

Formal consultation to establish a new
Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport
Learner's Voice Survey Report

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1. Introduction

Newport City Council is seeking to open a new Welsh-medium secondary school, to serve the city of Newport and south Monmouthshire. The Council held a consultation exercise between 1 March and 12 April 2016, to seek views on the following proposal:

“To establish a seedling Welsh-medium secondary school, sharing the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon on a temporary basis from September 2016 and subsequent transfer to the original site on Duffryn Way, Newport as soon as possible, or to a permanent location yet to be determined, at the earliest available opportunity.”

As part of this consultation exercise, a Learner’s Voice Survey was undertaken with pupils at the four Welsh-medium primary schools directly affected by the proposal, namely:

Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon, Newport
Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd, Newport
Ysgol Gymraeg Ifor Hael, Newport
Ysgol Gymraeg y Ffin, Caldicot

Written questionnaires were distributed to schools, and given to pupils at school councils and other meetings. The questionnaires were completed in the school by the eldest pupils. They included eight questions in total: four tick-box questions asking pupils to choose from three options – yes / no / don't know – and four questions that enabled the pupils to give more comprehensive responses.

There will be around 90 pupils in the school during the first year. Eighty-seven completed questionnaires were received, giving a good representation of the new school's prospective pupils. This report summarises the responses.

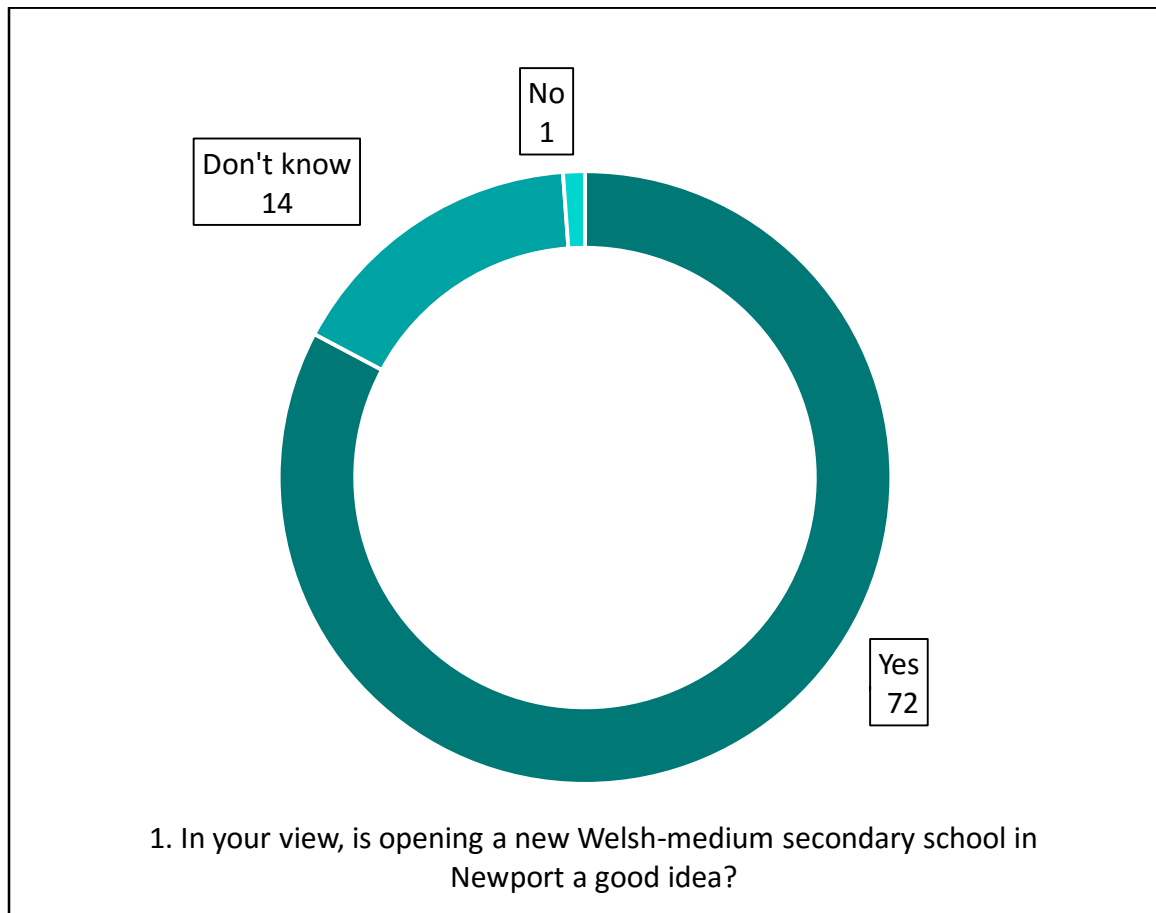
N.B. This report includes edited excerpts from the completed questionnaires. As the original surveys were completed in Welsh, the survey's questions and any answers included within this report are translated into English from the original.

