

Did education improve for Pembrokeshire
school children in the interwar period?

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Abstract

This study attempts to understand to what extent the education of children in Pembrokeshire improved between the First and Second World Wars.

The introduction looks at standards of education in Pembrokeshire at the end of the First World War. Following this, measures put in place by the Government to improve the education of the children of the nation as a whole will be discussed, and any initiatives implemented by the local authority to further this. More specifically, poor attendance impacted on children's experiences of school and therefore improvements made to ensure better attendance will be examined, including the impact of changes seeking to improve their health. Linked to these issues will be the condition of educational buildings and the impact of this on children and their day-to-day schooling. Educational developments will be studied, discussing the changes that occurred in the school curriculum and teaching methodology to improve standards. Where possible, the effect of the Depression on education will be examined. The conclusion will discuss whether standards of education improved over the interwar period and attempt to explain the reasons for and the effects of any improvement or decline. The broad focus for the study will be Wales, with case studies related to Pembrokeshire where possible, to highlight specific developments within the county.

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Introduction – Pembrokeshire in 1918

Pembrokeshire: a typical agricultural community and a largely rural area with scattered schools and a low rateable value.¹ This is how the *Times Educational Supplement* depicted the county, whilst the *South Wales News* described Pembrokeshire as ‘remote from centres of wealth and learning, sparsely populated, the isolation of visitors and schools, and two distinct racial and language areas.’²

Pembrokeshire’s population growth had been slower compared with Great Britain as a whole prior to World War One. The 1911 Census shows that approximately thirty per cent of Pembrokeshire’s 90,943 people were children under the age of fifteen; though this percentage dropped to around twenty-four per cent by 1939, it was still higher than the average for Great Britain during the interwar years.³

Post-war Pembrokeshire faced many privations but Pembrokeshire people were looking forward to post-war life with hope, the question of reconstruction often being discussed in council meetings and newspapers. Pembrokeshire Education Committee reports of 1918 were optimistic for the future of education in the county; pupils would be afforded greater opportunities providing changes were effected. Milford Haven County School’s headmaster noted that governors were ‘alive to the necessity of

¹ Pembrokeshire Records Office (PRO) PCC/ED/17/13 *The Times Educational Supplement*, 17 October 1925.

² PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *South Wales News*, 24 October 1925.

³ GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Pembrokeshire through time | Historical Statistics on Population for the District/Unitary Authority | Rate: Percentage aged under 15, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10103228/rate/AGE_0_14 (Accessed on 19 October 2017)

increasing the present accommodation and of furthering the welfare and health of the pupils in every way.’⁴

At a public meeting in Milford Haven, Mr. T.C. Morris of the N.U.R. Executive questioned the practice of children leaving school for employment at fourteen to contribute to family life and support younger siblings - he aimed that ‘education shall be full, free and open to every child.’⁵

Prospective Labour candidate for Pembrokeshire, Alderman Ivor Gwynne, believed elementary education offered no real value to children; only five per cent of elementary pupils proceeded to secondary education. His pledge was secondary education for ‘every boy and girl in the land’ irrespective of their parents’ wealth.⁶ Local headmistress Miss Evans recommended girls should be involved in the work of reconstruction and therefore have more opportunities, being educated as well as boys.⁷ Although Pembrokeshire was primarily an agricultural county, more pupils aspired to clerical employment and continuation classes were necessary. Several evening classes

⁴ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 24 April 1918, p.4.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119267/4119271> (Accessed March 2018)

⁵ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 26 June 1918, p.3.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119312/4119315> (Accessed March 2018)

⁶ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 27 November 1918, p.3.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119422/4119425> (Accessed March 2018)

⁷ Miss Evans, St Martins’ Girls’ Council School, Headmistress’ Report. *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 6 March 1918, p.3.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119237/4119240> (Accessed March 2018)

were held, such as typewriting and shorthand at Tasker's School⁸ and winter classes in reading, English, arithmetic and geography at Mathry; fees were repaid if a pupil's attendance was high.⁹

Pembrokeshire Education Committee believed private day and boarding schools should be open to local authority inspection also. It debated the gulf between elementary and secondary education and aimed to foster easier transition between the two types of school by promoting greater cooperation between them. It looked to other countries' education systems for inspiration; Haverfordwest headmaster George James noted that rural schools in France provided agricultural instruction, Dutch schools provided instruction relating to local industries such as dairies, and Swiss schools' technical training was pertinent to local industry needs.¹⁰

Ultimately the motivation for many Pembrokeshire parents to send their children to school was simply to enable them to earn a living – what George James called 'the Bread and Butter aim'.¹¹ He believed many parents only sent children to school because it was there, or because other parents did, yet some did so consciously because they

⁸ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 01 October 1919, p.3.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119629/4119632/38/evening%20typewriting%20classes%20taskers%201918> (Accessed March 2018)

⁹ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 23 October 1918, p.2.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119397/4119399> (Accessed March 2018)

¹⁰ Mr George James, speaking at the Mid Pembrokeshire Association Meeting of the N.U.T. *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 26 June 1918, p.4.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119312/4119316> (Accessed March 2018)

¹¹ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 26 June 1918, p.1.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119312/4119313> (Accessed March 2018)

knew that education could enable their child to earn a livelihood. The wish for a wider system of education was growing.

Aims and Methodology

Interest in the topic of education stems from the writer's own experiences as a primary school teacher over twenty-five years. Previous modules on education in south-west Wales focusing on the causes and effects of significant changes and reforms were thought-provoking; this prompted the writer to examine similarities and differences between educational systems and approaches over the years. Victorian schools and the educational experiences of evacuees during World War Two are well documented which prompted questions about the period between the wars; what life was like at the time and what changes had occurred since the previous century. Pembrokeshire became the focus, being the county where the writer was both a pupil and a teacher.

At the start, the study was too broad, encompassing children's home life and housing, employment and leisure; the approach needed to be refined so the original focus on education resumed. Attendance issues formed part of the research; poor attendance affected children's experience of school, therefore factors including health and effects of the Depression needed consideration. Reforms to improve child health and welfare also impacted on attendance and were relevant, such as the school meals service, the school medical service and changes in juvenile employment.

The methodology involved personal research coupled with reading secondary sources. Primary research was structured by the amount of sources available at Pembrokeshire Archives and Local Studies in Haverfordwest; although the sources

covered a wide range of topics across the period, inevitably there were gaps. The approach was to first examine life in Pembrokeshire at the beginning of the period. Reading all available copies of the local newspaper, *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Reporter*¹ for 1918 served to reinforce (and sometimes challenge) ideas gained from reading local history books and provided a useful benchmark for Pembrokeshire life in 1918. Similarly, useful statistics provided by the Vision of Britain website² added to the picture of life in the county at the time.

A variety of secondary source materials helped to understand the historiography. The next step was to establish a timeline of events for the period, into which specific Acts, Reports and other notable events could be fitted. This allowed the views of historians to be more clearly understood. Conclusions were largely formed by reading the work of Gareth Elwyn Jones, who has produced the largest volume of material related to education in Wales during the interwar period.³ His work provided a useful comparison of secondary education in Wales and England and helped in

¹ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Reporter*, 1918.

<https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/4116145> (Accessed in March 2018)

² GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Pembrokeshire District through time | Census tables with data for the District/Unitary Authority, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10103228> (Accessed on 19 October 2017)

³ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982); *Which Nation's Schools?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990); *Modern Wales: A Concise History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Policy and Power: One Hundred Years of Local Education Authorities in Wales in *Oxford Review of Education*, Volume 28, Number 2/3, A Century of Local Education Authorities. June-September 2002, pp. 343-358. Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1050917> (Accessed on 24 November 2018); Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).

understanding that for governments, preserving the social order sometimes outweighed educational priorities.⁴ As a Whitland School pupil himself, he has written the only material specifically devoted to education in Pembrokeshire,⁵ most other materials relating only to Wales, or to England with a Welsh dimension to part of the research. As such, his work was invaluable.

As the range of secondary reading broadened, it was evident that many historians quote from the work of Brian Simon,⁶ whose ideas helped to shape the conclusion of this study. His discussion of a 'top-down' approach to elementary education was helpful, along with other work regarding the issue of class distinctions and social reforms. Felicity Hunt's work was useful in providing an insight into the education of girls, providing a different perspective for the research.⁷ Bronwen Swinnerton's focus on *The Primary School Report* of 1931 gave a useful context for developments related specifically to primary schools and the challenges arising from these,⁸ and the work of Maurice Galton, Brian Simon and Paul Croll was useful to

⁴ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Which Nation's Schools? Direction and Devolution in Welsh Education in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), p.31.

⁵ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *The Education of a Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

⁶ Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-40* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974).

⁷ Felicity Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for life: the schooling of girls and women, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

⁸ Bronwen Swinnerton, 'The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: Tensions and Contradictions' in *History of Education*, Volume 25, Number 1, 1996.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760960250105> (Accessed on 02 January 2020)

compare interpretations of such changes, notably their views that some influential reforms were motivated by concern only for older pupils.⁹

Willem Van der Eyken's collection of extracts of primary sources,¹⁰ and footnotes contained in secondary sources were of much use as they referenced Consultative Committee Reports, and Board of Education Circulars and Pamphlets,¹¹ some specifically related to the Welsh Department, which led to further research of this

⁹ Maurice Galton, Brian Simon and Paul Croll, *Inside the primary classroom (The ORACLE Report)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

¹⁰ Willem van der Eyken, *Education, the child and society: a documentary history, 1900-1973* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1973).

¹¹ *Departmental Committee on juvenile education in relation to employment after the war* (London: H.M.S.O., 1917). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/lewis1917/index.html> (Accessed on 30 November 2019); *Report of the Departmental Committee on Scholarships and Free Places* (London: H.M.S.O., 1920). <http://educationengland.org.uk/documents/young1920/young1920.html> (Accessed on 17 February 2020); *Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls Respectively in Secondary Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1923). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1923/hadow1923.html> (Accessed on 09 February 2020); *Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on The Education of the Adolescent* (London: H.M.S.O., 1927). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1926/hadow1926.html> (Accessed on 28 February 2020); *Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on Books in Public Elementary Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1928). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1928/hadow1928.html> (Accessed on 01 March 2020); *Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School* (London: H.M.S.O., 1931). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1931/hadow1931.html> (Accessed on 26 January 2020); *Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1938). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/spens/spens1938.html> (Accessed on 15 January 2020); *Board of Education Educational Pamphlets Number 60, The New Prospect in Education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1928). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/boardofed/1928-new-prospect.html> (Accessed on 12 January 2020); *Ministry of Education Welsh Department, Education in Rural Wales* (London: H.M.S.O., 1930); *Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, No. 110. Homework* (London: H.M.S.O., 1937). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/boardofed/1937-homework.html#05> (Accessed on 01 March 2020); *Ministry of Education Welsh Department, Education in Wales 1847-1947, Welsh Department Pamphlet Number 2* (London: H.M.S.O., 1948).

primary material. Also useful was the Historic Hansard service,¹² which provided access to addresses made to the House by prominent figures of the time, allowing for a better understanding of the depth of feeling provoked by attempts to reform and the feelings of frustration resulting from budget cuts.

While the use of secondary sources shaped the outline of this work and helped in forming opinions, it was the primary source material from the Pembrokeshire Archives that provided more specific focus related to Pembrokeshire and allowed Education Committee Reports and minutes from meetings to be consulted, which gave relevant facts and figures, in addition to opinions and discussions.

Additionally, the work of contemporary authors provided authentic ideologies and responses to change, particularly the writings of Edmond Holmes¹³ and Susan Isaacs;¹⁴ their forward-thinking ideas are still found in today's classrooms and their concerns are still felt by today's teachers, just within a different context. With different economic conditions and support from like-minded individuals, their suggestions may have contributed to quicker and more deep-rooted reform. Similarly, M.K. Ashby's

¹² Parliamentary debates in the 1920s <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1920s> and parliamentary debates in the 1930s. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1930s> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

¹³ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1911). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/holmes/whatis.html> (Accessed on 17 February 2020)

¹⁴ Susan Isaacs, *The Children We Teach* (London: University of London Press, 1932, 14th Impression, 1959).

work provided an excellent overview of rural schools during the period.¹⁵ The history of Tenby's Greenhill School, written by former teacher Wilfred Harrison, was extremely useful, giving specific details of how reforms affected the district.¹⁶

So little secondary material relates directly to education in Pembrokeshire during the interwar period, meaning that this study is largely original and furthers the story of education in this county. Many primary sources exist, and therefore the topic would benefit from further and more detailed research.

¹⁵ M.K. Ashby, *The Country School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).

¹⁶ Wilfred Harrison, *Greenhill School Tenby 1896-1964. An Educational and Social History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979).

Government Acts and Local Authority Initiatives

Interwar governments introduced many measures to improve the education of the nation's children; developing their minds and improving their health was central to Britain's post-war reconstruction plans. Unfortunately, class-based attitudes to education were still strongly entrenched. Many believed elementary education would suffice for working-class children, arguing that post-elementary education would not be used in their future occupations, rendering the expense futile.

1917's Lewis Report informed the 1918 Education Act; it confirmed a growing feeling that children should be seen as children, not as little adults or prospective wage earners. The Report estimated that only thirteen per cent of children received any education after the age of fourteen and only five per cent in secondary schools;¹ continuing education would offer them more choices.

The Act abolished all payments for elementary education. It ended the half-time system of education and restricted types of juvenile employment - attendance from the age of five until fourteen was made compulsory, with no exemptions. The Lewis Report noted the benefits of education until fifteen but accommodating the influx of pupils aged twelve to fourteen made necessary by the Act was already an enormous task. Opposition to further increasing the leaving age was prevalent; employers opposed

¹ *Departmental Committee on juvenile education in relation to employment after the war*. (London: H.M.S.O., 1917) p.3. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/lewis1917/index.html> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

releasing children from work to attend new compulsory continuation schools while parents needed their children's financial contribution to the family income. Gareth Elwyn Jones questions whether the Act was a missed opportunity to repeal the 1889 Education Act,² and notes it had no Welsh dimension.³

Local authorities were responsible for implementing initiatives to improve education, submitting schemes to the Board of Education and ensuring 'children and young persons shall not be debarred from receiving the benefits of any form of education by which they are capable of profiting through inability to pay fees.'⁴ Pembrokeshire's Draft Scheme included the provision of ten pure central/continuation schools and fifteen central/continuation departments, such as at Warren School for pupils from Stackpole, Bosherton and Orielson. It proposed four new schools and one self-contained 'higher top' for Angle and Pwllcrochan, it being impossible to provide practical instruction in both.⁵ Jones notes that District H.M.I. Cassie Davies was unimpressed, reporting to the Welsh Department of the Board of Education that

² Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), p.67.

³ Gareth Elwyn Jones, Policy and Power: One Hundred Years of Local Education Authorities in Wales in *The Oxford Review of Education*, Volume 28, Number 2/3, A Century of Local Education Authorities (June - September 2002), p.348. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1050917> (Accessed on 24 November 2018)

⁴ From the Education Act 1918, Section 4(4), re-enacted in Education Act 1921, Section 14(4). Quoted in the *Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*. (London: H.M.S.O., 1938) p.305. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/spens/spens1938.html> (Accessed on 15 January 2020)

⁵ Pembrokeshire Records Office (PRO) SSM/1/132 County of Pembroke, Education Act 1918. *Draft Scheme of Education Committee for submission to the Board of Education pursuant to the Education Act 1918* (Haverfordwest, 1920)

Pembrokeshire's Development Plan was 'badly considered' and drafted only in order to present the Ministry with something on paper.⁶

Pembrokeshire Education Committee believed the challenges produced by the Act would result in 'years of experiment and readjustment'. It acknowledged that bringing together the older children from isolated districts was the only way to improve education but noted parents would oppose the new distances pupils would have to travel to school.⁷

The Act's implementation was suspended in 1921, following the collapse of the post-war boom. The so-called 'Geddes Axe' recommended £18m of education cuts to reduce public expenditure. Despite the poor condition of schools, programmes of building and repair that had been halted in wartime were further postponed. Geddes recommended closing small schools, increasing class sizes and raising the school entry age to six, with fewer free places and increased fees. S.J. Curtis argues the Act's 'administrative weaknesses' allowed cuts to be easily made;⁸ G.E. Sherington agrees the Act's failure was partially due to its own limitations but also attitudes in central

⁶ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Which Nation's Schools? Direction and Devolution in Welsh Education in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990).

⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/17/27 Central Schools Education Act Memorandum No. 6 by Director of Education Pembrokeshire Education Authority 1 December 1919, p.4.

⁸ S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (University Tutorial Press, 1967), pp.341-2.

educational administration.⁹ Socialist reformer R.H. Tawney felt the education system would regress to being a 'privilege of the rich'.¹⁰ The *Western Mail* stated that in the public's opinion, Geddes' reforms were not sufficiently stringent; only those capable of benefitting from it should receive secondary education, excluding children who would not utilise their learning in their future occupations or were not of sufficient 'mental calibre'.¹¹

Continuation schools were lost in the cuts. Brian Simon believes the Act 'did not mark a stage in educational advance'; its only result was to abolish the half-time system.¹² Pembrokeshire Education Committee reported that the period 1921-2 was 'educationally one of great activity but little progress' in the county, seeking to 'resist attacks on educational efficiency in the name of economy'.¹³ As Lawson and Silver state, public expenditure cuts made even maintaining the status quo in educational provision difficult.¹⁴

⁹ G.E. Sherington, The 1918 Education Act: Origins, Aims and Development. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Volume 24, Number 1, February 1976. p.78. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3120755> (Accessed on 08 February 2020)

¹⁰ Article by R.H. Tawney, *The Guardian*, 21 February 1922. <https://www.theguardian.com/century/1920-1929/Story/0,,99380,00.html> (Accessed on 17 January 2020)

¹¹ Extracts from an article in the *Western Mail*, 11 February 1922 (Catalogue ref: MH 96/199) <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/twenties-britain-part-one/geddes-axe-in-wales/> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

¹² Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), p.357. Quoted in Derek Gillard, *Education in England: a history*, Chapter 7: 1900-1923 Secondary education for some (2018). <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter07.html> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

¹³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2 Pembrokeshire Education Committee Report for 1 September 1921 to 31 August 1924.

¹⁴ John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen, 1973), p.385.

Pembrokeshire's Economic Committee recommended tighter analysis of maintenance allowance claims from 1922, alongside reductions in the per capita requisition allowance - 5s. per pupil in larger schools, 5s. 6d. in schools of fewer than one hundred pupils. Pembrokeshire spent more per child on elementary education than the average for Wales, possibly due to the increased costs of running smaller schools.¹⁵ By 1926 Pembrokeshire Education Committee noted that 'financial stringency [is] making any marked advance impossible.'¹⁶

Writing in 1922, Fabian Society member Barbara Drake stated that seventy-five per cent of elementary pupils were 'intellectually capable of profiting by further whole-time instruction up to sixteen or beyond';¹⁷ but children whose parents could afford the fees could be taught in place of academically able poor children. Pembrokeshire pupils receiving free secondary places increased by 51.9 per cent (from 445 in 1914 to 676 in 1923) but many needed maintenance allowances to subsidise family income for their loss of earnings. Despite this rise in free places, Pembrokeshire trailed behind the average for Wales which saw a ninety-six per cent increase.¹⁸

¹⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2.

¹⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3 Report 1 September 1924 to 31 August 1926, p.1.

¹⁷ Barbara Drake, *Some problems of education* (London: The Fabian Society, 1922), p.10.
<https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:quv422pox/read/single#page/2/mode/2up>
 (Accessed on 01 December 2017)

¹⁸ Number of children in each county of England and Wales who were in receipt of free secondary school education in January 1914 and January 1925. https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1925/mar/26/free-secondary-education#S5CV0182P0_19250326_CWA_46 (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

Secondary school fees were a contentious issue throughout the interwar years. In 1920 The Departmental Committee on Scholarships and Free Places recommended that secondary school fees be discontinued when national finances allowed; as Jones notes, this was forward-looking but had too many financial implications.¹⁹ Labour's 1922 education policy, written by R.H. Tawney, called for free secondary education for all; Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick assert Labour's search for equality of educational opportunity continued through the interwar period,²⁰ though Derek Fraser believes that 'educational equality... was to a great extent a minor concern of governments in the interwar years.'²¹ Free place provision differed widely across Pembrokeshire; in 1923-4 fifty per cent of Fishguard pupils were awarded scholarships whereas only twenty-six per cent received them in Haverfordwest Grammar School.²² In 1925 Circular 1371's spending limits met with fierce opposition; W.G. Cove M.P. believed the restrictions would 'maintain inequalities' and prove unpopular with working-class people who realised that 'education is a necessity for our children, even as bread and cheese is a necessity'.²³ Free places changed to special places with Circular 1421 in 1933, allowing total or partial exemption from fees related to income. Cove

¹⁹ Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944*, pp.88-9.

²⁰ Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.126.

²¹ Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), pp.241-2.

²² PRO, PCC/ED/17/2, p.44.

²³ Parliamentary debate on Circular 1371 and Memorandum 44. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/feb/08/educational-policy> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

believed the government would reserve fifty per cent of places for fee-payers, regardless of ability, to maintain class distinctions and maintained that normal and exceptional children alike had the same right to full and free secondary education as they had to full and free elementary education – though not necessarily the same kind of education.²⁴

Jones notes the Board admitted the special place system would be difficult to accept; its 1932 report recorded 'considerable apprehension', recognising that 'many of the authorities approach their responsibilities with reluctance'.²⁵ Circular 1421 penalized low-income families at a time when parents were recognising the importance of education. Most authorities set the qualifying level at which parental contribution would come into effect as high as possible so the same amount of pupils received free education. Pembrokeshire however set a low level which was actually raised by the Welsh Department; to qualify, household income after rent and rates was less than 12s. a week in the country, (later amended to 14s. 6d.) or 10s. in the town (later 12s.). Parents paid fees on a sliding scale, full fees being paid if net income exceeded twenty shillings. Pembrokeshire fees increased from £4 10s. to £6 per annum in 1933 which Jones believes reflected poorly on the county.²⁶

²⁴ Parliamentary debate on Circular 1421. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1932/nov/16/secondary-education> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

²⁵ Jones, *Policy and Power: One Hundred Years of Local Education Authorities in Wales*, pp. 349-50.

²⁶ Jones, *The Education of a Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp.77-8.

By 1932 there were still variations in free places locally: 31.3 per cent of pupils in Narberth compared to 61.6 per cent in Tenby County School. Six of the county's eight schools exceeded fifty per cent.²⁷ Jones notes Pembrokeshire's aim of providing eighty per cent special places was thwarted by further Welsh Department intervention, increasing fee-paying places to twenty-five per cent. In some areas of Pembrokeshire no fee payers received privileged access.²⁸ Welsh counties tried to increase the number of places allocated on ability alone rather than the ability to pay fees, what Jones calls the 'progressive meritocratization of Welsh education', noting that Pembrokeshire and Wales were ahead of England in this respect.²⁹

From 1936 there was no cap on the number of special places. Free education mattered in Wales - in 1937, fifty-eight per cent of secondary schools offered 100 per cent special or free places, compared with sixteen per cent in England.³⁰ Poverty meant more than sixty-four per cent of Welsh pupils were receiving free secondary education by 1939.³¹

Lawson and Silver note the 1926 Report *The Education of the Adolescent* received widespread support;³² this recommended the reorganisation of elementary education,

²⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/18/22 Free places in Pembrokeshire Schools, 31 July 1932.

²⁸ Jones, *The Education of a Nation*, pp.77-8.

²⁹ Jones, *The Education of a Nation*, p.77.

³⁰ Jones, *The Education of a Nation*, p.77.

³¹ Jones, *The Education of a Nation*, p.131.

³² Lawson and Silver, p.393.

suggesting a move at eleven to secondary education for all children able to benefit from it, regardless of their financial situation. The primary code related to schools for pupils up to the age of eleven, the secondary code including grammar schools, technical schools and selective and non-selective modern schools; having separate secondary, technical and modern schools would be too difficult to implement in Pembrokeshire. The Board of Education's 1928 response, *The New Prospect in Education*, suggested 'the adaptation of the existing Elementary School system so that all the older children, not a selected few, may receive an education suited to their age and special needs'.³³ At the time, only 8.5 per cent of pupils aged over eleven were being educated in a senior department.³⁴ Central schools, deemed the 'chief pioneers' of reorganisation,³⁵ provided general education under the elementary code and were cheaper to run but in rural areas, each school represented several districts, causing transport difficulties. After two years, only about twenty per cent of local authorities in England and Wales had begun the process, and of those only a small proportion of schools had been thus changed; reorganisation was no small task, and in particular as Jones shows, reorganisation of elementary education was slow and very difficult in rural Wales.³⁶ Gordon and Lawton

³³ Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, No. 60 *The New Prospect in Education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1928), p.6. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/boardofed/1928-new-prospect.html> (Accessed on 12 January 2020)

³⁴ Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, No. 60 *The New Prospect in Education*, p.7.

³⁵ Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, No. 60 *The New Prospect in Education*, p.3.

³⁶ Jones, *Policy and Power: One Hundred Years of Local Education Authorities in Wales*, p.349.

believe the Report's premise that 'all go forward, though along different paths' was an 'essentially traditional view of education'³⁷ whereas S.J. Curtis believes it represented 'a notable step' but its recommendation that the leaving age be raised to fifteen had little impact and the number of children remaining in school after the age of fourteen was very small.³⁸

The Board provided evidence that less able children did not benefit from being taught with younger pupils, and might thrive if taught alongside their peers with special provision being made for them, benefitting socially and through sporting pursuits by mixing with their brighter peers; placing less able pupils together meant those schools would 'tend to become labelled as "dud" schools, and this makes it all the more difficult for the children and their teachers to accomplish good work. Their difficulties will be all the greater if, as sometimes happens, the "dud" schools are badly accommodated and lack proper facilities for practical instruction.'³⁹

In rural areas, the Board suggested mixed non-selective senior schools or senior departments into which children were promoted on the basis of age only. Pembrokeshire proposed to reorganise two to three neighbouring schools between 1927 and 1930, prioritising St Davids, Fishguard, Tenby and Broad Haven. It aimed for

³⁷ Peter Gordon and Denis Lawton, *Curriculum Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), pp.26-7.

³⁸ Curtis, p.351.

³⁹ Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, No. 60 *The New Prospect in Education*, p.23.

financial economy and better application of teaching power through a more uniform grouping of children but noted complete reorganisation would take time. In the meantime, remote schools should receive practical instruction and better quality books.⁴⁰ In May 1926 Pembrokeshire's Reorganisation Sub-Committee reported probable costs for elementary education 1927-30. It recommended building a new school for 400 pupils at Milford Haven and reorganising existing schools - although Milford Haven's new Central School opened in 1931, other recommendations were not implemented and by March 1930, Pembrokeshire had been informed that its schemes were already outdated.⁴¹

In 1929, a departmental committee examined education in Wales and Monmouthshire, especially in rural areas, and suggested to the President of the Board of Education that children remaining to fifteen be schooled in the same building as those educated to sixteen and over. The Welsh Department's Circular 168 deemed this 'administratively impracticable' due to separate codes and salary scales, but suggested that if modern senior schools were established near grammar schools, some facilities could be shared.⁴²

⁴⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3, p.12.

⁴¹ Wilfred Harrison, *Greenhill School Tenby 1896-1964. An Educational and Social History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), p.197.

⁴² *The Board of Education Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*, p.345.

Pembrokeshire Education Committee opposed this 'association' of schools, predicting staffing defects and friction arising from shared facilities.⁴³

The 1931 Report *The Primary School* recognised reorganisation was challenging in rural areas - the necessity of having children of different ages in one class made teaching difficult, more so as many rural schools were staffed by uncertificated teachers. Maximum class sizes of forty were recommended to enable more individual attention, avoiding 'stereotyped instruction and mass discipline'.⁴⁴ To improve transition between schools and understanding of pupils' needs, pupil records should be shared between teachers in infant, primary and secondary schools. Galton, Simon and Croll note the Report's promotion of streaming pupils was still compatible with a child-centred approach; as Susan Isaacs explained, it was the school's duty to provide optimum conditions for spontaneous development.⁴⁵ They believe the Report was received favourably but made little impact; by 1932, more than half of primary children were still in classes of over forty.⁴⁶

Bronwen Swinnerton believes change in rural areas would inevitably take longer without extra resources; all-age schools could only be eradicated by setting up larger

⁴³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/4 Proposals for reorganisation – Report of the Reorganisation Sub-Committee to Pembrokeshire Education Committee, 18 March 1930.

⁴⁴ Board of Education *Report of The Consultative Committee on The Primary School* (London: H.M.S.O., 1931), p.75. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1931/hadow1931.html> (Accessed on 26 January 2020)

⁴⁵ M. Galton, B. Simon and P. Croll, *Inside the Primary Classroom* (The ORACLE Report) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p.35.

⁴⁶ Galton, Simon and Croll, p.35.

schools, meaning rural children travelling great distances.⁴⁷ She believes the Report's significance was in promoting primary education for all regardless of class distinctions whereas elementary schools had been established to educate working-class children.⁴⁸ Kevin Brehony views the report as radical, as it 'announced a new conception of schooling for young children which broke decisively with previous practice in the elementary schools'.⁴⁹

Pembrokeshire's rural nature made reorganisation problematic and its schools were of vastly differing sizes. In 1925-6, Grondre School had an average on register of twenty-one whereas Milford Council Girls' School had 380 pupils.⁵⁰ The situation was largely unchanged by 1939 when North Road Infant School in Milford Haven had 299 pupils and Henry's Mote School had an average on register of nineteen. 104 Pembrokeshire schools had fewer than one hundred pupils on their registers.⁵¹ By 1930, though some schools such as St Davids and Narberth were small, having fewer than 200 pupils, secondary school provision in Pembrokeshire was 17.9 places per thousand of the population.⁵²

⁴⁷ Bronwen Swinnerton, The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: tensions and contradictions, in *History of Education*, 1996, Volume 25, Number 1, pp.88-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760960250105> (Accessed 02 January 2020)

⁴⁸ Swinnerton, p.89.

⁴⁹ Kevin J. Brehony, What's left in progressive education?' in Ali Rattansi and David Reeder (eds.), *Rethinking Radical Education: Essays in Honour of Brian Simon* (1992), p.209, quoted in Swinnerton, p.89.

⁵⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/14/77 Board of Education Returns 1925-6.

⁵¹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/79 Board of Education Returns 1939.

⁵² PRO, PCC/ED/17/4.

Writing in 1929, M.K. Ashby noted the Board and local authorities believed tiny village schools could not occupy children to the limits of their capacity until they left school, resulting in wasted time in the higher classes. She felt concentration of the upper classes was inevitable to reduce costs and improve education, but she understood the idea of travelling two miles to a central school to receive compulsory education was not popular. Parents feared physical consequences for their children and therefore the authorities should provide for their needs to prevent disadvantage to them.⁵³ Dr Tom Griffiths, a pupil of Tenby County School between 1915 and 1921, recalled transport problems; there were no buses and few cars, train times did not coincide with school hours and railway stations were far from villages.⁵⁴ The Education Committee noted that some isolated schools were not part of reorganisation due to Pembrokeshire's topography and reorganisation was further complicated by the split between the Welsh-speaking north and English-speaking south. Only Pembroke Dock, Haverfordwest and Milford Haven were seen as being suitable for central schools.⁵⁵ The Education Committee acknowledged that more children were travelling long distances to school, but felt they were receiving a better education in better conditions.⁵⁶

⁵³ M.K. Ashby, *The Country School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp.90-3.

