1st May 2015

Dear Ms Evan Hughes

Re: Ysgol Solfach Governing Body Response- Review of Secondary Education Provision in the Mid and North West of Pembrokeshire

Thank you for inviting comments, opinions and ideas from the Ysgol Solfach Governing Body; we welcome the opportunity to have our voice heard and become involved in the consultation process. A number of the governing body have attended the public meetings and found them very informative. In addition we have consulted with parents, pupils and the wider community to formulate our response.

We acknowledge that there is an inevitable need for change within education in Pembrokeshire due to falling school numbers and subsequent surplus places impacting on value for money and sustainability of schools. The governing body have considered carefully each of the options detailed in the document specifically with Ysgol Solfach and the wider community in mind.

In response to the consultation itself and the discussion surrounding secondary education in the peninsula very little has changed. We maintain the position asserted at the last consultation and would like to reiterate our belief that maintaining a strong central hub with Ysgol Dewi Sant as our secondary school is essential to sustain our strong cluster of feeder schools. Ysgol Dewi Sant is a key asset for the communities it serves and to lose secondary provision in the peninsula would weaken not only the integrity of the feeder schools, but the morale and community ethos that is generated between our communities. We, the governing body, would hope to keep the site of Ysgol Dewi Sant open to allow the natural progression of education to continue for the children of our community. Moreover there are issues over transportation links and viability when discussing travel between Solva – Haverfordwest or Solva – Fishguard and the extra hours added through travel coupled with expense would certainly be a prohibitive force when it came to extracurricular activity such as music or sports. We are however realistic about the sustainability of sixth form education in Ysgol Dewi Sant and identify that pupils need maximum choice and equality of access for A Level subjects. Whilst this could be accessed through the potential proposed 6th Form Centre we feel that considering options such as satellite study centres and the use of distance learning should also be included in the planning for the future. Whilst our concerns with the removal of 6th Form provision from Ysgol Dewi Sant include transport issues we would also seek clarification on how teaching for MAT pupils would be provided, for example if a year10 pupil wanted to sit an AS level how would this be accommodated?
In recognition of the points raised above we also want to record our response to the Plan that has been submitted by the Schools for the Future/Save YDS campaign. We certainly would endorse key elements of the plan on the basis of it allaying our fears of losing our secondary partner in the peninsula and welcome some of the innovative proposals for education but have concerns that the proposal suggests a centralised management system. To centralize the management and teaching structure would potentially weaken the capacity of Ysgol Solfach to maintain high standards of teaching and have implications on the ability to scrutinize performance and also monitor the effectiveness of the staff as a whole. As a school currently in special measures but striving to improve the lack of ‘on site’ support, management and challenge could have a potentially detrimental effect. As there is already a strong partnership with other schools within the cluster this enables sharing of good practice whilst undertaking robust, consistent and accurate moderation and standardisation. If this is already functioning effectively we feel there would be little merit in dissolving this in order to establish a new management structure. With this positive, well established cluster in mind Ysgol Solfach Governing Body would suggest that if the proposed Plan were to be implemented consideration should be given to including all current members of the cluster within the ‘new school’ to ensure that the transition is seamless and the foundations for the new approach builds on the already established professional relationships within the cluster.

In addition we feel it is imperative that the current school site within the community of Solva is retained in order to retain the individual identity of the school whilst continuing to embrace the diversity within the community as identified by Estyn. Based on our current school role 91% of pupils would need to be transported to another site, for example in St Davids, which would incur substantial additional costs and raise concerns for parents around their young families accessing school transport. Whilst we acknowledge Ysgol Solfach has had minimal capital investment recently Estyn identified in January 2015 that the accommodation is appropriate and well maintained. Any funding available through the 21st Century Schools funding could be utilised to enhance the Ysgol Solfach school site with specific consideration of developing community learning or i-Learn facilities as identified within the Plan.

Whilst this additional proposal would incur costs to ensure the premises were suitable for 21st Century education it would remove the additional ongoing expenditure necessary in order to transport pupils to a site within St Davids. It is also our opinion that this would be the most beneficial, inclusive and holistic approach for all of children and young people within the St. Davids area and ensure the sustainability of excellent and developing education opportunities within Ysgol Solfach.

Heidi Holland

**Chair of Governors- Ysgol Solfach**