2. Level of support for opening a new school in Newport

The survey's first question asked pupils for their views on the general proposal of opening a Welsh-medium school in Newport:

Question 1: In your view, is opening a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport a good idea?

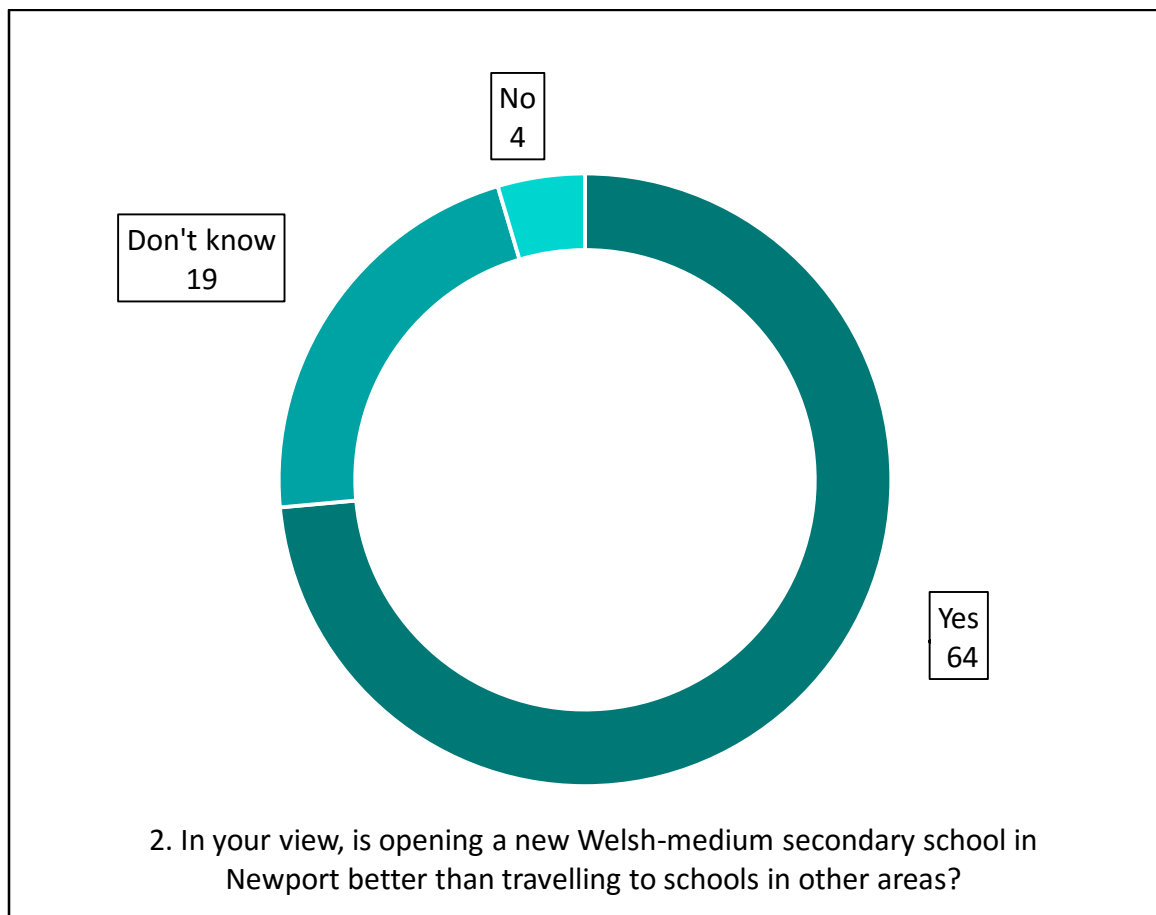
Of the 87 pupils who completed the survey, 72 agreed that opening a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport is a good idea. Only one pupil said that opening the school was not a good idea. Fourteen pupils were unsure.