⁵⁴ Harrison, p.231.

⁵⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/6 Secondary Education in Pembrokeshire: Report of the Special Sub-Committee, 19 September 1933.

⁵⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/4.

New proposals for reorganisation in 1930 recommended the decapitation of all-standard schools in Begelly, Stepside, Pentlepoir, Amroth, Saundersfoot, Manorbier, St Florence, and Tenby Council School and Non-Provided School. A non-selective senior school for 360-80 pupils would be established at Tenby Council School, independent of, or in association with, Tenby County School. All infants and juniors in Tenby Council School would be sent to Tenby parochial schools and New Hedges and Penally Schools would be closed, their pupils being sent to Tenby. The Diocesan Religious Education Committee opposed this and eventually in 1932, the authority and managers agreed to amalgamate the non-provided boys' and girls' schools into a mixed school.⁵⁷

The Welsh Department's *Education in Rural Wales* of 1930 signified a change in opinion: country life should be promoted in local authority schemes without placing obstacles to migration. It noted there was not enough staff in rural schools to organise pupils according to their ages or aptitudes; more funding was needed to improve the staffing, equipment and premises to meet modern requirements. It advocated raising the leaving age to fifteen only when post-primary courses were satisfactory, since keeping children in small rural schools till the age of fifteen was detrimental.⁵⁸ It aimed to remove any distinction between schools under the 1889 Act and those built between 1902 and 1921 – as Jones notes, the existence of two separate codes led to social injustice as pupils of the

⁵⁷ Harrison, p.197.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Education Welsh Department, *Education in Rural Wales* (London: H.M.S.O., 1930), p.53.

same age learned with different standards of class size and resources.⁵⁹ Despite these recommendations to assist small rural schools, Jones believes the Welsh Department imposed government policies on reluctant Welsh local authorities and did not fight for the interests of most Welsh pupils.⁶⁰

In 1933 Pembrokeshire Education Committee acknowledged that receiving more individual attention in small rural schools meant pupils' ability to benefit from secondary education was recognised earlier. It noted rural children loved their schools; if asked to move to a new school in an urban area, they would stay in the rural school until they realised it did not meet their post-primary needs. It recognised that the average age of admission was higher in rural schools than in urban areas, which was typical across Wales.⁶¹ Pupils also entered secondary schools later in Wales, due to the influence of parents, teachers and schools managers, resulting in a shortened course. Despite the Board's aim that children would stay for a four year course in secondary schools, early leaving was a problem in Pembrokeshire - in 1930-1, of 306 leavers, 239 children left prematurely. Some early leavers were of good ability but lost interest; the Education Committee believed a more suitable curriculum might renew their interest though the new system of post-primary instruction being framed would not be easily

⁵⁹ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944*, pp.115-6.

⁶⁰ Jones, *Which Nation's Schools? Direction and Devolution in Welsh Education in the Twentieth Century*.

⁶¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/6.

applied in Pembrokeshire. During 1932 about sixty per cent of pupils stayed for the full course, and forty per cent of pupils were successful in obtaining the school certificate.⁶²

Infant education was of much interest in the interwar years. The 1918 Education Act allowed education authorities to establish nursery schools though there were no immediate plans to establish any in Pembrokeshire.⁶³ A Labour party memorandum of 1919 urged the Board to encourage local authorities to establish nurseries; whilst it was felt that home was the best place for under-fives, 'to keep them at home under present conditions is not practicable nor desirable.'⁶⁴ Lady Astor called for the provision of nationwide nursery education but as Brehony states, her campaigning could not 'overcome the belief that children should be cared for by their mothers and that provision for working-class children in their earliest years was a cost the nation could not afford to bear.'⁶⁵

Pembrokeshire aimed to improve existing infant schools, with short courses for teachers on modern infant methods and lectures to parents on infant welfare.⁶⁶ Writing in 1922, Barbara Drake noted there had been 'almost a revolution in methods for

⁶² PRO, PCC/ED/17/6.

⁶³ PRO, SSM/1/132, p.19.

⁶⁴ Labour Party Memorandum prepared by the Advisory Committee on Education, 1919, pp.21-2 in Willem Van der Eyken (ed.), *Education, the Child and Society: a documentary history, 1900-1973* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1973), p.255.

⁶⁵ Kevin J. Brehony, Lady Astor's Campaign for Nursery Schools in Britain, 1930-1939: Attempting to Valorize Cultural Capital in a Male-Dominated Political Field, in *History of Education Quarterly*, Volume 49, Number 2, New Perspectives on Preschooling: The Nation and the Transnational in Early Childhood Education (May 2009), p.208. Cambridge University Press: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40648078> (Accessed 08 April 2019)

⁶⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/6.

teaching infants over the last twenty years' but more reform was needed.⁶⁷ Reform needed to be adequately funded; Pembrokeshire Education Committee noted in 1926 that infant schools in rural areas often suffered so that senior schools could be equipped and should receive a fair allowance according to their own numbers.⁶⁸ Though the Board's *New Prospect in Education* noted the 'special methods and characteristics' of infant schools and sought them to keep them separate from junior schools, Circular 1350 advocated educating children from the ages of five to eleven in one school, which might be necessary in rural areas with smaller numbers of pupils. The Welsh Department's *Education in Rural Wales* recommended specially trained teachers be appointed as advisors of infant education to further improve standards.⁶⁹

Reorganisation proceeded slowly. In 1937 Pembrokeshire's Director of Education, D.T. Jones, noted the importance of public opinion and geographical conditions in planning, but believed that concentration of post-primary schools would allow larger, more economic schools with better staffing, equipment and facilities. He noted twelve suggested districts: Fishguard and Goodwick, Letterston, St Davids, Precelly, Maenclochog, Narberth, Begelly and Kilgetty, Tenby, Pembroke and Pembroke Dock, Milford Haven, Neyland, and Haverfordwest.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Drake, p.9.

⁶⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Education Welsh Department, *Education in Rural Wales*, p.72.

⁷⁰ Harrison, p.201.

More detailed reorganisation proposals included a single-stream school for Kilgetty with a child clinic, gymnasium, evening activity room and library, to accommodate the twelve schools in Begelly and Kilgetty and their 138 senior pupils aged over twelve. Another single-stream school was suggested for Tenby, having three town schools and three neighbouring schools with 137 senior pupils. Despite discussion, neither scheme was adopted following World War Two.⁷¹

Brian Simon believes 'there was virtually no threat to the established scheme of things during the 1930s until the Spens Report advocated secondary education for all'.⁷² This 1938 *Report on Secondary Education* noted a demand for free schooling in Wales where a higher proportion of pupils attended secondary schools than in England; fewer children paid fees in Wales and the hundred per cent special places system was taken up more widely. The Report advocated the tripartite system of secondary education with parity of status between the differing types of secondary schooling but in rural areas, small grammar schools could be established, incorporating modern senior schools. The idea of multilateral schools was popular in the Labour Party and among educationists in the Schoolmasters' and Schoolmistresses' Associations, the T.U.C. and the Welsh Educational Association; the Spens Report agreed such schools offered great advantages but noted this might be 'too subversive a change to be made in a long

⁷¹ Harrison, pp.202-3.

⁷² Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-40* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p.322.

established system.’⁷³ In its view, ‘arrangements for the whole-time higher education of boys and girls above the age of 11+ in England and Wales have ceased to correspond with the actual structure of modern society and with the economic facts of the situation,’⁷⁴ indicating further reforms of the education system were necessary. By September 1939, Pembrokeshire Education Committee was still discussing matters related to reorganisation, showing the difficulty of this task in a rural county.⁷⁵

⁷³ The Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*, p.291.

⁷⁴ The Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*, p.353.

⁷⁵ PRO, PCC/SE/16/111 Buildings Sub-Committee Minutes, 08 September 1939.

Attendance, Health and Well-being

In his 1918 memorandum to schools, Pembrokeshire's Director of Education noted that 'Education is at the heart of the whole problem of Reconstruction, and the question of regular attendance is at the heart of the problem of Education.'¹ Change was necessary: attendance in the county needed improvement if education itself was going to be improved.

The Lewis Report found that parents could plead 'reasonable excuse' for non-attendance at school, such as no school within a reasonable distance, or the child being medically unable to attend. Magistrates accepted poverty in the home and the need of a child's help as reasons for non-attendance and therefore some authorities refrained from prosecuting parents. Large class sizes and poor quality teaching meant the mediocre education received by older children failed to compensate for their delay in earning wages.

Approximately seventy-five per cent of Pembrokeshire's young workers were employed in agriculture.² The Lewis Report stated that 'many children under the age of fourteen, especially in poor districts, undertake wage-earning tasks outside school

¹ Pembrokeshire Records Office (PRO) PCC/ED/7/16 Education Act 1918 Memorandum No. 2 by the Director of Education on School Attendance, September 1919. Report of an enquiry into the present condition of school attendance in the county area, with suggestions as to methods to be adopted for securing improvement, p.15.

² PRO, PCC/ED/17/17 – Employment of Children Circular 109/19, 21 November 1919.

hours. In some cases these tasks are not merely uneducative, but positively harmful, and in some they are so laborious or prolonged as to interfere to a serious extent with the benefits to be derived from schooling.’³ Through Circular 109/19, headteachers were asked about employment in Pembrokeshire; the survey revealed the majority of Pembrokeshire headteachers felt children were overworked, adversely affecting their education. Uzmaston boys arrived late for school and were tired after working on farms; Slebech pupils were kept home for threshing, milking, working in the dairy or on the potatoes, driving pigs and sheep. Manordeifi’s working children had little rest or recreation. Bolton Hill staff believed children worked ‘far beyond their powers of endurance’ while at Llantood they noted ‘employment... quite spoils the physical and intellectual development of children.’ Pwllcrochan’s headteacher stated ‘if employment was done away with, or fixed hours, children will benefit both physically and intellectually by it and the school attendance will also benefit.’ At Bwlch-y-Groes they noted ‘farmers seem to find child labour cheap and effective. Children so employed are a serious obstacle to progress in classes to which they belong.’ Similarly, at Puncteston, ‘the educational progress of children who are employed is greatly retarded.’ At Narberth, children appeared run down, having no time to eat food properly while Rhydbirth’s working children were too sleepy to learn and could hardly keep awake in

³ *Final Report of the Departmental Committee on Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment after the War Volume I* (London: H.M.S.O., 1917), p.23, Point 42, The Employment of Children Act.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/lewis1917/index.html> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

school.⁴ Low average attendance (73.4 per cent in January 1918) effectively lost the council money to the same value as a 4d. rate, whereas a ten per cent improvement would lower rates by 2d. in the pound. Attendance Committee member Mr Dundas Roach stated that until parents realised the importance of sending their children to school and employers realised the harm done by taking children from school several days a week, he felt little more could be done to improve attendance, despite the Attendance Committee's best efforts.⁵

Pembrokeshire's Director of Education believed the 1918 Education Act provided for less fortunately endowed children as well as 'star' children but noted that however excellent the system, it would 'fail utterly' if children were physically unfit or had irregular attendance. He noted that periodical unfitness could be genuine, or caused by neglect and ignorance, or excessive employment resulting in fatigue and ailments. He hoped that home visits by health visitors would improve personal hygiene, sanitation and diet and believed the new system of medical inspection would reduce the number of minor ailments.⁶ He urged that information concerning 'wanton neglect' be passed to the Inspector of the NSPCC.⁷

⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/17.

⁵ Mr Dundas Roach, speaking at the Pembrokeshire Education Committee meeting. *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 31 July 1918, p.4.
<http://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119337/4119341/42/1918%20education%20act%20pembrokeshire>
 (Accessed in March 2018)

⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/7/16, pp.1-2.

⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/7/17 Special Report Attendance in the Elementary Schools of the County 1919-22.

Local newspaper reports show that schools positively encouraged attendance yet Pembrokeshire's monthly averages for the first half of 1918 were all below 85 per cent.⁸ Headteachers noted that causes of poor attendance were distance from schools; bad roads, wet weather and slight illnesses; seasonal employment; indifference of parents and lack of proper control; lack of clothing or boots; careless attendance close to leaving; leniency of magistrates; laxity in registering children at age five; and lack of sleep owing to the Daylight Saving Bill.⁹ In cases of persistent absenteeism, parents were fined by the courts; fines usually ranged from five to ten shillings though in June 1918 a parent summoned for the third time by the Attendance Officer for failing to send his thirteen year old son to school, was fined fifteen shillings as the boy had only attended fifty-seven times of a possible two hundred and was still being taught in Standard II.¹⁰ Most Pembrokeshire headteachers favoured stricter enforcement of attendance regulations, disapproving of farcical fines and lenient magistrates;¹¹ 'too much mercy shown was actually an injustice to the child'.¹²

Attendance Officers were few in Pembrokeshire; they visited the homes of absentees to ascertain the reason for non-attendance, with warnings issued and

⁸ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 31 July 1918, p.4.
<http://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119337/4119341/42/1918%20education%20act%20pembrokeshire>
 (Accessed in March 2018)

⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/7/16, p.5.

¹⁰ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 19 June 1918, p.4.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119307/4119311> (Accessed in March 2018)

¹¹ PRO, PCC/ED/7/16, p.8.

¹² PRO, PCC/ED/7/17.

prosecutions conducted if necessary. Elsewhere duplicate registers were kept and examined by the Office, which prevented personal contact with families and a subsequent lack of 'human understanding'. Despite rural councils being asked to improve roads in remote areas, some children missed school for months at a time due to poor transport conditions.¹³

1920 was the first year of attendance records in Pembrokeshire. Attendance in Wales 1919 to 1920 was 85.4 per cent, but lower in Pembrokeshire (81.8 per cent) due to unusual outbreaks of infectious diseases in localities. There were variations across the county; in 1921, Bosherton and Neyland Boys' School each recorded over ninety-five per cent attendance, but only 64.2 per cent in Fishguard N.P. Infants.¹⁴ Improved attendance led to larger government grants and savings to ratepayers that outweighed the cost of monitoring attendance. By 1922, Bosherton School's average attendance had risen to 97.4 per cent, and Fishguard N.P. Infants had improved slightly to 74.8 per cent though three schools still recorded below seventy per cent.¹⁵ The Education Committee recognised that Pembrokeshire seemed to suffer more from epidemics of ailments affecting children than other counties, owing to its mild, damp climate; attendance was affected despite an intensive campaign to impress upon parents the importance of

¹³ PRO, PCC/ED/7/16, pp.6-9.

¹⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/7/17.

¹⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/7/17.

attending regularly.¹⁶ In 1925 Pembrokeshire achieved record attendance of 87.9 per cent but there was still concern that parents kept children home for petty reasons, 'denying them the privileges and advantages of school'.¹⁷ The maximum fine for non-attendance was twenty shillings – 'so little that parents have been known to boast that it is cheaper for them to pay the fine in order to be able to keep their children at home. A few heavy fines are far more effective than a large number of light ones.'¹⁸ Appeals to local churches and chapels to arrange outings and treats out of school times were met with only partial success. Headteachers were felt to be effective attendance officers, 'for they have the power of making schools so attractive and bright that the children insist on going back to school regularly.'¹⁹

From May 1925, to encourage attendance schools were given an extra half-day holiday for averages of ninety-five per cent or above, and there were prizes; at Lambston School, for eight years of perfect attendance Gladys Jones received war savings,²⁰ and Mary Ann Jones received £1 1s, worth of books for nine years.²¹ Additionally, schools achieving attendance of ninety-three per cent or more were given a ten shillings library prize.

