

The Fields of Elysium

Prospectus for a food-based school

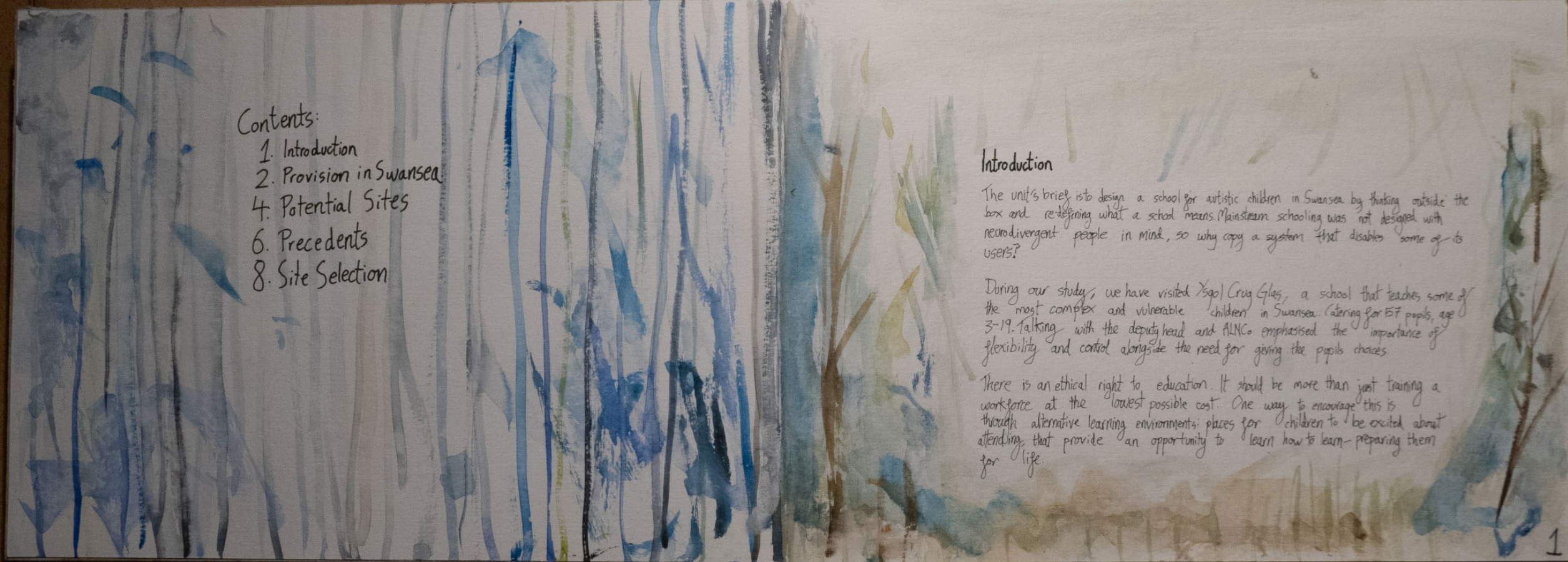


This flap book is inspired by the books I was obsessed with as a child. Photographed in the same style as the wooden blocks for my response to the introduction task - it describes the purpose of the school; what it will teach; who its users will be; ancillary services; and its location on site. Appended are 3 key photos of the site area, references, and a transcript.



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Contents:

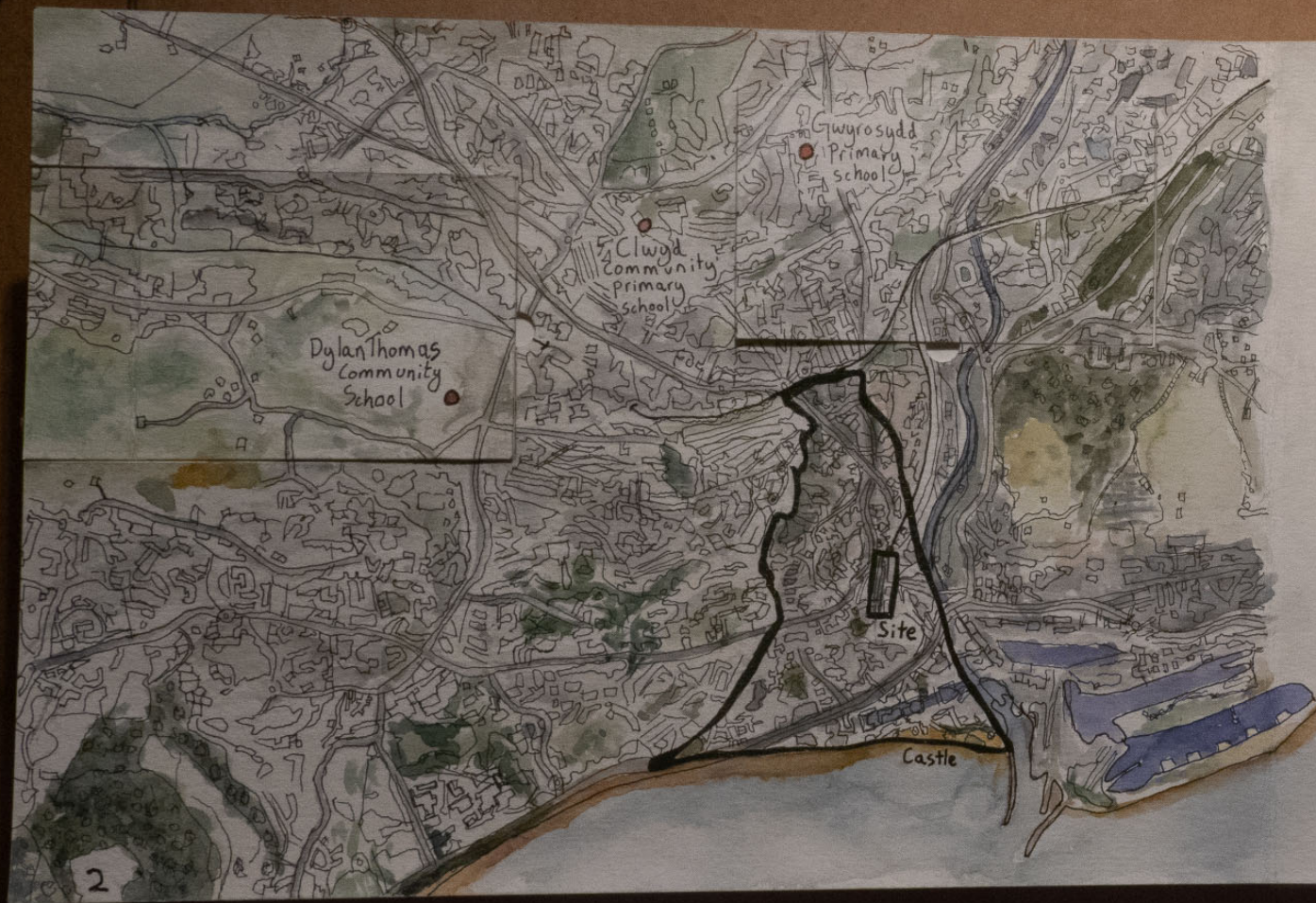
1. Introduction
2. Provision in Swansea
4. Potential Sites
6. Precedents
8. Site Selection

Introduction

The unit's brief is to design a school for autistic children in Swansea by thinking outside the box and re-defining what a school means. Mainstream schooling was not designed with neurodivergent people in mind, so why copy a system that disables some of its users?

During our study, we have visited Ysgol Crug Glas, a school that teaches some of the most complex and vulnerable children in Swansea. Catering for 57 pupils, age 3-19. Talking with the deputy head and ALNCo emphasised the importance of flexibility and control alongside the need for giving the pupils choices.

There is an ethical right to education. It should be more than just training a workforce at the lowest possible cost. One way to encourage this is through alternative learning environments: places for children to be excited about attending, that provide an opportunity to learn how to learn - preparing them for life.