The second question asked specifically whether a Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport would be preferable to travelling to schools in other areas:

Question 2: In your view, is opening a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport better than travelling to schools in other areas?

Once again, the vast majority of pupils agreed that a Welsh-medium school in Newport would be preferable to travelling to school in other areas. Sixty-four pupils agreed, while only four disagreed. Nineteen pupils were uncertain.



One of the nineteen pupils who ticked "don't know" offered an explanation for their response:

“Depends what the new school is going to be like”

3. The advantages and drawbacks of having a Welsh-medium school in Newport

The survey's third question asked pupils to identify the advantages of having a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport:

Question 3: In your view, what will be the good things about having a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport?

All but one pupil could name at least one advantage of having a new Welsh-medium school, with 23 pupils listing two or more advantages. This is the question that encouraged the most extended responses from pupils.

Of the 86 pupils who believed there are advantages to the proposal, a very high proportion – 53 pupils – made some reference to distance:

“Closer, easier, better than travelling for ages on a bus”

“It's closer to where Newport's Welsh-speaking children live”

“I can go to school where I live”

“We won't have to choose between giving up on our Welsh or travelling so far”

Indeed, the Welsh language is also a consistent theme in the responses identifying the advantages of opening a new school:

“Because we can keep our language, Welsh”

“Because we’ve gone to a Welsh school for 7 years and it will have been for nothing if we have to go to an English school”

Opening a new school is also seen as a step that will benefit the Welsh language more widely:

“The Welsh language will have a better chance”

“It keeps the language alive in Newport”

Some respondents suggested that opening the school in Newport would lead to more children having opportunities to receive Welsh-medium education:

“Children from English schools will be able to go there”

“It will give other children a chance to speak Welsh”

Friends were an important theme in the responses to this question:

“I’ll be with my friends”

“We’ll meet new friends”

Several pupils identified the benefits of new provision:

“New books and new dining tables”

“A large yard and school clubs”

“A better education”

“A brand new school”

Some pupils felt that the move would be a historic step:

“In my opinion it's good because we're creating history”

“We'll be the first year in the school. The first Welsh-medium school in Newport.”

One pupil chose not to identify an advantage of having a new school, noting:

“I don't think building a new school is a good thing, there's too much fuss”

The fourth question asked the pupils to name any reasons for not opening a Welsh medium secondary school as proposed:

Question 4: In your view, are there any reasons why we should not open a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport in September?

Of the 87 survey responses received, 21 pupils gave reasons why a Welsh-medium secondary school should not be opened in Newport in September.

The fact that some pupils would be at a different school to siblings was noted more than once:

“Because I want to go with my sister”

“Some children can't be with their families”

There were some references to the proposed site, including potential issues with the suitability of the site:

“The Duffryn area isn't a very nice area”

“Because the site could have floods”

A lack of pupils or a lack of teachers was suggested as one possible reason:

“Few teachers”

“There won't be many children at the school”

For one pupil, Newport is not the most convenient location for a new school:

“Because I don't live close to Newport”

The cost was noted by one pupil as a reason not to open the school:

“It will cost loads of money”

One pupil suggested that political objection to the Welsh language would be one reason for not opening the school:

“People don't like the Welsh language”

Some pupils referred to the intention of locating the school on the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnion temporarily:

“In my opinion, we shouldn't open the school in September, because we won't feel excited because we've already attended Bro Teyrnion!”

