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Dear Parents and Carers,

I write in response to the claims made in an article currently featured on Wales Online.



I would like to take the opportunity to thank you, once again, for your ongoing partnership in the exciting endeavour of maintaining a caring community committed to providing “Great Opportunities For All to Learn”. To this end, we do not promote or instil any doctrines or ideologies, nor do we evangelise, rather, we continue to develop what inspectors described as, ‘a clear vision for [our] Curriculum for Wales following appropriate trialling, evaluation and taking account of the views of stakeholders’ and create ‘a caring and supportive environment where all are valued and encouraged to give of their best’. We remain as passionate and excited as ever about ensuring your child enjoys their learning journey and realises their dreams and aspirations.

Creationism and the curriculum

Like other schools across the country, and in accordance with the Agreed Syllabus and WJEC examination board’s GCSE Religious Studies specification, we teach creation, evolution and big bang theories in our religious education lessons. Specifically, the WJEC GCSE course includes, ‘Beliefs and teachings on Creation from the Genesis accounts (Genesis 1-3, esp. Genesis 1:1-3).’ Non-religious views on the creation of the universe are also covered such as the ‘Big-Bang theory’ (Stephen Hawking) and evolution (Charles Darwin and Richard Dawkins).

In science, we deliver the WJEC examination board’s GCSE science double award specification. Students learn that science progresses through a cycle of hypothesis, practical experimentation, observation, theory development and review. In biology, they explore variation and evolution, and in physics they learn about scientific theory relating to the origin of the solar system.

Inspectors recently described the curriculum at Llanidloes High School as ‘broad and balanced’, ‘a particular strength’ and ‘successful in meeting the needs of nearly all pupils.’



Wall displays and financial management

We reinforce pupils' general knowledge and their understanding of content covered in WJEC exam specifications and the Welsh curriculum, through thought-provoking, bilingual displays around the school. These displays include celebrations of pupils' work and learning experiences, professionally designed posters and information about pastoral support. These have helped create what inspectors recently described as a 'positive environment for all pupils'.

Our displays are designed to embed subject knowledge, complement our broad and balanced curriculum, inspire pupils' curiosity, support delivery of cross-cutting themes, and reflect the emphasis in the new Welsh curriculum on the inter-connectedness of different subject disciplines across the curriculum.

In the science area, displays encourage pupils to reflect on statement by scientists, such as Stephen Hawkins, Richard Dawkins, Isaac Newton and Galileo. They include the verse from the Jewish Tenach found over the main entrance of the Cavendish Laboratory, the home of the Department of Physics in the University of Cambridge. They also include Marie Curie's statement that, *'Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more so that we may fear less.'* In short, the displays are broad and balanced.

In other areas of the school, the commissioned displays reinforce the school's inclusive and caring ethos, promote the school's commitment to embedding a strong reading culture, and reinforce the school's commitment to promoting the Welsh language and culture. For example, one display makes clear that pupils are valued regardless of their age, sex, additional learning needs, race, sexuality, religion, belief, hobbies or lifestyle. Another provides quotes from authors aimed at inspiring pupils to read, such as C.S Lewis's statement, *'You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me,'* and Malala Yousafzai's observation, *'Let us remember, one book, one pen, one child, and one teacher, can change the world'*. A further display comprises a map of Wales with all locations and places of interest given solely in Welsh, such as Eryri, Bannau Brycheiniog and Castell Caernarfon.

The school commissioned these professional displays to mark the once in a lifetime roll out of a new Curriculum for Wales, one of the most significant junctures in Welsh education history. They have considerably improved the learning environment and have been shared with parents and the wider community through school's termly newsletter which is available on the school website. Inspectors recently noted that, *'the school business manager, headteacher and governing body manage the school budget well. They prioritise expenditure appropriately to match the school's current areas for improvement.'*

Clubs and daily acts of collective worship

Many staff deliver wide-ranging extra-curricular activities and contribute to the delivery of daily acts of collective worship. Extra activities include: dance clubs, sports activities, Duke of Edinburgh training, educational visits and wheelchair rugby. Inspectors recently noted that, *'Many pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular*

opportunities...that help them become healthy, confident individuals' and 'provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to socialise and develop their wider skills outside the classroom.'