¹⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2 Pembrokeshire Education Committee Report for 1 September 1921 to 31 August 1924, p.26.

¹⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/7/17, p.1.

¹⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/7/17, pp.2-3.

¹⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes 21 July 1925 Appendix G.

²⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes of Board of Education 1925-1932.

²¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes 20 July 1926 Appendix F.

In 1925, Pembrokeshire Attendance Officers enquired after 14,877 children, visited 11,110 homes and there were eighty-six prosecutions, resulting in a 0.9 per cent increase on 1924's figures.²² Standards were still inconsistent; in only three cases were parents fined the maximum twenty shillings for their children's poor attendance, whilst twenty-three cases were dismissed on payment of five shillings costs.²³ The Education Committee considered a report of the number of gipsy children in Pembrokeshire but was informed by the Standing Joint Committee that the authority could do nothing more due to the parents' migratory habits.²⁴

Annual attendance in 1926 was 87.7 per cent - very satisfactory due to the large number of schools affected by epidemics.²⁵ By 1927, Pembrokeshire's attendance had improved to 87.94 per cent, resulting in less grant lost through absences and a saving of £1357 4s. 0d.²⁶ New initiatives were tried, such as conveyance; a charabanc conveyed Cippin pupils to St Dogmaels Infant School for over three months and attendance improved.²⁷ In 1933, seven schools won twenty-two half holidays to reward good attendance.²⁸

²² PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes 21 July 1925 Appendix G.

²³ PRO, PCC/ED/7/17, pp.10-13.

²⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes 20 July 1926 Appendix F.

²⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Pembrokeshire Education Authority Report, 31 March 1926.

²⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Pembrokeshire Education Authority Report, 31 March 1926.

²⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/15/43 Inspections, 01 June 1927.

²⁸ PRO, HPR/6/62 Attendance Report, 31 March 1933.

Awareness was growing that poor housing and nutritional standards caused a weakened physical state in some children so improving their health and thereby their attendance was important. Pembrokeshire's School Medical Service continued examining children; the School Medical Officer, Harry Middleton, worked with elementary pupils for forty-five per cent of his time, with his assistant, Dorothy Rees. Pupils were inspected as entrants, intermediates and leavers for defects of ear, nose and throat, with treatment for adenoids and chronic tonsillitis. Although all Pembrokeshire schools received health checks during 1924, eighty-two schools were re-examined during November and December to note the progress of weak children and post-operation patients. Eye defects were checked and pupils examined for cleanliness; 'marked improvements' and 'satisfactory progress' were noted. District nurses and health visitors treated minor injuries, lice and skin problems, noting when pupils were dirty or poorly clothed. Children who had not been vaccinated were referred for observation.²⁹

A register was kept of blind, deaf and epileptic children, and those deemed 'mentally defective' or requiring orthopaedic treatment. Middleton noted that many children needed orthopaedic treatment but Pembrokeshire did not have sufficient beds to cope with demand, meaning an eighteen month waiting list for admission to

²⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes of Pembrokeshire Education Authority, Appendix B1, Report on Examination of School Children for the Months of November and December 1924.

hospitals in Cardiff and London. He advocated developing a scheme in conjunction with other counties to open orthopaedic centres with visiting surgeons. There was no provision in Pembrokeshire for blind, deaf or physically disabled children who were sent to facilities in Swansea, Bristol or London. Children deemed to be 'high grade ineducable' due to 'mental defects' were educated out of county and children who were 'educable' were sent to schools in other areas; it was impractical to set up a special boarding school locally as the numbers attending would not justify the expense.³⁰ Middleton reviewed all children deemed 'Dull and Backward' in the early 1920s, noting that 'every child is examined three times during the course of his school life, and if found defective in any way, kept under constant supervision until his defect is remedied. It is almost impossible under the present system for any defect to remain undetected.'³¹ Certainly the percentage of defects requiring treatment was in decline in the first half of the decade, from 39.7 per cent in 1921 to 15.4 per cent in 1925, indicating that health checks and early detection were beneficial. Minor ailment treatment centres were also helping more families – the number of children treated had risen from 627 in 1921 to 2,032 by 1925.³²

Pembrokeshire's dental officer was appointed in 1920. School dentistry originally targeted six to eight year olds but research proved that permanent teeth could be

³⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Report by H Middleton, School Medical Officer, 26 February 1925.

³¹ PRO, PCC/SE/16/30 Appendix D2 Special Report of S.M.O., 1921-1925.

³² PRO, PCC/SE/16/30 Appendix D2 Special Report of S.M.O., 1921-1925.

irreparably damaged by age six so in 1922 this service was expanded to include five year olds, and in 1923 extended to nine year olds. More children were attending for treatment by 1925 and headteachers noticed far fewer absences due to toothache. Middleton noted that if the scheme could be extended, these absences would largely be eliminated although some children still didn't receive treatment due to parental objection, which he noted mirrored other counties.³³ In 1926 the question of dental services for secondary school pupils was raised³⁴ and by 1938 pupils were treated up to the age of twelve - no dental provision was made after this age although pupils received medical examinations up to fifteen.³⁵ The separate Borough of Pembroke, however, still made no dental provision for its children by 1929.³⁶ Charles Webster notes the Board of Education realised dental decay was much more widespread in the 1930s but the School Dental Service had inadequate resources to treat it properly;³⁷ a circular of 1936 issued minimum standards in rural areas of one dentist per 4000 children but admitted 'the School Dental Service is seriously incomplete in most parts of the country'.³⁸ John

³³ PRO, PCC/SE/16/30 Appendix D2 Special Report of S.M.O., 1921-1925.

³⁴ PRO, PCC/SE/16/30 Minutes May 11th 1926 Appendix B.

³⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/14/13 Board of Education Special Services LEA Pembrokeshire Statement of Staff and Arr., 1 October 1938.

³⁶ Parliamentary discussion on the dental service in Wales.

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1929-04-18/debates/c0c36dbc-265c-49f2-9ab0-2d53271fcde4/DentalService\(Wales\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1929-04-18/debates/c0c36dbc-265c-49f2-9ab0-2d53271fcde4/DentalService(Wales)) (Accessed on 28 February 2020)

³⁷ Charles Webster, *Healthy or Hungry Thirties? History Workshop*, Number 13, Spring 1982, p.118. Oxford University Press <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4288406> (Accessed on 06 December 2018)

³⁸ *Health of the School Child*, 1935 (London: H.M.S.O., 1936), pp.112-4, noted in John Welshman, *Dental Health as a neglected issue in medical history: The school dental service in England and Wales, 1900-40. Medical History*, Volume 42 Number 3, July 1998, p.320.

Welshman acknowledges 'the new provision of inspections and treatment was an improvement on what had gone on before' but believes it was 'the least impressive aspect of the School Medical Service' in the interwar period.³⁹

Medical inspections in Pembrokeshire continued with success – in 1927 of 1,271 children noted as 'defectives', 475 were deemed to have been cured, with 796 children undergoing treatment, improving or waiting. However it is noticeable that 207 children missed their inspection examination so the importance of the service was not yet fully embedded.⁴⁰

The 1931 Report *The Primary School* recognised that continued absence through illness or migration between areas affected children's learning. Children's well-being was considered, noting emotional difficulties that could be attributed to home circumstances and less able children with low self-esteem. It warned that poor teaching or lack of individual attention, lack of suitable challenge or not receiving adequate support would impact on a child's attainment. Liaising with the School Medical Officer, school nurse and parents was deemed good practice to ensure the health and well-being of all pupils. It recognised that schools could not always ensure their pupils were properly fed and clothed, with sufficient sleep and opportunities for play and noted

³⁹ Welshman, p.326.

⁴⁰ PRO, PCC/SE/16/30 Minutes 18 January 1927 Appendix B1.

that some parents were still reluctant to listen to advice from the School Medical Officer.

Specialist officer Nathan Rocyn Jones was appointed in Pembrokeshire in January 1937 to run six clinics a year, working mostly within elementary education. More staff were employed in the School Medical Service: two nurses worked half-time and one at sixty-six per cent, and forty-eight district nurses were employed as part-time school nurses.⁴¹ Defective eyesight was treated; spectacles were free of charge in special cases, check-ups confirmed they had been obtained and were being worn, and regular re-examinations were made. When children were admitted to hospital, parents completed a form detailing their income, rent costs and number in the family which was given to the authority for consideration.

The 1938 Spens Report believed medical and dental treatment should be extended throughout secondary schooling. Attitudes towards mental health issues were progressive - medical officers and teachers were instructed to note incidences of undue mental strain on pupils, whether from school work, homework, family circumstances, the effects of poverty or poor housing, or pressure from ambitious parents. The Report recommended developing closer links between the School Medical Service and parents through meetings or associations.

⁴¹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/13.

Alongside a growing awareness that children needed to be healthy to benefit fully from their education, the importance of diet was recognised. Many supported the idea of providing school children with meals, but there was still opposition - as Burnett states, the issue raised the question of state responsibility as opposed to parental responsibility; whether some children should be fed at public expense when the family ideal was the fabric of the nation.⁴² He claims that rising working-class standards during World War One led to a decrease in the number of free meals provided by 1918 though many were suffering from the effects of rationing; in Pembrokeshire, the *Western Telegraph* commented that 'scores of ill-fed children may be seen about the streets'.⁴³ Meal provision existed in 1920 at Marloes N.P. where forty out of eighty-two children paid 2d. a day for soup made using vegetables from the school garden and donations.⁴⁴

Bernard Harris states, 'the Board of Education's desire to limit costs continued to play a major part in the development of school meals policy throughout the 1920s'.⁴⁵ The School Medical Officer selected pupils to receive meals; teachers had no say in the matter until the Milk in Schools scheme was introduced. John Hurt believes the Board

⁴² J. Burnett, 'The rise and decline of school meals in Britain 1860-1990' in J. Burnett and D.J. Oddy (eds.), *The origin and development of food policies in Europe* (1988), p.56.

⁴³ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 9 January 1918, p.2.
<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119197/4119199> (Accessed in March 2018)

⁴⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/15/43 Inspections: 27 October 1920 Marloes N.P. School.

⁴⁵ Bernard Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild: a History of the School Medical Service in England and Wales* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p.123.

was aware that parents who were ashamed of their poverty wouldn't apply for means-tested assistance, plus the children of parents on higher incomes who didn't feed their children properly through indifference or ignorance also benefitted from this selection process. He asserts that interwar governments sought to avoid double relief - children whose fathers received unemployment relief should not receive free meals since that relief provided for their maintenance,⁴⁶ but as Derek Fraser states, by using public money to provide free school meals the state acknowledged its responsibility for the hungry.⁴⁷

Jeffreyston N.P. School provided midday meals to supplement the children's home diet of bread, butter and tea; the headmaster noted that prior to this experiment, children were listless in the afternoon and unable to benefit from their education, and minor illnesses were frequent. He noted that 'people in a rural area are shy of any new movement in their midst', but found them in favour of the scheme. Soup was provided each day; 'apart from attendance and general improvement in the work, a decided improvement in the appearance, cleanliness and well-being of the children was noticeable'. The Medical Branch of the Board of Education wrote that 'there can be no

⁴⁶ J. Hurt, 'Feeding the hungry schoolchild in the first half of the twentieth century' in D.J. Oddy and D.S. Miller (eds.), *Diet and Health in Modern Britain* (1985), pp.180-181, p.184.

⁴⁷ D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1973 (Fourth edition 2009)).

question as to the advantages which are likely to accrue to the children's health from such an arrangement' and hoped that other rural schools would follow suit.⁴⁸

1925's Circular 1357 outlined the importance of the midday meal in rural areas for children travelling great distances to school. Pembrokeshire's Director of Education wrote to parents in February 1926 outlining an experiment to provide hot drinks with the midday meal. Many children had to bring their own meals due to Pembrokeshire's rural nature, including cans of tea or cocoa to reheat over the school fire. He stressed the importance of diet in the physical and mental development of children, asking parents to provide the most nourishing food affordable to them but requested improvements in cleanliness as cans were not cleaned daily and food was wrapped in old newspaper.⁴⁹

Johnston Council School children were charged 3d. per week for meals or 1d. a day for casual attendance. Meals were supervised by the headteacher and assistants, and proper table manners cultivated. The first month of the scheme coincided with low attendance caused by an epidemic but the Director noted that 'children who partake of the hot drink have been singularly immune from sickness.' It was hoped to reduce the charge eventually, especially in the cases of large families.⁵⁰

In May 1926, Pembrokeshire County Council confirmed its belief that a midday meal should be an essential feature of a rural school; not only did it bring health

⁴⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2, pp.22-4.

⁴⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/11 Letter from County Offices, Education Department, Haverfordwest on 11 February 1926, Evan T. Davis, Director of Education and Clerk to the Education Committee to parents.

⁵⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/14/11.

benefits, it also gave training to the children in developing social habits. Some schools provided hot malted milk at morning break; many children brought lunch to eat in their classroom and hot water for tea or cocoa was provided. Tegryn and Crymych Schools provided hot soup daily costing 1½ to 2d. per week, which was greatly appreciated by parents; older girls prepared vegetables from the school garden and meat and bones were bought locally, the authority providing utensils. The L.E.A. reiterated that provision of hot meals would be desirable in other schools, especially where the children walked long distances.⁵¹ Rosemarket School conducted a very successful experiment in providing hot drinks most days and midday meals once a week, with the older girls learning how to prepare them; the results so impressed the Director of Education that girls from nearby schools were sent there to learn in the same way.⁵²

Though the importance of school meal provision was recognised, it coincided with the reorganisation of secondary schools which made many demands on finances. Lord Eustace Percy stated in 1926 that the cost of feeding striking miners' children could have rebuilt schools for 25,000 children currently in buildings 'not fit to house a pig', or built new secondary schools for 8000.⁵³ Yet following the miners' strike at Bonville's Court Colliery in 1926, the cost of feeding Saundersfoot's needy children was met from the St Issells and Begelly Relief Fund. By 1927 the public had contributed £177

⁵¹ PRO, PCC/SE/16/29 and 30 Minutes from May 1926.

⁵² Geoffrey Nicolle, *Beyond Wales – the story of the Pembrokeshire village of Rosemarket*.

⁵³ Lord Eustace Percy, *The Times*, 9 November 1926. Quoted in J. Hurt, p.185.

1s. 3d., also donating goods to feed school children at St Issells; 23,329 meals were made at an average cost of 1.75d per meal.⁵⁴ Feeding schemes continued, however small. Carew School's cocoa scheme aimed to pay for itself so small profits in 1930 helped to offset any future losses.⁵⁵

Burnett claims standards of living for the employed improved in the 1930s, though social policy was still dictated by the effects of depression;⁵⁶ conversely Kenneth Morgan emphasises that the modern interpretation of improved living conditions was not the circumstance of many.⁵⁷ Minister of Health Sir Hilton Young stated in 1933 that there was 'no available medical evidence of any general increase in physical impairment, sickness, or mortality as a result of the economic depression or unemployment' and though he acknowledged there was 'social and domestic distress', he felt that public medical services for school children had been of tremendous service.⁵⁸ That was doubtless the case, but Save the Children's 1933 report, *'Unemployment and the Child: An Enquiry'*, showed mass unemployment did affect children's nutrition. Some controversy existed around the actual figures related to malnutrition as there were inconsistencies in examining children; Hurt believes it was possible that doctors in

⁵⁴ PRO, PCC/SE/16/29 and 30 Minutes 18 January 1927 Appendix B.

⁵⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/14/29 Carew School Magazine 1931.

⁵⁶ Burnett, p.64.

⁵⁷ K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880–1980* (Print publication date: 1980), p.20. Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: March 2012.