“We'll need to go to Bro Teyrnion for two years and we won't have a 'high school experience'. We won't have older people to look up to. The school won't be ready, we only have a name and a headteacher, everything else is just on paper”

It appears that some pupils misread the formal negative in this question, and thought they were being asked why a new school should be opened:

“It's close to where children live”

“Because you don't want to let people down”

“Because if you don't, we won't have a school to go to”

Nevertheless, most pupils understood the question, and most chose to refrain from identifying a reason not to open a new school. Many left a blank or wrote 'no'. However, some pupils gave a further explanation:

“No, I think it's a sensible idea”

“I think open it in September”

“No! We need this school”

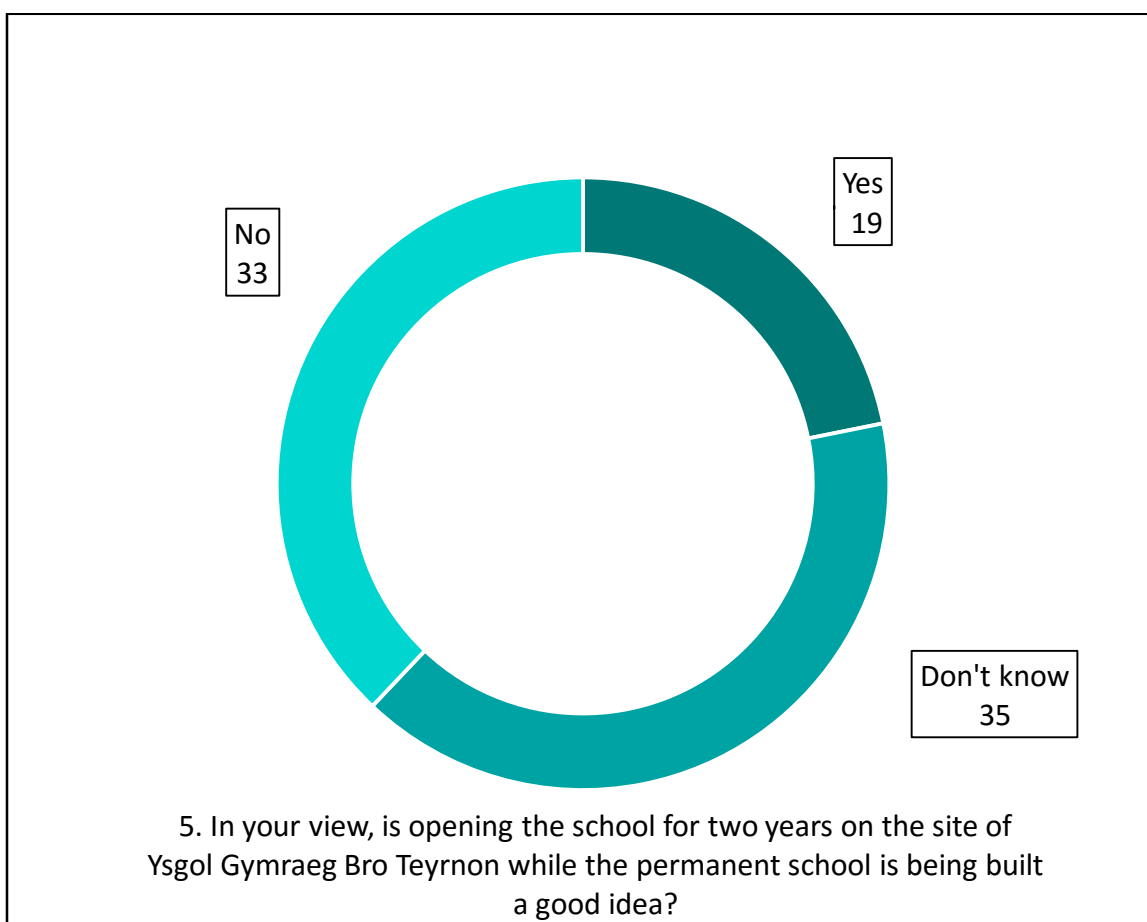
“No, I think it's an incredible idea”

3. Temporary site for the school on the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrn

The survey's fifth question asked pupils for their views on the proposal of opening the school on the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrn temporarily:

Question 5: In your view, is opening the school for two years on the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrn while the permanent school is being built a good idea?

