held locally regarding the future of the school. Considerable doubts were raised about the exact position of the mountain behind the school and about the Council's plans regarding the future of the school itself. Doubts were also raised as to why the Council intends to build a school for 210 children where the school, even back in 2019/20 had a total of 153 pupils. It would be beneficial in this connection to continue to pursue a process of engagement with the local community. In this ongoing discussion it would be possible to discuss the current data regarding the numbers of children in the school and in neighbouring schools, and to discuss possible options. It would also be possible to discuss the potential difficulty of persuading the Welsh Government to agree to the scheme in the context of declining pupil numbers and the financial austerity that the Welsh Government and Neath Port Talbot Council are currently facing.

10. Area of linguistic significance

Careful thought should be given before proceeding with the construction of a new building for an English medium primary school in Godre'r Graig in an area considered to be of linguistic significance by the Council itself. There is little doubt that such a development would affect the provision of Welsh language education in this area where the Welsh language is clearly in a vulnerable position. Therefore, in terms of this study of assessing the impact on the Welsh language of this potential development, this development is likely to have a negative impact on the development of the Welsh language in this area. It could also go against current Welsh Government and Neath Port Talbot Council policies in promoting the growth and development of the Welsh language.

11. Creating an area school

Within a mile of each other are the site of the old Godre'r Graig Primary School and the present Llangiwig Primary School, two English-medium schools serving an area stretching from Pontardawe to Godre'r Graig, an area where pupil numbers according to the data are in decline. There is an argument here for rationalising the provision and creating one viable school.

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