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198217367.001.0001 (Accessed on 05 December 2019)

⁵⁸ Address to Parliament by the Minister of Health. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1933/jul/07/ministry-of-health> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

regular contact with children became used to their malnourished appearance and may not have deemed them needy. Discouraging means-testing and using medical criteria to identify children in need meant only approximately eight per cent of children received breakfasts or dinners, tea, milk and cod liver oil.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the importance of feeding needy children to improve their health and thereby benefit from their schooling was recognised, and as Burnett states, depression revived post-war concerns for the health and welfare of the nation, and specifically the nutrition of children.⁶⁰ Charles Webster shows the change in emphasis of the Board of Education; where once 'Undernourishment and School Feeding' had been the eleventh chapter in Board of Education reports, from 1933 'Nutrition and School Feeding' became the first chapter, perhaps showing a new comprehension of the problems of the poor and a determination to allow children to benefit from improved educational opportunities.⁶¹ Writing in 1933, Barbara Drake was concerned that although children consumed a seemingly adequate quantity of food, its nutritional quality was inadequate; they might develop diet-related health problems without school meals. Inadequacies in the school meals system were either the product of

⁵⁹ Hurt, pp.184-6.

⁶⁰ Burnett, p.56.

⁶¹ Charles Webster, p.113.

authorities lacking initiative or simply lacking the funding to provide the necessary service.⁶²

The Ministry of Health Advisory Committee on Nutrition stated children should consume one to two pints of milk daily⁶³ and the 1934 Milk Act provided a third of a pint of milk for all elementary school pupils at subsidised prices. Despite Webster's assertion that milk schemes were 'insufficient in scale to reach the needy',⁶⁴ by 1938 the number of children receiving free milk across the country had risen from 36,000 to 635,174⁶⁵ and by 1939 fifty-four per cent of eligible pupils were benefitting from a scheme that Burnett calls the one success of interwar nutritional policies.⁶⁶ Atkins asserts this was 'a major departure in national food policy';⁶⁷ Hurt agrees, stating this was the start of a more liberal phase - milk had been given in schools by voluntary groups before 1906 but now the government was giving official support, despite the Board's earlier fears that free milk would lead to calls for free meals and medical treatment.⁶⁸ Webster believes some health authorities disapproved of free milk schemes

⁶² Barbara Drake, *Starvation in the midst of plenty: a new plan for the state feeding of school children* (London: The Fabian Society, 1933), pp.9-11. (Accessed on 27 November 2017)

<https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:vul228wen/read/single#page/22/mode/2up>

⁶³ R.F. George, A New Calculation of the Poverty Line. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Volume 100, Number 1, 1937, p.79. Published by Wiley for the Royal Statistical Society
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2980284> (Accessed on 30 November 2018)

⁶⁴ Charles Webster, p.125.

⁶⁵ Hurt, p.193.

⁶⁶ Burnett, p.65.

⁶⁷ Peter Atkins, The milk in schools scheme, 1934-45: 'nationalization' and resistance. *History of Education*, 34:1, 2005. p.1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760042000315291> (Accessed on 23 February 2020)

⁶⁸ Hurt, pp.186-7.

because this type of benefit was thought to 'weaken the moral resolve of mothers',⁶⁹ but the provision of milk was cheaper than the provision of meals so schemes were introduced; Atkins notes the lower costs of milk for authorities meant the number of solid school meals 'stagnated' by the late 1930s.⁷⁰ Indeed, Bernard Harris believes the larger costs of school meal provision by the end of the decade would have been much greater had solid meals been as widely provided as milk.⁷¹ 1935's Circular 1443 approved the use of means-testing in providing food in public elementary schools to needy children, acknowledging that three medical inspections might be insufficient to check whether children needed extra food. Teachers, nurses and attendance officers reported children likely to benefit from receiving free milk - as Hurt asserts, the debate on nutrition and health was growing and selection procedures were being challenged.⁷²

The Spens Report instructed that pupils should be provided with a midday meal for a small fee, with school medical staff helping to plan menus to secure proper nutritional value and grammar schools having properly equipped kitchens and dining rooms. Burnett shows only four per cent of the elementary school population received meals in 1938; 110,000 were free, only half the number in 1914.⁷³ Hurt notes that the Board wrote to 150 local authorities regarding improvements in provision, more lenient

⁶⁹ Charles Webster, p.125.

⁷⁰ Atkins, pp.5-6.

⁷¹ Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*, p.93. Quoted in Peter Atkins, p.6.

⁷² Hurt, pp.180-1, p.191.

⁷³ Burnett, p.65.

scales and better selection processes, which represents a notable improvement from the start of the period when it sought to restrict feeding services.⁷⁴

Meals were still being provided in Pembrokeshire by October 1938 which was of great importance for rural children. As Pembrokeshire had no feeding centres, primary school children selected to receive free meals went to the same canteen as paying children, their free meals status being periodically reviewed. Pembrokeshire was not yet feeding all its necessitous pupils, but compared with other authorities, it was mindful of their needs; even in 1939 fewer than half of local authorities supplied a meals service and only three per cent of school children were being fed.⁷⁵ Charles Webster claims that school meals and school milk 'made an insignificant contribution to the problem of poverty and malnutrition existing before 1939';⁷⁶ provision of school meals for all might have resulted in health improvements but 'from the outset there was a determination to prevent school meals from becoming a generally available benefit'.⁷⁷ John Welshman states the interwar period achieved steady but slow progress with school feeding, with only small percentages of children receiving free school meals. He observes that it was

⁷⁴ Hurt, p.196.

⁷⁵ D. Gillard, *Food for Thought: child nutrition, the school dinner and the food industry* (2003).

www.educationengland.org.uk/articles/22food.html

(Accessed on 30 November 2019)

⁷⁶ Charles Webster, Government policy, p.191. Quoted in Peter Atkins, Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921-1941. *The Economic History Review*, Volume 58, Number 1 (February 2005), p.75. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3698917> (Accessed on 24 November 2018)

⁷⁷ Charles Webster, Health, Welfare and Unemployment during the Depression. *Past & Present*, Number 109 (November 1985), p.213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/650615> (Accessed on 24 November 2018)

not until the early 1940s that the Board of Education accepted its methods were outdated;⁷⁸ it was only with the 1944 Education Act that the School Meals Service became compulsory.

⁷⁸ John Welshman, 'School meals and milk in England and Wales, 1906-45' in *Medical History*, 41, 1997, pp.25-8.

The School Environment

In the spirit of post-war reconstruction, Circular 1086 of February 1919 described the type of buildings envisaged as ideal continuation schools with classrooms, laboratories, workshops, gymnasia, libraries and facilities for medical inspection and social areas of school life. It acknowledged that providing new schools was difficult due to government restrictions on buildings.¹ Improvements in educational buildings and the impact of such changes would undoubtedly improve education for children but these requirements would be difficult to fulfil in a rural county like Pembrokeshire.

There was concern that increasing the school leaving age to fourteen would leave little surplus space in Pembrokeshire's elementary schools; some were already overcrowded. The programme of post-war building and reform planned in the 1918 Education Act could not be fully implemented due to the economic downturn at the start of the next decade – the Geddes Committee recommended closing schools with fewer than one hundred pupils, of which there were many in Pembrokeshire.²

The availability of classrooms in Pembrokeshire schools was a problem. Its 145 departments contained 499 classes; seventy-six rooms contained two classes each, twenty-four rooms had three classes in, and six rooms contained three or more classes. 66.9 per cent of schools had rooms containing two or more classes, the highest

¹ Pembrokeshire Records Office (PRO) PCC/ED/18/18 Circular 1086, 01 February 1919.

² PRO, PCC/ED/14/79 Board of Education Returns, 1939.

percentage in Wales. Almost half of Pembrokeshire pupils were taught in rooms containing more than two classes, the percentage for Wales being 29.2.³ In his 1919 Report, the Director of Education noted that several classes being taught in one room placed an added strain on children. Reducing class sizes would allow more individual attention, and promote understanding between parents, pupils and teachers.⁴ Writing in 1929, M.K. Ashby explained that schools had originally been built to instruct children and therefore one large room had sufficed. She understood the strain placed on pupils when rooms were shared between different classes as children had to remain quiet for most of the day which was not conducive to group work or to the spirited responses of children – ‘they could not work with zest’.⁵

The 1925 Report of Pembrokeshire’s County Architect, Owain Thomas showed improvements had been suspended; pre-war plans to divide schoolrooms into two classrooms were deemed too expensive for post-war finances; classroom partitions required extra heating and lighting. Thomas noted that Pembrokeshire schools had been at a standstill for ten years, with some outdated ‘dreary bleak sites’. Money considerations had been more important than suitability – ‘the buildings, instead of being attractive to a child, must convey the impression of being a prison’. He added that

³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2 Pembrokeshire Education Committee Report for 1 September 1921 to 31 August 1924, p.30.

⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/26 Education Act Memorandum No. 2 by Director of Education Pembrokeshire Education Authority September 1919 – Report of an enquiry into the present condition of School Attendance in the County Area, with suggestions as to methods to be adopted for securing improvement.

⁵ M.K. Ashby, *The Country School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), p.85.

it was reasonable that schools be bright, cheerful and healthy as children were compelled to spend the better part of the day for eight or nine years of the most impressionable part of their lives in them. Yet in Pembrokeshire schools, sanitation was poor; a 'considerable number' were antiquated and primitive, 'the result a serious slackness in the matter of personal cleanliness.'⁶

Thomas stressed the amount and direction of light was important; Draft Buildings Regulations for Public Elementary Schools in Wales in 1925 showed a south-west aspect was best for light and where this was given consideration, the number of eye defects had lessened - Tenby Council School had seen a 4.3 per cent decrease.⁷ Other improvements were considered. In 1902 Pembrokeshire L.E.A. had changed the lower light-reflecting salmon-pink or blue paint to light green paint to help eyesight and aid lighting and by 1925 this had changed to cream, giving fifty per cent light reflection. Thomas recommended painting Burton N.P. School white as 'the dark, dismal appearance of the rooms is very disappointing.' Llanstadwell School's windows were small and adjoining buildings blocked daylight but inserting larger windows might cause the whole building to collapse. Schools in Llangwm, Brawdy and St Davids had their sills lowered and windows enlarged, but by 1937 there was still fear of risk to pupils' eyesight due to insufficient light, for example in Roch, Spittal and Stepside

⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/14/10 Pembrokeshire Education Authority Report of the County Architect Owain T. Thomas on certain council and non-provided school buildings in the county of Pembroke referred by the Board of Education to the LEA for urgent attention, county offices Haverfordwest, April 1925.

⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/14/10.

schools. Thomas also noted problems caused by lack of adequate ventilation – only a small proportion of Roch N.P.'s small windows could open.⁸

Thomas' report noted the importance of playgrounds; Nolton C.P. had no playground at all, its pupils playing on a public roadway. Thomas noted that in some schools, necessary repairs and replacements had been neglected and there was some slackness in cleaning. At Hubberston N.P., 'neglect in the matter of repair and upkeep now makes the exterior of the school an eyesore to the vicinity instead of adding to the amenity', though the fabric of this school was too weak for repairs to be cost-effective. At Barn Street N.P., 'the very dilapidated state of the offices should be attended to as early as possible as these parts of the school building are as important as classrooms.' Thomas noted that delaying improvements would only incur unnecessary expense in future and observed that 'such lamentable conditions of school life cannot but exercise a profoundly deleterious effect upon young children.'⁹

Other schools fared equally as badly. Burton N.P. pupils obtained water from the public well on a nearby common. Roch C of E School was situated in 'squalid, miserable surroundings' and Uzmaston C of E School was 'most unsatisfactory in every respect. Quite primitive, dark, dingy and utterly unwholesome.' At Llanrhian, the girls' toilet was a bucket closet accessed via the garden, the boys' toilet accessed via the public

⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/14/10.

⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/10.

highway. Seventy-two children were taught in one stuffy room with four teachers and one student¹⁰ – a far cry from the standards the Conservative party had pledged to achieve, seeking reduced class sizes and replacement of inefficient schools.

Schools Medical Officer Harry Middleton reported in 1925 that constant supervision was undertaken of sanitation, ventilation and lighting but that Pembrokeshire was 'behind' in this respect, though the Committee sought to make improvements as finances allowed.¹¹ He felt the most necessary improvement was a proper water supply to each school and adequate facilities for washing but this would still be an ongoing problem in 1939.

Circular 1371 in 1925 caused M.P. W.G. Cove to comment that many schools were insufficiently lit and heated; many were in a disgraceful condition and 'a danger to the health and morals of the children'. He observed that reading books were in a deplorable condition yet economies were ordered; most libraries and pianos were obtained through teachers' and pupils' efforts rather than public funding.¹² The 1928 Report on Books in Public Elementary Schools recommended that 'every school should be provided with a permanent collection, adequate for its special requirements, of works bearing on the various branches of the curriculum, chosen and arranged for their

¹⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/14/10.

¹¹ PRO, PCC/SE/16/30 Appendix D2 Special Report of S.M.O., 1921-25.

¹² Parliamentary debate on Circular 1371 and Memorandum 44. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/feb/08/educational-policy> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

appeal to children of different ages'.¹³ Though most Pembrokeshire schools had libraries, many needed overhauling.¹⁴

Lord Eustace Percy sought the repair of unfit elementary schools but was frustrated that half the £1.4m increase in expenditure on education for local authorities between 1923 and 1925 was spent on administration and maintenance.¹⁵ Pembrokeshire Education Committee was conscious that it was difficult to provide equipment and bring schools up to a worthy standard structurally in all rural areas.¹⁶ Speaking at Haverfordwest about central schools as a vision of the future, Sir Ernest Gray noted that combining smaller schools and closing several others would be necessary. He knew local managers and the Board of Education had been considering the repair of some schools for twenty-five years, and that some schools condemned twenty-five years ago were still in existence.¹⁷

H.M.I. reports of 1925 listed twenty-three unsuitable schools in Pembrokeshire. List A comprised four council schools and two non-provided schools that were unsuitable and unable to be improved, including Charles Street School in Milford

¹³ Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Books in Public Elementary Schools*. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928), p.109.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1928/hadow1928.html> (Accessed on 01 March 2020)

¹⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12 Board of Education (Welsh Department) General Report of H.M. Inspectors on Elementary Education in the Administrative County of Pembrokeshire for the period ending 31 December 1937.

¹⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *South Wales News* 30 October 1925.

¹⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/11.

¹⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *County Echo* 29 October 1925.

Haven; List B showed seventeen council schools and one non-provided school that were unsuitable at that time but could be improved 'at considerable expense'.¹⁸ The replacement of Charles Street School featured in Pembrokeshire's revised budget of February 1926,¹⁹ but was not actioned. Council discussions called for the temporary adaptation of schools in both lists to 'avoid an overburdened building programme' and suggested reorganising two to three neighbouring schools into groups for economy, allowing better use of teaching power.²⁰ By 1929 the authority still proposed to rebuild Charles Street School.²¹

In 1924 Pembrokeshire Education Committee noted that economy necessitated furniture being shared between schools. Any new furniture supplied was 'of the most modern type and includes a variety of designs for the sake of experiment to meet modern ideas of teaching'.²² It allocated £500 per annum for furniture,²³ with £5000 per

¹⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/17 Minutes March 24th 1925 Appendix D1 J.E. Talbot, Welsh Department of the Board of Education – list of school premises not suitable and incapable of improvement, obtained from H.M.I. Reports.