When designing a curriculum for a Welsh school there are four key purposes to consider. It should support its learners to become:

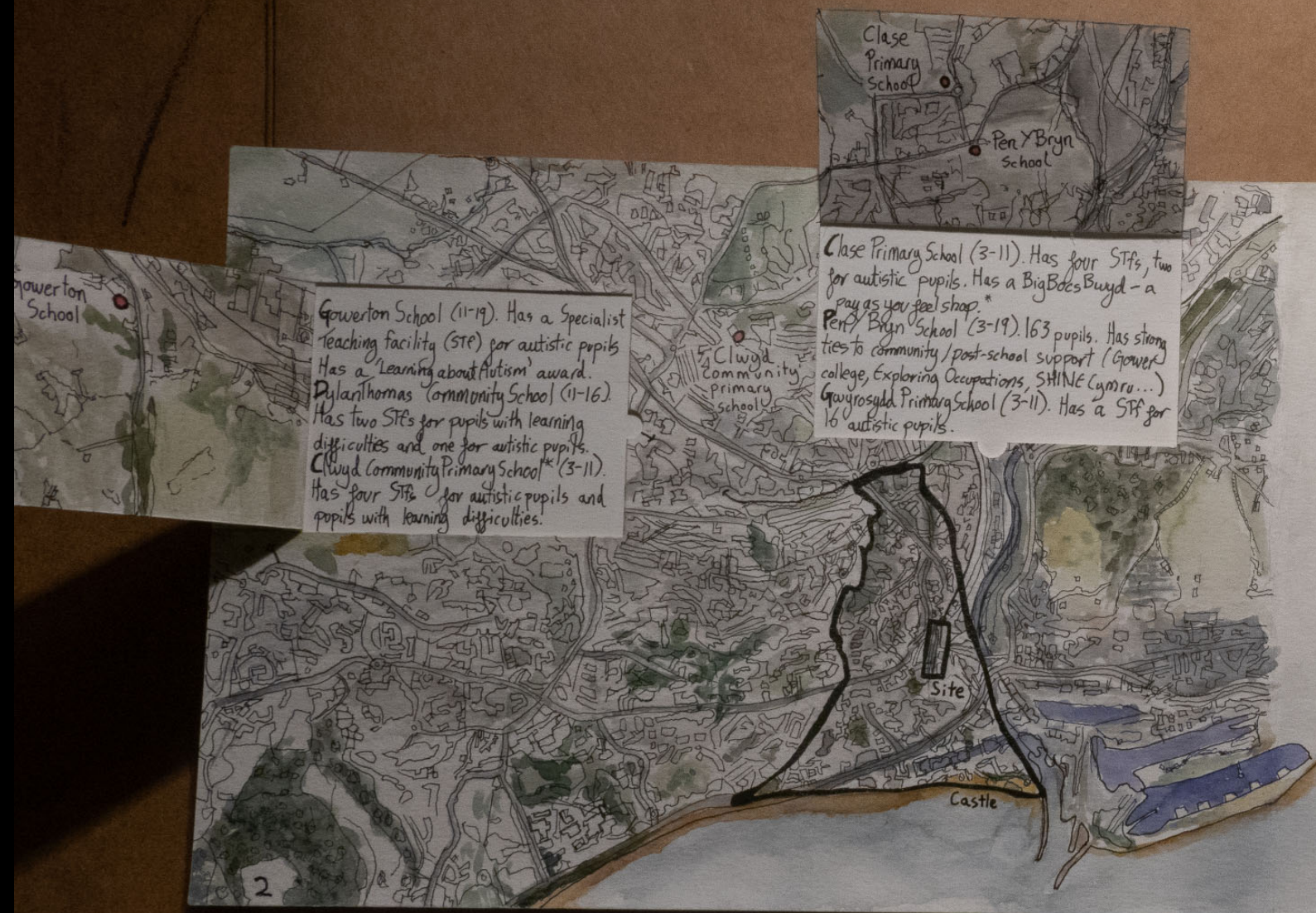
- Ambitious and capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives.
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work.
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The area of Swansea where our site is (Castle) has a high unemployment rate, with a jobseeker's allowance claimant rate of 6.6% compared to the Swansea average of 3.5% and Welsh average of 3.2%.

Of disabled people aged 16 to 64 in the UK, 53.5% were in employment compared with 81.6% for non-disabled people. Disabled people with severe or specific learning difficulties, autism (2.9%) and mental illness had the lowest employment rates.

