This briefing presents a response from the Public Health team within Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to Wrexham County Borough Council on the following planning application: -

Application number	P/2025/0337
Location	Ysgol ID Hooson, Heol Caradoc, Rhosllanerchrugog, Wrexham LL14 2DX
Proposal	Demolition of two double classroom buildings and replacement with a new four classroom block for infants/new nursery (phase 1). Construction of new four block classroom for Juniors (phase 2).

1. Summary of recommendations

During this development stage, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Public Health team would encourage the developer to consider the following points:

- Consult with parents and children in relation to ideas of active travel to school, and allow them time and space to voice any concerns in relation to congested volume of traffic around the school area at the start and end of a school day.
- Consult with existing pupils, at different stages of the development.
- Consider the children's thoughts and wishes as they are taken on this transition journey from the existing school classrooms to the new site.
- Consider canopies that open to outdoor areas to enhance outdoor active learning.

Public Health Team response

The following information provides guidance with respect to active travel, access to green and play spaces, active learning opportunities, catering and dinning capacity and infection and prevention control. We would encourage Wrexham County Borough Council to consider this information and key areas of evidence when responding to this application.

2. Active Travel

As part of any school expansion plan it is important to consider how the increase in numbers of pupils and staff will travel to school. We welcome the work undertaken in the transport assessment and school travel plan acknowledging how the potential increase in traffic could affect the local community. There is the potential to mitigate this risk by:

- Establishing designated drop off areas away from the school where parents can park and walk their child or their child can cycle or scoot from
- Encouraging parents to park even a little way from the school reduces congestion and air pollution at the school gates and improves road safety

- Creating car exclusion zones within a particular distance of the school to both reduce air pollution and road traffic accident risk within the immediate vicinity of the school

Active Travel Opportunities

The above three solutions incorporate an element of actively travelling to school. There are many benefits of active travel. Walking and cycling / scooting to school will help to increase attention span during the school day, decrease stress levels, and improve mental health. Active school travel is a great way to prepare for learning.

Providing children and staff with the infrastructure; storage for bikes and scooters and changing facilities to actively travel (walk or cycle / scoot) to school is key to encouraging and increasing the uptake of active travel. The inclusion of bike and scooter storage outlined in the site plans is encouraging.

3. Access to Green spaces

With regards to the plans on extending the existing school, it needs to be considered carefully and ensured that the new erection of the new classroom units does not have a detrimental effect on the school's ability to offer physical activity opportunities and reduce the availability of green spaces for children to enjoy and learn in.

4. Access to play spaces

As part of the new erection of the classroom units, careful consideration and planning should be taken to ensure the offer of enriched play opportunities for children to enjoy their school playground area. Engagement with the existing pupils within the school would be a key part of the planning.

As noted by Play Wales[i], children say that playtimes are the most important part of the school day to them. They have the right to time and space to play as part of their school day. In Wales children's free time is increasingly scarce and opportunities for outdoor play are steadily decreasing. So, school playtime is vital to children for their fun and relaxation as well as for their health and wellbeing. It is part of their 'work/life balance' therefore it is important that their school playgrounds are of an adequate size to provide them with a rich play environment.

School landscape and playground design presents an opportunity to improve the quality of time spent outdoors both for pupils and staff. An optimised school playground design can support positive benefits[ii] such as:

- the provision of positive social experiences for children
- increased attention and activity in the classroom
- a reduction in violent behaviour within the school playground

Whilst making developments to erect the new and replacement classrooms, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Public Health team would suggest that the developers allow thought and time to observe how the school pupils at Ysgol ID Hooson are playing within their existing area of play to inform plans.

It is important for the developers to be mindful that school playgrounds support pupils in active running, games, sports and enriched play opportunities. Consideration should also be thought of those pupils who wish to socialise or contemplate alone as well.

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Public Health team recommends that the developer consults with the school pupils and the Healthy School's team (taking all their opinions on board) to adopt a new enriched play environment for the school pupils.

Ideas on ways to support the school pupils to adapt to the new school ground setting could include playground markings and zoning of areas to support curriculum delivery and provide a range of activities for children to play together. Markings such as number squares and targets can be useful for active learning during curriculum time. We know that less structured activity can be squeezed out of most school playgrounds by the playing of large ball games which can dominate a play space. Giving thought to different zones within the school playground can protect areas to encourage free play, access to loose parts play and other less structured activities.

5. Active Learning across the curriculum

Children and young people spend up to eight hours at school each day and many classroom learning environments encourage prolonged periods of sedentary behaviour, i.e., sitting. There are many benefits of creating a more active curriculum including greater concentration, motivation and participation from the pupils. An erection of the new classroom units presents an excellent opportunity to consider creating a more active learning space throughout the whole curriculum.

Points for consideration:

- Increase awareness of the potential impact of prolonged sitting/screen time on health,
- Seek ideas to plan and provide opportunities for the pupils to receive a reduced amount of sedentary activities within the classroom.
- Windows could be replaced with doors that allow a canopy above each opening to the outside areas. This would allow the school to:
    - provide opportunities for learners to have classroom movement breaks where prolonged periods of sedentary behaviour are experienced;
    - encourage active discussion time and walking classrooms
    - provide opportunities for out of classroom learning through planned opportunities for outdoor learning
    - integrate physical activity into learning and teaching activities across all areas of learning and experiences
    - provide staff with outside space from the staff room.

6. Creative spaces and curriculums

Arts and creativity support the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. There is strong evidence[iii] that arts and creativity can aid infant and child social development and the wellbeing of young people. The arts can also support[iv] prevention of ill health and promotion of good health, and recommendations encourage engagement with the arts across the life course.

The arts can improve the appearance of spaces that can stimulate, relax, distract, and inspire, depending on the colours, materials, and design and how they are utilised. It is important for the look and feel of spaces to be considered so that they can serve their practical purpose and enhance creativity, learning, and imagination. Art works, colours and materials should be carefully chosen to reflect the intentional use and purpose of a given space, and those who will use it. Employing and utilising professional artists can help achieve this.

Providing space and regular opportunities for creative activities is important for young people. The arts are a broad spectrum, and it is recommended that children and young people should be introduced to a broad range of age appropriate, culturally diverse art

forms including: performing arts (music, dance, theatre, singing, film), visual arts (crafts, deign, painting, photography, sculpture and textiles), literature (creative writing and reading), culture (museums, galleries, art exhibitions, concerts, the theatre, community events, cultural festivals and fairs), and online digital electronic arts (animations, film-making and computer graphics). This can enhance learning and encourage play. A recurrent creative arts and cultural offer can provide opportunities for young people to express themselves in creatively imaginative ways that may support their wider learning and educational experience. Ensuring that there are dedicated spaces, materials, and opportunities for creative engagement is important and can enhance opportunities for active learning and engagement with green and play spaces.

7. Catering and dining space capacity

With regards to the extension to the existing school building, it needs to be ensured that the capacity of the support facilities such as catering are adequate to ensure that healthy food is able to be prepared and distributed to children on-site and that there is appropriate and adequate dining areas which give space and time for both children and staff to access to eat food.

8. Infection and prevention control

The proposed plans must ensure that the facility can operate in accordance with all current guidance[v] on infection prevention and control for childcare, pre-school, and educational settings.

References

[i] Play in schools - Play Wales
[ii] A Play Friendly School
[iii] The role of arts in improving health and wellbeing
[iv] Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report
[v] Health Protection Guidance for childcare, preschool and education settings