¹⁹ Parliamentary debate on Pembrokeshire's revised estimates for 1926–27.

https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/feb/25/pembrokeshire-education-authority#S5CV0192P0_19260225_HOC_122

(Accessed on 09 January 2020)

²⁰ PRO, PCC/SE/16/29 and 30 Minutes from May 1926

²¹ List of the schools in Wales and Monmouthshire in respect of which proposals have been received, or promised, for remedying the defects in the premises during the year 1929–30.

https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1929/mar/07/defective-school-buildings-wales#S5CV0226P0_19290307_HOC_86

(Accessed on 09 January 2020)

²² PRO, PCC/ED/17/2, p.29.

²³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3 Report 1 September 1924 to 31 August 1926.

annum to put school accommodation into a reasonable state of repair in terms of sanitation, water, light, heat and playgrounds.

In 1928, The Board of Education's Pamphlet *The New Prospect in Education* urged the condition of school buildings be considered, including schools needing extending or reconstruction work. This would inform its plans regarding reorganisation of elementary education; it was realistic, acknowledging many schools would need to be adapted since it was impractical to suggest all schools would be new. However, lack of accommodation hindered the process of reorganisation by impeding the transfer of some pupils on the basis of age, having to remain in junior schools past the age of eleven.

1931's Report *The Primary School* recognised that old-fashioned buildings were unsuitable for modern teaching styles using group and individual work, but would have to be adapted as primary schools as available finances would be directed into building new secondary schools. Ideal schools featured a hall and canteen, an adequately equipped library, a room for medical inspections and suitable drying facilities, especially important in rural schools. The importance of providing drinking water, hot water and towels was noted alongside the need for improved sanitation and more suitable furnishings for children.

In 1926-7 the average class size in Pembrokeshire was twenty-four pupils, compared with thirty-two in England and Wales; 196 classes comprised fewer than 20 pupils but six classes contained between fifty and sixty pupils.²⁴ Circular 1397 recommended a maximum class size of forty for seniors and fifty for juniors but in 1927-8 seven senior classes in Pembrokeshire still taught more than fifty pupils, due to the premises and not a lack of staff.²⁵ A three year programme was proposed from 1930; concerns that schools in Pembroke Dock would be overcrowded dissipated as families migrated in search of work but Milford Haven urgently needed accommodation due to overcrowding. It had six all-standard schools, three infant schools and two single sex schools, but closure was proposed for two schools and three were condemned.²⁶ In 1936 Pembrokeshire recorded its lowest birth rate, and school numbers dropped from 12,589 pupils in 1911 to 9906 in 1937.²⁷ The authority believed the declining school population would be offset by retaining pupils aged fifteen when the leaving age was increased in 1939 but this did not materialise due to the outbreak of war.

Outdoor provision improved. H.M. Inspectors commended Pembrokeshire L.E.A. on its enlightened policy regarding playgrounds - in 1930 £3000 was spent on

²⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3.

²⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/4 Proposals for reorganisation – Report of the Reorganisation Sub-Committee to Pembrokeshire Education Committee, 18 March 1930.

²⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/4.

²⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

resurfacing and in 1936 a loan of £5000 was raised for the purpose. Forty-eight playgrounds were surfaced with tarmacadam but although playgrounds were good in council schools, they were still unsatisfactory in non-provided schools.²⁸

In his 1937 Report, Director of Education D.T. Jones noted that although Pembrokeshire's school buildings were outdated, they were often sound structures and too substantial to abandon. He felt they reflected the educational ideas of the time they were built; new semi-permanent, attractive schools should be built so they could be adapted to future changes in regulations and improved educational methods.²⁹

Had there been any real improvement in Pembrokeshire's school buildings during the inter-war period? A report in 1939 by Harry Middleton to Pembrokeshire Education Authority listed twenty-six unsatisfactory buildings while seventeen schools needed extensive reconstruction. Heating arrangements were poor or inadequate in many schools, thirty having poor heating and thirty with insufficient lighting. Amroth was lit by oil lamps with one stove and one fire. Almost all older schools lacked drying room accommodation.

Sanitation was unsatisfactory in a large number of schools; fifty-one schools had poor cloakroom accommodation and washing facilities and seventy-six schools had unacceptable lavatory accommodation. Six schools had toilets in such bad condition

²⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

²⁹ Wilfred Harrison, *Greenhill School Tenby 1896-1964. An Educational and Social History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), pp.203-4.

they warranted immediate attention, five still used the pail system; Barham N.P. had an open gully and the tide cleared the trough in the toilets at Angle. Llanycefn school had been condemned by the Rural District Council – its open closets were flushed by a stream which then ran into the river above a natural pool used by the children for swimming instruction.

Fifty-four schools had a poor supply of water whilst five schools still had none. Pupils at Bridell needed to carry their drinking water from Dale, and Hayscastle pupils obtained water from an open well at the side of the road from which animals drank.³⁰ Pembrokeshire Education Committee had reported in 1924 that ‘the question of water supply in rural schools is one for which no Authority appears to have found a satisfactory and moderately economical solution’; indeed Pembrokeshire still had not done so by 1939.³¹

The authority was mindful of the state of its schools and what was needed to improve them, and tried to make improvements with limited resources. In 1939 the Buildings Sub-Committee recommended the installation of central heating in schools, Tegryn, Eglwyswrrw and Monachlogddu being prioritized. In the same year it offered grants of £350 to any county school applying for a sports pavilion. Some modernisation continued, Tenby County School turning its woodwork room into a dining room,

³⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/14/14 Pembrokeshire Education Authority, 5 July 1939.

³¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2, p.29.

seeking permission for a temporary hut for a new woodwork block.³² The County Architect noted that if Greenhill School were to be remodelled to requirements, it would leave so little of the early buildings that it might be necessary to provide a new building with the exception of the woodwork and cookery block. The school was still heated by coal fires in 1939.³³

Forty-four schools had poor quality playgrounds and Nolton still had no playground at all. Little Newcastle pupils played on the road and the commons and had to walk through a stream to the closets.³⁴

S.J. Curtis believes the interwar years saw advances in school buildings and equipment - by 1939 although there were still many inadequate buildings, schools were brighter, friendlier and more pleasant places.³⁵ It appears that in Pembrokeshire, much work was still to be done.

³² PRO, PCC/SE/16/111 Buildings Sub-Committee Minutes.

³³ Harrison, p.243.

³⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/14/14.

³⁵ S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (University Tutorial Press, 1967), pp.366-9.

Curriculum Matters

Questioning curriculum content and traditional methods of pedagogy was not new. Educationalist Edmond Holmes had published recommendations for change in 1911, believing teaching methods required only 'passive receptivity' from lethargic and inert pupils¹ who were 'the outcome of five or six years of systematic repression and compulsory inaction'.²

The Lewis Report noted that in their final years, elementary school pupils received mediocre education. If education was to be the solution to some of society's post-war problems, change was necessary - better quality teachers, smaller size classes, and an improved curriculum. Local authorities should have discretion to plan the curriculum according to local need; a more rural bias might discourage migration to urban areas.

Standards were inconsistent in Pembrokeshire schools. In October 1920 Bosherton School's headteacher was praised for reading Board of Education publications and keeping abreast of new ideas; conversely at Angle N.P. 'an infusion of new ideas' was deemed necessary and Ambleston's syllabus had remained unchanged since 1909, showing no awareness of educational progress. Lessons at Prendergast

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1911), pp.143-4.
<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/holmes/whatis.html> (Accessed on 17 February 2020)

² Holmes, pp.155-6.

Infants School showed 'forethought, preparation and zest', whereas Dew Street Infant School relied on old methods.³

Due to developments in child psychology theories, the 1920s brought a growing awareness of new methods and understanding of the ways in which children learn, with some progressive methods being introduced into Pembrokeshire schools. Parents National Education Union methods were used in Prendergast Council Girls' School and Manordeifi Upper N.P School, and a modified Dalton Plan in Goodwick Council Mixed School. Teachers were encouraged to visit other schools to promote the exchange of ideas: Blaenffos and Puncheston specialised in handwork, Eglwyswrw in art and Tenby Council Mixed in physical training.⁴ There was a movement towards learning through activity and experience and away from drill and rote-learning, although traditional methods could still prove useful in learning to write or developing arithmetic skills. A balance of methods was needed - in the Labour Party's 'Education for All', R.H. Tawney recognised that not all children respond to the same methods or curriculum.⁵

The curriculum was the focus of growing debate. Felicity Hunt notes some gender differentiation existed but in 1919 the Board of Education observed that the

³ Pembrokeshire Records Office (PRO) PCC/ED/15/43 Inspections: 13 October 1920 Bosherton School; 13 October 1920 Angle N.P.; 01 November 1920 Ambleston; Inspection Book 1 p.76 14 November 1921 Prendergast Infants School.

⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2 Pembrokeshire Education Committee Report for 1 September 1921 to 31 August 1924. p.22.

⁵ R.H. Tawney, *Secondary Education for all: A Policy for Labour*, 1922, pp.62-7 in Willem Van der Eyken (ed.), *Education, the Child and Society: a documentary history, 1900-1973* (Harmandsworth: Penguin Education, 1973), p.266.

‘educational requirements of boys and girls, like their capacities, are not identical’ and sought further information from the Consultative Committee.⁶ Its 1923 Report, *Differentiation of the Curriculum*, recommended improved science teaching and more handwork subjects for girls, whilst boys should have more opportunities to study English literature. Girls were often subjected to intensive teaching methods and needed to develop initiative and independence; they should not face undue pressures due to their ‘sensibilities’ and therefore should sit the school certificate examination a year later than boys. The Committee felt that much ‘evidence’ on the differences between boys and girls was unscientific and subject bias was sometimes due to tradition or existing methods of teaching, rather than inherent differences between the sexes. Greater flexibility in the curriculum would allow girls and boys to follow subjects of interest to them, indeed it recommended that ‘girls should not be debarred from any opportunities of development open to their brothers, and should be free [...] to study any subject of the ordinary school routine accepted for boys.’⁷

Pembrokeshire took a progressive stance in curriculum development. It held an Education Week in October 1925 – an event the *South Wales News* called ‘the most comprehensive attempt yet made at an Education Week on a county scale in any part of

⁶ Paragraph 7 of Circular 1112, *Memorandum on Advanced Courses*. H.M.S.O., 1919, quoted in Felicity Hunt (ed.), *The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.17.

⁷ *Report of the Consultative Committee on Differentiation of the Curriculum for Boys and Girls Respectively in Secondary Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1923), p.134.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1923/hadow1923.html> (Accessed on 09 February 2020)

the United Kingdom.’⁸ It aimed to overcome the difficulties caused by children being remote from their schools, and of schools from each other, and to foster cooperation with parents and stimulate their interest. Many rural schools employed uncertificated teachers who were isolated from new methods; initiatives like Education Week introduced modern developments and viewpoints to improve standards of teaching.

Education Week highlighted the importance of making school buildings attractive spaces outside with plants for the children to tend, and bright interiors with displays of children’s work. It emphasized the importance of team spirit and respect for people and equipment. Exhibitions of work were held and using films and broadcasting to enhance lessons was promoted. Fifty schools were given wireless apparatus to listen to special lectures and watch films from the British Instructional Film Company. The *Tenby County News* noted that ‘for the first time in England or Wales an experiment in the use of the wireless and the film in schools is being tried on a wide scale [...] watched with the closest interest by all educationalists.’⁹

Education Week garnered much support and praise. One teacher observed that ‘hitherto, as a school, we have been on our own – seeing nobody, hearing of nobody and consequently having no neighbours...The venture has done much to brighten the lot of the rural child for he feels that he is no longer one of a ‘number on books’ but a

⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *South Wales News*, undated news cutting.

⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *Tenby County News*, 7 October 1925.

child whose interest and well-being is the great concern, not only of his parent and teachers, but of many outside his limited confines.’¹⁰

Not everyone was impressed however. The *Pembrokeshire Telegraph* reported the money spent should have been used to improve school sanitation.¹¹ A *County Echo* reader felt the focus should have been on teaching methods to ensure a good return on ratepayers’ money – he believed silent reading was wasted time without instruction and criticised the marking of books. He felt that teachers resented any interest shown by parents and thought them interfering.¹²

Education Week coincided with a growing discussion on the role of parents in education; one common opinion held that ‘parents leave everything to the teacher and abdicate responsibility regarding the educational progress of the child.’¹³ Indeed, Pembrokeshire’s Director of Education broadcast that the time would come ‘when parents would look upon the schools as a kind of super-incubator’ and that their sole function was to place their child in it.¹⁴ Some newspapers concurred that parents took education for granted and urged them to take interest in their children’s progress, that it was ‘gross negligence of parental duty to throw the whole responsibility of the training

¹⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17/11 *Education Week and After*, 23-31 October 1925.

¹¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *Pembrokeshire Telegraph*, undated news cutting.

¹² PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *County Echo*, 5 November 1925.

¹³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *Western Mail*, 28 October 1925.

¹⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 Broadcast by Evan T. Davis reported in an undated news cutting.

of the children's character upon the teachers.'¹⁵ Others commended the increased number of Pembrokeshire teachers who were conscious of their social responsibilities.

President of the Board of Education, Lord Eustace Percy, claimed the curriculum was overcrowded.¹⁶ The *Western Mail* urged him to hold an enquiry as many children left elementary school without proficiency in basic skills:¹⁷ a sense of 'marking time' existed for those not proceeding to scholarship examinations and secondary schools. Some criticised the curriculum being comprised of separate subjects, not related parts of the whole education, despite good examples of cross-curricular work in some areas.

From 1926, the elementary school curriculum was no longer prescribed; Ron Brooks questions whether the Board relinquishing control was a natural progression, or whether it was simply too expensive to maintain a national curriculum.¹⁸ The Board's *New Prospect in Education* of 1928 recommended the curriculum be adapted to children's varying needs and aptitudes, otherwise compulsory attendance would alienate them from the importance of education - 'uniformity in syllabus is the last thing the Authority desires.'¹⁹

¹⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 Undated news cutting.

¹⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *South Wales News* 30 October 1925.

¹⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *Western Mail*, 31 October 1925.

¹⁸ Ron Brooks, *Contemporary Debates in Education – an Historical Perspective* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), pp.56-7.

¹⁹ Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, No. 60, *The New Prospect in Education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1928), p.27. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/boardofed/1928-new-prospect.html> (Accessed on 12 January 2020)

Bilingualism was a factor needing consideration in Pembrokeshire. In 1919 the Board questioned the practice of teaching Welsh-speaking children in English, and felt 'the present time... is favourable to a thorough reconsideration of language teaching in Wales,' as 'no broad and comprehensive view of teaching of Welsh seems to have been taken'.²⁰ The amount of children who spoke Welsh as their first language varied across the county; Pembrokeshire Education Committee Report for 1921 to 1924 showed ninety-seven per cent of St Davids elementary school pupils spoke Welsh at home but only 13.5 per cent of Haverfordwest pupils, and only two of Milford Haven's 2228 pupils. Forty-six per cent of Fishguard's secondary pupils could speak Welsh, with twenty-five per cent being able to speak, read and write Welsh with fair proficiency for their age; only eleven per cent of Haverfordwest Grammar pupils could speak Welsh and none of them received lessons in Welsh compared with seventy-five per cent of St Davids' pupils.²¹

In 1926 Pembrokeshire Education Committee recognised bilingualism as 'an acute problem'; it was difficult to teach Welsh in Pembrokeshire, despite more books being written directly for Welsh-speaking children. The Committee believed bilingual children developed a 'richer vocabulary and a readier sense of style and literary appreciation' and aimed to include more literature in the scholarship examination,

²⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/18/4 Report of the Board of Education under the Welsh Intermediate Education Act 1889, for the year 1921, p.5.

²¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2.

believing 'reading and more reading is the way to the mastery of language'.²² It noted the difficulty of creating interest in Welsh books whose language differed from the children's Pembrokeshire dialect. Welsh arithmetic books were not available so Welsh-speaking pupils were taught in a strange language.²³ The 1928 *Report on Books in Public Elementary Schools* noted that 'the general aim is to secure bi-lingualism in varying degrees in the Elementary Schools throughout Wales' but made qualification in respect of schools in three counties, including Pembrokeshire. It noted teachers' complaints about the deficiency of Welsh reading books and those for use in other subjects but publishers expressed difficulties regarding demand plus the need to produce texts at different levels appropriate to Welsh-speakers and learners.²⁴ The Consultative Committee recommended local authorities increase grants to facilitate better provision of Welsh books in elementary schools, and this was achieved in some areas by 1938.²⁵

Welsh Department Reports show a change in attitude to teaching Welsh and a revised policy was adopted - where Welsh was the mother tongue, it was given its proper position in school life with English introduced as a second language after the age of

²² PRO, PCC/ED/14/5 Minutes of the Education Committee, 21 September 1926 App E1.

²³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3 Report 1 September 1924 to 31 August 1926.

²⁴ Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Books in Public Elementary Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1928), pp.53-6. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1928/hadow1928.html> (Accessed on 01 March 2020)

²⁵ Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Books in Public Elementary Schools*, pp.115-6.

seven.²⁶ In 1927, conferences for teachers took place in Welsh-speaking areas and in 1928 refresher courses were held in Fishguard regarding the problem of teaching language in Welsh-speaking areas.²⁷ Such initiatives may have been successful. Gareth Elwyn Jones believes using Welsh as the medium of instruction increased and the quality of Welsh teaching improved, the elementary schools helping to preserve the Welsh language during the interwar years;²⁸ as Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick show, there were no secondary schools in Wales where Welsh was the first language.²⁹ Despite the 1927 Report's recommendation that Welsh should be the medium of instruction for some subjects in secondary school, Roger Webster maintains that 'little or nothing was done in the interwar period to introduce Welsh medium teaching into secondary schools, even in the most Welsh areas.'³⁰

The 1938 Spens Report accepted bilingualism as a special problem in Wales. Though the Board and local authorities tried to give Welsh prominence, they insisted standards in English for grammar school pupils in Wales should not be lower than in

²⁶ Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Books in Public Elementary Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1928), p.53.

²⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12 Board of Education (Welsh Department) General Report of H.M. Inspectors on Elementary Education in the Administrative County of Pembrokeshire for the period ending 31 December 1937.

²⁸ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), pp.126-128.

²⁹ Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.121.

³⁰ Roger Webster, *School and Community in Rural Wales* (Aberystwyth: Y Ganolfan Astudiaethau Addysg, 1991), p.187.

England. Reading aloud and drama were encouraged to improve Standard English according to the pupils' needs since the English spoken at home and in the playground was different to that spoken in class. It noted Wales had cultural links to music, singing, drama, poetry and art, which should be better represented in the secondary curriculum; Welsh culture was recognised in the teaching of history, literature and geography also.

The 1931 Report, *The Primary School*, stated that 'the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored'.³¹ Bronwen Swinnerton believes that while the 1926 Report advocated that post-primary curricula should relate to pupils' future occupations, the 1931 Report focused on children as children and not as future adults.³² It acknowledged the benefits of bringing younger children together through reorganisation; teaching was more appropriate, challenging more able pupils whilst supporting the less able. The project method of teaching was recommended in primary schools; child-led investigations and independent enquiries resulted in more relevant experience and understanding. Swinnerton believes the influence of supporters of progressive teaching methods was seen throughout the 1931 Report, opposing formal class lessons run by authoritarian teachers. Yet despite the variety of modern teaching methods available, archaic

³¹ Board of Education *Report of The Consultative Committee on The Primary School* (London: H.M.S.O., 1931), p.93. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1931/hadow1931.html> (Accessed on 26 January 2020)

³² Bronwen Swinnerton, The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: tensions and contradictions, in *History of Education*, 1996, Volume 25, Number 1, p.82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760960250105> (Accessed 02 January 2020)

practices were prevalent – maybe as Swinnerton suggests, trying to introduce modern teaching methods into a formal, traditional education system created tensions.³³ Even by 1938 the curriculum in Pembrokeshire's junior schools needed greater breadth and better development of skills; H.M. Inspectors recognised the need to move away from 'mechanical' methods of learning and welcomed experiments in using new methods.³⁴

The importance of practical work was recognised in the 1918 Education Act but rural school finances often restricted this provision. The Chief Inspector of Elementary Schools, Mr. F.H. Dale, noted that thousands of children left school with little experience, due to lack of suitably qualified teachers and the greater costs of teaching practical subjects and because some authorities did not favour progressive teaching methods.³⁵ Pembrokeshire L.E.A., however, encouraged its schools: its Draft Scheme following the 1918 Education Act stated that 'in infant schools, handwork should form the core around which all other instruction is centred. In junior classes, handwork should be correlated with other subjects.'³⁶ Yet despite its suggested scheme, training provision and vacation course grants, handicrafts were either not taught or taught to only one sex in sixty-two Pembrokeshire schools, although provision of practical

³³ Swinnerton, p.78.

³⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

³⁵ *Departmental Committee on juvenile education in relation to employment after the war* (London: H.M.S.O., 1917), p.12. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/lewis1917/index.html> (Accessed on 30 November 2019)

³⁶ PRO, SSM/1/132 County of Pembroke, Education Act 1918. *Draft Scheme of Education Committee for submission to the Board of Education pursuant to the Education Act 1918* (Haverfordwest, 1920), pp.20-1.

instruction in all elementary schools was a condition of the Board's grant to the L.E.A. The authority asked headteachers to provide details of the types of handicraft taught, the time spent per week, and the teachers' qualifications, showing the importance it placed on practical instruction.³⁷ It recommended pupils receive two hours of practical needlework lessons per week, linked to arithmetic and drawing. Two full-time peripatetic cookery teachers were employed to provide intensive courses for senior girls from small schools; other mistresses taught at county schools once a week and at neighbouring elementary schools. The Board held refresher courses in cookery in 1936 but senior schools needed to be properly equipped before standards could be improved. In their 1937 Report on Pembrokeshire secondary schools, H.M. Inspectors noted there had been 'a commendable attempt in the county to modernise the curriculum'³⁸ and reported that the system of practical work allowed pupils to make progress not achievable in elementary schools, which represented a step forward.

In 1929, two Group IV school certificate subjects counted as one subject from Groups I-III.³⁹ Felicity Hunt notes that Group IV contained subjects traditionally chosen by girls, which she believes cast aspersions on their academic status. Penny Summerfield agrees, believing the inferior status given to domestic subjects showed

³⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/14/8 Special Circular 1/24 Very important Pembrokeshire Education Authority Memorandum on Practical Instruction including Needlework and Gardening - Report forms 9b.E for 1922-23.

³⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

³⁹ Board of Education Annual Report 1929, p.37 quoted in Felicity Hunt (ed.).

girls that preparation for domestic life was unimportant to schools; there was an 'inverse relationship between academic ability and domestic competence' as these subjects were often taught to less able pupils or those deemed lower class.⁴⁰ By Group IV subjects not being included for matriculation purposes, Pembrokeshire Education Committee believed the special interests of some children were sacrificed.⁴¹ Jones raises the wider question of the economic usefulness of girls' education and why it was not more appropriate for them, giving them no social or geographical mobility; in 1925-6 thirty-four per cent of girls in Wales stayed home after leaving school.⁴²

Pembrokeshire's Draft Scheme following the 1918 Education Act noted that most young people entered into agricultural occupations and advocated the provision of advanced instruction with a rural bias.⁴³ This was a topical debate: *Western Mail* opinion noted agricultural bias was needed to interest children in farming pursuits and rural life; schools were teaching subjects that the children couldn't understand or utilise in later life.⁴⁴ Sir Ernest Gray of the NUT advocated closer links between teachers and farmers, stating 'nature should be a feature of every subject';⁴⁵ people would continue to leave rural areas until country life was made more attractive. In Circular 1365, the

⁴⁰ Penny Summerfield, Cultural reproduction in the education of girls: A study of girls' secondary schooling in two Lancashire towns 1900-50, in Felicity Hunt (ed.), p.156.

⁴¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/6 Secondary Education in Pembrokeshire: Report of the Special Sub-Committee, 19 September 1933.

⁴² Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944*, p.83.

⁴³ PRO, SSM/1/132, p.6.

⁴⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *Western Mail* 28 October 1925.

⁴⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/13 *Pembrokeshire Telegraph* 5 November 1925.

Board noted it of 'great importance that the teaching in rural schools should be associated closely with the environment of the children', especially noting gardening and other forms of practical work.⁴⁶ Pembrokeshire maintained links with agriculture into the 1930s, with lectures and demonstrations about crops and beekeeping. The County Horticultural Instructor's visits provided guidance and ideas for related experiments: Lamphey pupils successfully experimented with trials in growing produce and eradicating pests, developing practical cross-curricular skills alongside theory. Maenclochog pupils were given a plot of land, a grant for equipment and housing for poultry keeping, being taught by the County Poultry Inspector.⁴⁷ J. Synge states that in the 1930s the Board suggested that education should not prepare rural children solely for agricultural life⁴⁸ but Pembrokeshire's schemes were praised in H.M.I. Reports of 1937. 'Hands-on' work excelled over being drilled by teachers; pupils would be 'better fitted to adapt themselves to their environment after having lived a more natural life in school.'⁴⁹ Pembrokeshire Education Committee recommended agricultural science for active, meaningful learning and provided financial support in St Davids to develop

⁴⁶ Board of Education Circular 1365, paragraph 1 (London: H.M.S.O., 28 May 1925), quoted in J. Synge, 'The Selective Function and British Rural Education' in *The British Journal of Educational Studies*, Volume 23, Number 2 (June 1975), p.142. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Society for Educational Studies. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3120497> (Accessed on 24 November 2018)

⁴⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

⁴⁸ Synge, p.143.

⁴⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

this.⁵⁰ The Spens Report emphasised the importance of growing and using produce, and keeping small livestock in rural areas and Pembrokeshire schools understood the benefits: over the year 1939-40, thirty-two new gardens were made and forty-two school gardens were increased, although forty-eight schools had no garden at all.⁵¹ It was not until after World War Two that the authority established a grammar school with agricultural courses at Bush Estate, Pembroke.⁵²

Physical education continued to be important; Circular 1445 expressed the hope that this would not be 'crowded out of the curriculum' for older pupils.⁵³ H.M.I Inspectors noted a 'growing consciousness of the importance of physical education' in Pembrokeshire and teachers were trained to use the P.T. Syllabus. Many senior schools aspired to hold inter-house and inter-school matches, galas and athletic meetings but playing fields and facilities were inadequate. Proper clothing and footwear were needed for lessons - Circular 1450 noted schools should buy gym shoes as equipment. By 1938 the Spens Report recommended further enquiries be made into appropriate physical education activities for secondary school pupils indicating more improvement was necessary, but South Pembrokeshire schools had rugby and football teams, Milford

⁵⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17/6.

⁵¹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/52 Lamphey School Garden, 1930.

⁵² Wilfred Harrison, *Greenhill School Tenby 1896-1964. An Educational and Social History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), pp.219-20.

⁵³ The Progress of Education: The Board's Report for 1936. *The British Medical Journal* (London: H.M.S.O., 13 November 1937), p.199. <http://www.bmj.com> (Accessed on 19 January 2020)

Haven was renowned for gymnastics teaching and dancing was deemed a useful subject for country children.⁵⁴

In line with Reconstruction aims, Pembrokeshire's R.E. Syllabus of 1921 aimed to produce 'the best type of citizen'; citizenship and moral character should be taught alongside lessons promoting hygiene and temperance.⁵⁵

Despite new ideas, some Pembrokeshire schools failed to modernise their curriculum. In 1926, the Education Committee noted that 'the greatest danger to the standard of elementary education in a rural area is monotony. The isolation of the school tends strongly to make them less accessible to modern developments in educational theory and practice; there is less opportunity for exchange of ideas and comparison of methods'. Although it advocated annual review of school timetables and syllabuses, some were still repeated without amendment.⁵⁶

Pembrokeshire pupils were however brought together by music festivals, Urdd activities and the National Eisteddfod. In 1935 the Royal Welsh Show was held in Haverfordwest, almost all schools taking part in an exhibition of work. *The Primary*

⁵⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

⁵⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/14/5 Scheme of Religious and Moral Instruction in Public Elementary Schools, January 1921.

⁵⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3, p.19.

School Report of 1931 recommended the use of educational visits to enhance children's learning and these were popular in Pembrokeshire.⁵⁷

1937's *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers* confirmed rural curricula should be flexible and uniformity of practice was not expected; 'modern education must adapt itself to modern needs'.⁵⁸ The Spens Report noted the curriculum should reflect children's growing concentration spans and ability to learn, with appropriately challenging tasks and a move away from tedious rote-learning; lessons should be more child-led than teacher-directed. It recommended individuality be nurtured, with pupils being taught to think for themselves and show initiative, developing inference and reasoning skills.

The influence of the examination system on the curriculum was questioned from 1918. At a Mid-Pembrokeshire NUT meeting, Haverfordwest headmaster George James stated elementary education was dominated by the pursuit of a scholarship as children receiving secondary education were likely to gain better employment. He acknowledged this showed parents wanted to improve their children's education, but insisted these years should be spent more wisely than preparing for examinations.⁵⁹ By 1924, Pembrokeshire's syllabus was in line with the Board's requirements but differed from other counties by having two examinations - elementary teachers recommended

⁵⁷ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

⁵⁸ PRO, PCC/ED/23/15 Board of Education *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers, for consideration of teachers and others concerned in the work of public elementary schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1937), p.11.

⁵⁹ *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter*, 26 June 1918, p.1.

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4119312> (Accessed on 06 March 2018)

the admission examination be merged into the scholarship examination whereas secondary headteachers advised it be kept separate. The maximum age for examination was fixed at thirteen in Pembrokeshire which was still deemed too high; no over-age candidates were allowed to sit after 1924.⁶⁰ In 1927, of 443 pupils, seven failed to score, fourteen scored full marks, and 227 achieved fifty per cent or more. The Education Committee noted that 'in the draft paper, we endeavour to strike an even balance and to offer Welsh speaking children, as far as possible, a better opportunity of showing what they can do when they are not unduly hampered by limitations of vocabulary'; indeed a year later the Report of the Chief Examiner showed that of 577 Pembrokeshire candidates, more children than before attempted the Welsh section. He noted that 'one knows full well the difficulties the teachers in the county have to surmount in dealing with language teaching.'⁶¹A report on the examination for entrance scholarships and free places in Pembrokeshire in 1928-9 showed twenty-three per cent were exempt due to 'mental deficiency', lack of attendance, 'being retarded', medical reasons or lateness. Intelligence tests were given on 31 March 1929 to all Pembrokeshire pupils between the ages of 11½ and 12½, headteachers being advised that evaluating a child's potential would be helpful in reorganisation.⁶²

⁶⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2, pp.34-5.

⁶¹ PRO, PCC/ED/15/79 Pembrokeshire Education Committee Entrance School Examination 1927, Joint Scholarship Board.

⁶² PRO, PCC/ED/15/79.

The *Primary School* Report agreed examinations needed to be part of the selective process for secondary education but noted the curriculum was dominated by the 3Rs to the neglect of other subjects, with coaching and cramming widespread. Pembrokeshire's Director of Education felt excessive homework should be discouraged for scholarship examination candidates,⁶³ and Pembrokeshire would enforce the Board's recommendation that no children below twelve should receive homework.⁶⁴ Educational Pamphlet 110, *Homework*, reiterated these recommendations in 1938; although homework was voluntary, it noted an increased amount and pressure of homework on junior pupils which could be remedied by reducing the pressure of competitive examinations. It provided guidance on amounts of homework requested of pupils and recognised that home conditions were not always conducive to the completion of homework.⁶⁵

The 1937 H.M.I. Report showed an increase in the proportion of Pembrokeshire children from public elementary schools proceeding to secondary education;⁶⁶ Pembrokeshire's Director of Education, D.T. Jones, suggested a new form for the examination including progress reports and group intelligence tests 'to avoid entry into

⁶³ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

⁶⁴ Harrison, p.200.