The response to this question was much more mixed. Only 19 of the responses agreed that this was a good idea, while 33 disagreed. The highest number of pupils – 35 altogether – had chosen 'don't know'.



One pupil who had chosen 'no' added comments to explain their response:

“Bro Teyrn is not a very big school, Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd has more room for us to have Year Seven”

The sixth question gave pupils an opportunity to elaborate on their views on sharing the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon for two years:

Question 6: In your view, will sharing the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon while the new school is built be a good thing or a bad thing?

Although some pupils were uncertain or could see both sides of the argument, the high number of 'don't knows' in the previous question is not reflected here to the same extent. Furthermore, of those who gave a clear indication of whether the plan would be good or bad, they are broadly equal for and against.

Some saw the plan as an opportunity to ensure an easier transition between the primary and secondary:

“It could be a good idea because we'll be more comfortable because it's a primary school”

“Good because it will give us time to get used to secondary school”

Some identified economic benefits for the Council of the two schools sharing a site:

“In my opinion it's a good idea because it costs less to share”

Some pupils believed that the proposal was a good one, but were concerned that there would be insufficient space:

“It will be a good thing because we will make new friends but on the other hand it will be cramped”

A lack of space was also a concern for the pupils who saw the proposal as a bad one:

“Bad because there won't be much room for everyone”

Another concern was that it would affect their experience of starting at secondary school:

“Bad because we want to be in a secondary school”

“No because you're losing two years of being in a real school”

“Bad because people from Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd want to go to secondary school”

“Bad because we won't have the resources we need”

One pupil noted that they didn't mind, and a number of pupils saw advantages and disadvantages to the proposal:

“I don't mind where we go”

“Good in one way! Bad in another!”

A final theme identified in this question was that several pupils could see disadvantages in sharing a site, but recognised that it was preferable to some of the other possibilities:

**“I believe that sharing Ysgol Bro Teyrnnon is not better.
But personally I would prefer to share than have
nothing.”**

“It's not great but we can make do”

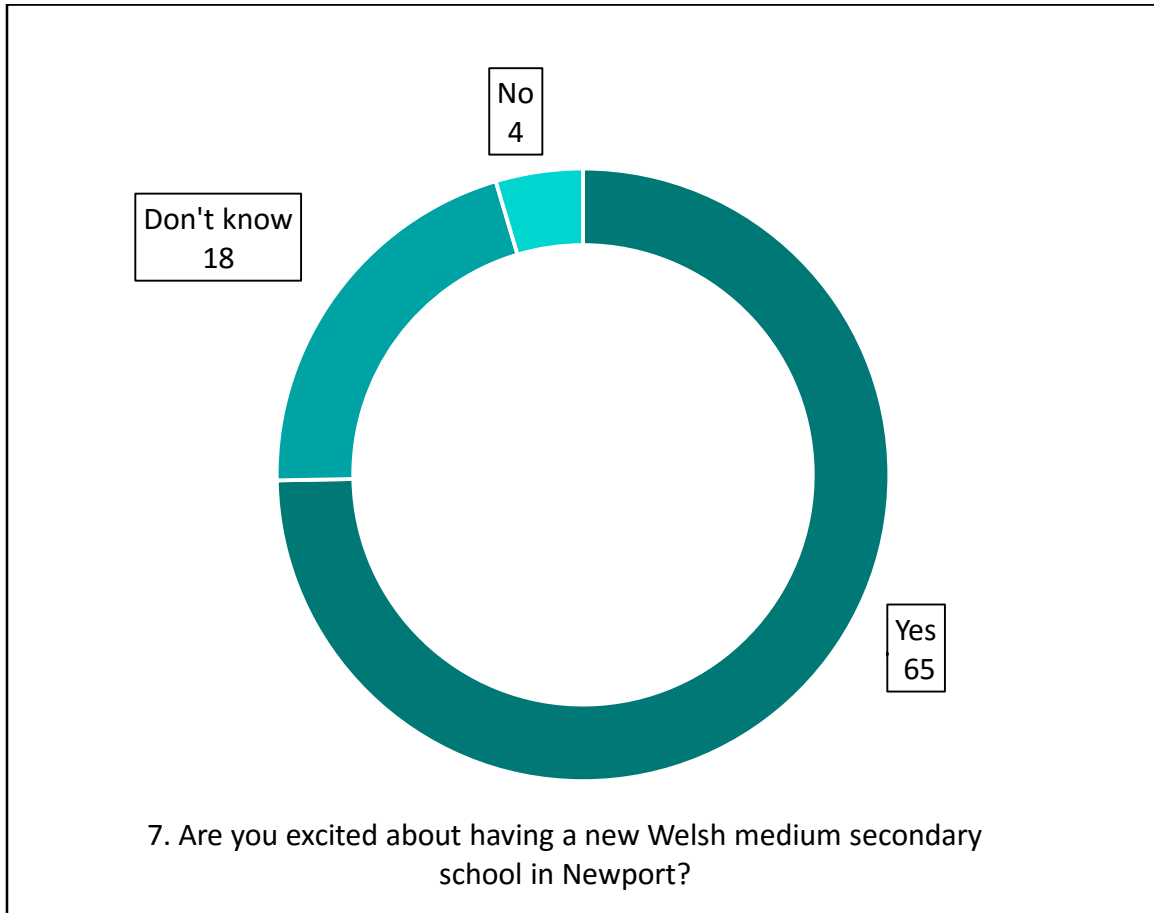
**“Yes and no, because it's better than wherever I would
go otherwise”**