The lunchtime Christian club aims to ensure Christian pupils feel supported, valued and safe. It provides a supervised forum in which pupils can explore and talk about their faith with their peers. The Alpha course is a non-denominational resource that is widely used in churches around the world and is familiar to many Christian pupils, but it is not delivered at the school.

While not covered in the article, it is worth noting that the school is careful to comply with requirements concerning the daily act of collective worship. The Education Reform Act 1988 and the Welsh Office Circular 10/94 set out the legal requirements for collective worship in schools in Wales. The law states that schools must provide collective worship daily for all registered pupils. Most acts of collective worship in each term should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. This means that they should reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination. Like other schools across the UK, we respect both the right of staff to withdraw from collective worship and the right of parents' to excuse their child.

In Llanidloes, like many schools across the UK, we fulfil this legal requirement in various ways. Good collective worship promotes spiritual development, contributes to personal development, benefits the whole school community, links the school community and the wider local community, and enhances awareness of global citizenship. Our pupils enjoy thought-provoking assemblies throughout the year. These are variously led by staff, clergy from different denominations, and the pupils themselves. We also have a 'thought for the day' booklet which includes quotes from wide-ranging sources, from the Bible to Benjamin Franklin, Anne Frank to Abraham Lincoln, Hemingway to Hudson Taylor, Aristotle to Albert Einstein, Maya Angelou to Mahatma Gandhi, and Dwight L Moody to Dumbledore. Pupils have an eclectic range of source material to help them reflect on the beliefs of others to help them shape their own spiritual and ethical beliefs.

Inspectors recently found that, *'the school's provision to develop pupils' moral and spiritual education is suitable. Assemblies and tutor time provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on ethical issues. Teachers provide an appropriate PSE programme, which develops pupils' understanding of how to care for themselves, other people and the world.'*

Pastoral care and planners

The school's pastoral care is excellent. Inspectors recently found the school to be, *'a welcoming community, which provides pupils with effective care and guidance. A team of committed staff respond sensitively to pupils' social and emotional needs through a comprehensive and organised support system. The school provides a positive environment for all pupils including those that need additional support in their learning and well-being.'* They acknowledged, *'Year leaders and well-being staff have a thorough understanding of the needs of the pupils in their care. Pupils are provided with helpful emotional support and guidance to overcome any barriers that might prevent them in engaging in learning.'* They noted that, *'The school provides a comprehensive transition programme to ensure positive experiences for*

pupils transferring to the school in Year 7. This is strengthened for vulnerable pupils who benefit from an enhanced programme of activities.'

Pupil planners complement this wider pastoral support system and contain wide-ranging and beneficial pastoral information aimed at promoting pupils' emotional, mental and physical wellbeing and safety, including guidance on: developing a 'Growth Mindset'; codes of conduct; the behaviour system; e-safety advice; revision guidance to reduce stress during exam season; several pages of useful guidance on developing a healthy lifestyle that covers eating well, the value of exercise, the importance of sleep, promoting positive mental wellbeing; identifying warning signs and practical steps to take in response to anxiety and feeling low, such as speaking to a parent, sibling, friend, teacher or GP; tips in response to concerns about eating behaviours and self-harm. A single page in the 141-page planner duplicates Bible references provided by the Gideons in support of Christian children who find them helpful.

And finally...

The school will continue to adhere to the law regarding collective worship, support children from faith communities, delivering our vision for the new Curriculum for Wales including cross-cutting themes such as Religion, Values and Ethics, and providing outstanding pastoral care for all pupils.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me at the school.

Your sincerely,



Daniel Owen (Headteacher)