⁶⁵ Board of Education Educational Pamphlets, Number 110. *Homework* (London: H.M.S.O., 1937), pp.64-6. <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/boardofed/1937-homework.html#05>

(Accessed on 01 March 2020)

⁶⁶ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

our secondary schools of pupils who have been intensely prepared'.⁶⁷ Roger Webster believes the need for scholarship passes 'overshadowed the main function of the elementary school'.⁶⁸ Jones believes the special place system resulted in more focus on the entrance and scholarship examinations which he believed were 'amateurish' in Wales, having no age allowance, and that this focus coupled with long travelling times and too much homework meant that 'life for school pupils in the 1930s was earnest'.⁶⁹

In 1931, H.W. Household, an advocate of P.N.E.U methods, observed that the demand for certificates led to acquisition of knowledge that lasted the length of examination week with little effect on intelligence; ideal pupils were passive listeners who responded well to drill and obtained certificates. He acknowledged class sizes had reduced since Victorian times and more books were available, but noted 'the method of the oral lesson, the questions, the text book, and the dictated summary, largely persist'.⁷⁰

Other examination pressures existed: in 1937, H.M. Inspectors noted Pembrokeshire schools should not be restricted by external exams, having freedom to devise the curriculum to meet pupils' needs.⁷¹ The Spens Report recommended a wider

⁶⁷ Harrison, p.200.

⁶⁸ Roger Webster, p.38.

⁶⁹ Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944*, pp.152, pp.160-61.

⁷⁰ H.W. Household, *The Parents' Review*, 1931, pp.638-649.

<http://charlottomasonpoetry.org/the-teaching-methods-of-charlotte-mason-and-the-p-n-e-u/>

(Accessed on 30 November 2019)

⁷¹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

approach - education should go beyond the acquisition of facts, developing 'specific habits, memories, ideas, forms of manual and mental skill, intellectual interests, moral ideals, and a knowledge of methods'.⁷² It encouraged creativity and reiterated that examinations should follow the curriculum rather than determine it, allowing schools more freedom in their topics of study. S.J. Curtis believes the school certificate examination was acknowledged as providing useful motivation to attainment, but was the source of much strain on pupils. Many dropped subjects not recognised for matriculation which effectively made it a university entrance examination, despite the fact that eighty-five per cent of pupils left school at sixteen, meaning the curriculum was being created for a minority.⁷³ The Spens Report showed an increase in those taking the examination across the country though approximately forty per cent of children still left school without doing so.

Across the country, numbers remaining to pursue more specialised studies after the examination showed an increase of ninety-six per cent of boys taking the higher certificate and forty-one per cent of girls.⁷⁴ Jones believes that competition for allocation of funds for advanced courses resulted in an 'elite' of council schools in Wales.⁷⁵ In

⁷² The Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1938), p.356.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/spens/spens1938.html>

(Accessed on 15 January 2020)

⁷³ S.J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (University Tutorial Press, 1967), p.355.

⁷⁴ The Board of Education *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*, pp.100-1.

⁷⁵ Jones, *The Education of a Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p.75.

1917-8 only seven advanced courses were offered in Wales, increasing to thirty-six in 1921; by 1927-8 this had only changed to thirty-seven courses taught in thirty-two schools.⁷⁶ Despite this, increasing numbers of Pembrokeshire pupils remained for sixth form studies throughout the 1930s. In 1931 Pembroke Dock School had thirty-six sixth form scholars; Jones attributes this to headteacher T.H. Jones, who brought influences from England's first grade schools to Pembrokeshire. Jones states that Haverfordwest Grammar School for Boys placed too much onus on examination results, despite wider calls for the curriculum not to be determined in this way. Milford Haven School's headteacher, K.D. Evans, believed in differentiating the curriculum to individual needs, yet pupils only achieved four higher certificates between 1902 and 1931.⁷⁷

The authority recognised the need to improve the quality of its teachers. In its Draft Scheme following The 1918 Education Act it noted there was little opportunity for educational exchange of ideas - only those with 'superlative initiative and enthusiasm keep abreast of modern secondary developments'.⁷⁸ To raise standards of infant teaching in Pembrokeshire, the headteachers of Prendergast and Goodwick infant departments observed teaching methods in London in 1921, which resulted in more equipment and staff. The Prendergast teacher made two further visits, obtaining a

⁷⁶ Welsh Department of the Board of Education *Report of the Board of Education under the Welsh Intermediate Education Act 1889, for the year 1930*. (London: H.M.S.O., 1931), p.10.

⁷⁷ Jones, *The Education of a Nation*, p.75.

⁷⁸ PRO, SSM/1/132, p.5.

Montessori Diploma in 1929. Other infant teachers visited 'demonstration schools' to raise standards and such visits were still ongoing in 1937, H.M. Inspectors noting this good practice.⁷⁹ But more training was necessary; only 37.9 per cent of Pembrokeshire teachers were certificated, lower than in other rural Welsh counties.⁸⁰ To allow them to specialise following their general courses, Saturday classes and summer courses were provided.

Other opportunities for professional development existed. In 1923 almost all Pembrokeshire teachers attended a meeting promoting the scheme of rural lore as an educational aid and discussing the League of Nations' new methods of teaching history and geography. In the same year Haverfordwest was the only rural centre providing lectures on 'Individual Work in Infants' Schools', given by a London headteacher to demonstrate modern developments in theory and practice. Over one hundred teachers attended, resulting in 'a marked quickening of interest in the work of our Infants' Schools'. Sadly many felt they would struggle to implement these modern methods due to their school buildings and apparatus.⁸¹ Local teachers were encouraged by the authority to read periodicals such as *Child Education* and *Teacher's World* – 'teachers who do not read two or three such periodicals per week will soon be in an educational

⁷⁹ PRO, PCC/ED/14/12.

⁸⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2.

⁸¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2.

backwater and school work will soon degenerate into routine.’⁸² Some took up correspondence courses in Infant School Methods with ‘Teachers’ World’.⁸³ £150 per annum was available to promote awareness of new ideas and help teachers attend courses and the Teachers’ Library had fourteen centres throughout the county.⁸⁴ Arithmetic teachers were given suggestions from Leicestershire Education Committee, and memoranda and pamphlets were disseminated including ideas on physical training in rural schools and Cylch Dewi pamphlets regarding the teaching of Welsh. The Director of Education used his school visits to share new ideas and examine timetables and syllabuses in consultation with inspectors. Monthly circulars were sent to all schools listing Education Committee and Board of Education decisions and instructions, and detailing educational books and courses, developments and facilities – any information to equip teachers more fully.⁸⁵ Writing in 1929, M.K. Ashby noted the existence of books of ready-made lessons to ‘spoon-feed’ teachers in order that they could ‘spoon-feed’ their pupils⁸⁶ so Pembrokeshire’s efforts to educate its teachers were laudable.

⁸² PRO, PCC/ED/14/9 – 203/25A Scheme for securing an adequate place to be given to handwork in the curricula of elementary schools in Pembrokeshire, 19 November 1925.

⁸³ PRO, PCC/ED/17/2.

⁸⁴ PRO, PCC/ED/17/11 Education Week and After.

⁸⁵ PRO, PCC/ED/17/3 p.7.

⁸⁶ M.K. Ashby, *The Country School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), p.130.

R.J.W. Selleck states that the Handbooks of Suggestions for Teachers 'became steadily more sympathetic to progressive theory' in the interwar period,⁸⁷ however Gordon and Lawton assert that 'by 1944, the content of the primary school curriculum was virtually unchanged since the start of the century'.⁸⁸ As Jones and Roderick assert, the interwar period produced a gradual improvement in teaching methods, curriculum and results but there was still a great disparity between progressive ideas and classroom practice, resulting in only limited reform.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ R.J.W. Selleck in *English Primary Education and the Progressives 1914-39*, 1972, pp.123-4 quoted in Peter Gordon and Denis Lawton, *Curriculum Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), p.27.

⁸⁸ Gordon and Lawton, p.157.

⁸⁹ Jones and Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales*, pp.116-17.

Conclusion

In 1918 John Whitehouse M.P. noted that a class system of education existed, with elementary schools intended for poor children and secondary schools for those with well-to-do parents and 'no scientific relation between elementary and secondary education.'¹ The question is to what extent this system changed over the interwar period, and whether education improved for Pembrokeshire children.

Post-war discussions centred on the need to develop healthy and well-rounded future citizens; Gareth Elwyn Jones states there had been 'almost unprecedented public interest' in education as a feature of reconstruction,² but preserving the social order was at the heart of government policy, not educational priorities.³ Though the government implemented many measures to improve education, extensive reform was in part frustrated by the class prejudices of wealthier sections of the population who sought to maintain the social status quo.

The interwar years were characterised by forward-thinking individuals striving to improve educational opportunities for all children; writing in 1932, Susan Isaacs noted lecturing to one mixed group was time wasted; she advocated smaller classes,

¹ Parliamentary address by John Whitehouse M.P. https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1918/mar/13/education-bill#S5CV0104P0_19180313_HOC_246

(Accessed on 06 March 2020)

² Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Which Nation's Schools? Direction and Devolution in Welsh Education in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), p.44.

³ Jones, *Which Nation's Schools?* p.31.

modern individual methods and differentiated groups.⁴ Despite Pembrokeshire's isolated rural nature, its local authority was keen to keep abreast of such progressive ideas and motivate and stimulate pupils through initiatives such as Education Week and use of modern technology. It initiated a successful programme of observing good progress in other authorities which impacted positively on standards, although this was only on a limited basis and might have been implemented in other schools to similarly good effect, achieving greater consistency.

Despite the authority's good intentions in developing curricula, these were still dominated by scholarship examinations in elementary and junior schools due to the need to achieve free or special places. Some archaic practices remained by 1939, but improvements had undoubtedly been made; as Gareth Elwyn Jones attests, 'the quality of elementary education undoubtedly improved in the interwar period and there was a more enlightened attitude to the teaching of Welsh.'⁵ Similarly the secondary school curriculum was often directed by the need for pupils to achieve school and higher certificates and thereby boost their employment opportunities; as Jones notes, the largely academic focus remained.⁶ Jones and Roderick believe that though numbers proceeding to secondary education had increased by 1939, Welsh schools and the

⁴ Susan Isaacs, *The Children We Teach* (London: University of London Press, 1932, 14th Impression, 1959), p.172.

⁵ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Modern Wales: A Concise History, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.291.

⁶ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), pp.171-2.

education they offered had changed very little,⁷ and R.H. Tawney's aim of secondary education for all had not been achieved.

The role of parents in education and children's welfare was the subject of much debate; too much interest was seen as interfering, too little interest showed a lack of responsibility. M.K. Ashby noted in 1929 that 'education will continue to be half a failure till home and school have a vastly better understanding';⁸ undeniably there was a need to improve cooperation with parents and initiatives such as Education Week showed Pembrokeshire L.E.A. tried to improve links between home and school. Some parents opposed increasing the school leaving age due to poverty; free place provision alone did not allow children from poorer families to attend school. Maintenance allowances offset the loss of potential wages and assisted with purchasing uniforms and books but Gareth Elwyn Jones believes 'there was a less enlightened attitude to maintenance allowances in rural areas'.⁹ Pembrokeshire Education Committee noted further obstacles - 'in remoter areas even free Secondary Education and general maintenance allowances do not affect the position: here Pembrokeshire's special difficulty i.e. the distance of schools from each other and of some children from

⁷ Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.134.

⁸ M.K. Ashby, *The Country School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), p.98.

⁹ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Which Nation's Schools?*

secondary schools will always be a hindrance.’¹⁰ It believed lodging was impracticable owing to finances and the lack of available accommodation, and conveyance costs were prohibitive; in summary it believed ‘the average Pembrokeshire child will always have to make a considerable physical effort in order to obtain educational facilities.’¹¹

Improvements in Pembrokeshire’s school buildings were few and this had the biggest impact, as it was difficult to deliver new teaching approaches in buildings that had been designed to meet very different needs in earlier times. Lawson and Silver’s statement that ‘the recommendations of Reports were hampered by the financial climate which meant the modernisation of buildings and purchase of new equipment and apparatus could not proceed’ was particularly true in Pembrokeshire.¹² The special child-sized furniture advocated by Maria Montessori was a far cry from the antiquated furniture in Pembrokeshire schools, which was not conducive to comfort or new learning styles. The recommendations of the School Medical Officer and County Architect were not just important for new teaching styles but vital for children’s health and welfare; reports on the state of buildings show huge improvements were needed in basics such as sanitation and clean water supply, even by 1939. Maybe Pembrokeshire’s rural nature meant fewer complaints from parents about conditions – the Welsh Secondary Schools Review noted in 1930 that ‘the worst schools are undoubtedly in the

¹⁰ PRO, PCC/ED/17/27 Central Schools Education Act Memorandum No. 6 by Director of Education, Pembrokeshire Education Authority, 1 December 1919.

¹¹ PRO, PCC/ED/17/27.

¹² John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A social history of education in England* (London: Methuen, 1973), p.388.

remoter villages in purely agricultural areas. The country people tolerate unsatisfactory conditions longer than will the people in the industrial areas.'¹³

Changes introduced to improve children's health meant that many more pupils received medical and dental inspection and treatment but more was needed. That children were examined three times during their school career was an improvement but a more regular programme was needed. Brian Simon states a sad truth; 'not only were thousands of children growing up ill-fed and ill-housed but facilities for their education – which could, properly maintained and extended, have done much to mitigate matters – were pared to the bone.'¹⁴ Bernard Harris calls the provision of school meals and milk 'a major extension of public welfare provision'¹⁵ and yet the system had limitations as there were wide variations in the criteria for receiving the meals, milk meals or supplements. Pembrokeshire's experiments with meal provision were largely reported in positive terms however and certainly improved the experience for children who lived a great distance from their schools.

The Depression made a huge impact on standards. The need to cut public expenditure meant new initiatives and ideas could not be implemented, especially in elementary schools as any available funds were channelled into secondary education.

¹³ *The Welsh Secondary School Review XVI Supplement 1930*, pp.3-6 in Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944*, p.135.

¹⁴ Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-40* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p.196.

¹⁵ Bernard Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild: a History of the School Medical Service in England and Wales* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), pp.125-6.

Jones believes depression set the tone of the 1930s, with economy considered above pupils' needs.¹⁶ Simon claims as Britain's economy improved in the mid 1930s, working class children still received the minimum of elementary education in poor conditions, a 'top-down' approach of providing the working classes with what was thought to be good for them, rather than what they themselves thought was good.¹⁷

For Pembrokeshire, education in the interwar years produced paradoxes. The curriculum needed greater variety but cuts in expenditure meant courses were curtailed; the profession needed to attract better teachers to improve the quality of teaching but salaries were cut; more progressive methods were advocated but the examination system perpetuated the use of drill methods; a child-centred approach was recommended but old-fashioned classrooms made this difficult due to lack of space.

In summary, the interwar period was characterized by progressive ideas and commendable plans to improve the education of all Pembrokeshire children, though progress was slowed by economic problems, and strict financial measures meant idealistic plans could not be implemented. Perhaps the interwar years' greatest achievement for Pembrokeshire children was the rise in the number of pupils able to receive schooling and their improved attendance.

¹⁶ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944*, p.153.

¹⁷ Simon, p.320.

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