4. Other comments

The survey's seventh question asked pupils whether they are looking forward to having a new Welsh-medium secondary school:

Question 7: Are you excited about having a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport?

Of the 87 responses, 65 pupils said they were excited, and four said they were not excited. Eighteen pupils were unsure.



The eighth question was an opportunity for the pupils to share any other comments they had:

Question 8: Do you have anything else you would like to share with us?

Of the 87 responses, 59 pupils chose not to write anything or stated they did not have any further comments.

One theme in the additional comments was a concern about the long term plans:

“What will happen if the school is still not ready in two years?”

“Please try to get us to only go to Bro Teyrnnon for 1 year”

“We need a real school quickly”

Another common theme were comments or enquiries about resources at the new school:

“I like clubs and sports. Will there be football and netball clubs after school?”

“Does it have a 3D projector?”

“I want after school clubs, and choosing what to eat. Having big chairs to sit on and big tables”

There were some references to Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, and a suggestion of another potential location for the new building:

“I really want to go to Gwynllyw but it costs too much!”

**“What about the University of South Wales
(Caerleon campus)?”**

There was more than one request for information:

“I would like more information”

“I would like more information about the travelling”

And a desire to contribute to the work of establishing the school:

“Creating a name, creating a uniform and helping”

There were also comments that reinforced responses given to previous questions, some showing concern and others looking ahead confidently:

**“Please build the new school or I'll need to go to an
English school”**

“We're going to be happy in the new school”

5. Conclusion

It is clear that the opening of a Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport is strongly supported by pupils from the proposed feeder schools. They demonstrate pride in their ability to speak Welsh, and an unwillingness to lose the language. They see the opening of a Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport as something that will benefit them personally as well as Newport and its people more generally.

In terms of locating the school temporarily on the site of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon, views are more mixed. Objections to the proposal are centred on lack of space, and the perception that it could lead them to miss out on the experience of being in a 'real' secondary school. However, some pupils do see the benefits of the proposal in allowing an easier transition between primary and secondary, and even among those opposing the move there is an acknowledgement that the proposal is a necessity in view of the lack of alternative options in the short term.

The majority of students are looking forward to having a Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport, and comments also reflect an enthusiasm for the new school building, as well as a desire to contribute ideas and to receive more information. Further discussion and communication with these pupils will be vital, especially with regard to the proposed two-year site at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Teyrnnon.

Although further discussions will continue, it is hoped that this report conveys the learner's voice about the Council's intentions regarding the opening of a new Welsh-medium secondary school in Newport, and gives an insight of their enthusiasm, ideas and intelligence in their own words. With that in mind, the pupils should have the last word:

“I can't wait for the secondary school. I'm so excited”

**“I'll be proud to be in the first year at
Ysgol Gyfun Gwent Is Coed”**