Provision in Swansea





Gowerton School (11-19). Has a Specialist teaching facility (STF) for autistic pupils. Has a 'Learning about Autism' award. Pylant Thomas Community School (11-16). Has two STFs for pupils with learning difficulties and one for autistic pupils. Clwyd Community Primary School* (3-11). Has four STFs for autistic pupils and pupils with learning difficulties.

Cluse Primary School (3-11). Has four STFs, two for autistic pupils. Has a BigBoesBuyd - a pay as you feel shop. Pen Bryn School (3-19). 163 pupils. Has strong ties to community/post-school support (Gowerton college, Exploring Occupations, SHINE Cymru...). Gwyrosydd Primary School (3-11). Has a STF for 16 autistic pupils.

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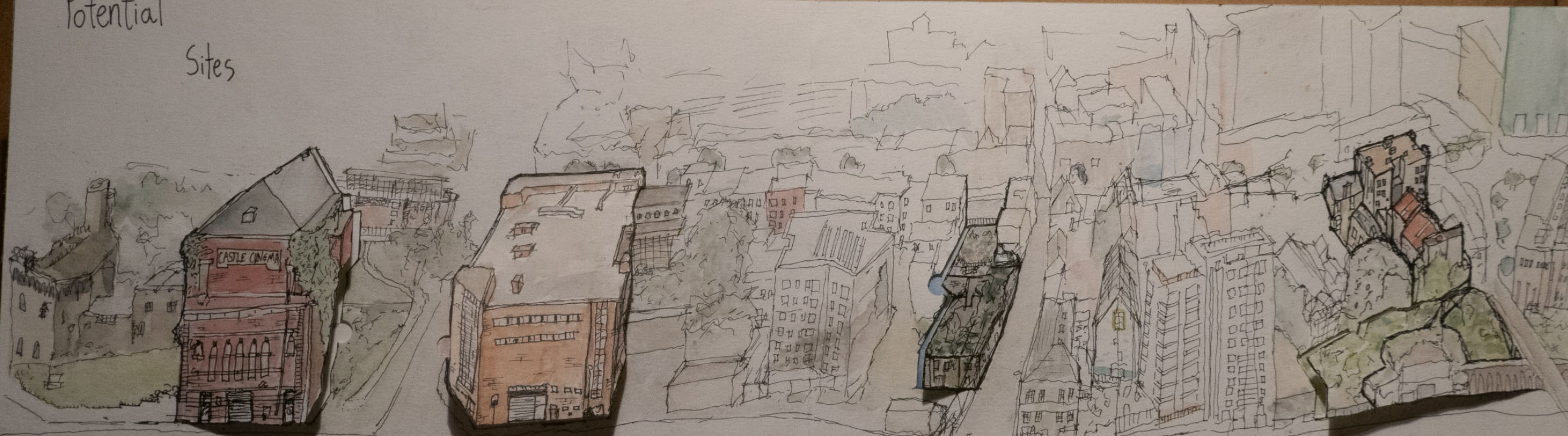
Provision in Swansea

These are the schools listed in Swansea Council's 'Special Education Needs in the City and County of Swansea: a guide for parents and teachers' under 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder(s)'. Note the absence of Ysgol Crug Glas, which is listed under 'Special Schools'; these fulfil a specialised set of criteria.

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*Clwyd also has a Big E

Potential Sites



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Castle Cinema 715 sqm Grade II listed
Opening in 1913, the cinema was one of the few buildings to survive World War Two. Closing in 1991, it is now home to a Laserzone.

Old Woolies 1980 sqm
Opening in 1912, this building was heavily damaged in the Blitz. The old store was rebuilt in the 1960s and was an Argos from 1986 until 2020. Now it's a charity shop for Step by Step.

226+226A High Street
575 sqm
Previously two shops, they were demolished in 2022.

Elysium Cinema/Labour Hall+Shoulder of Mutton Pub 1750+410 sqm
Starting life as a hall for working men, the ballroom and cinema opened in 1914. The cinema was transformed into a bingo hall in the 1960s. The workingmen's club, now Labour Hall, closed in 1998.

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Could a school live here?

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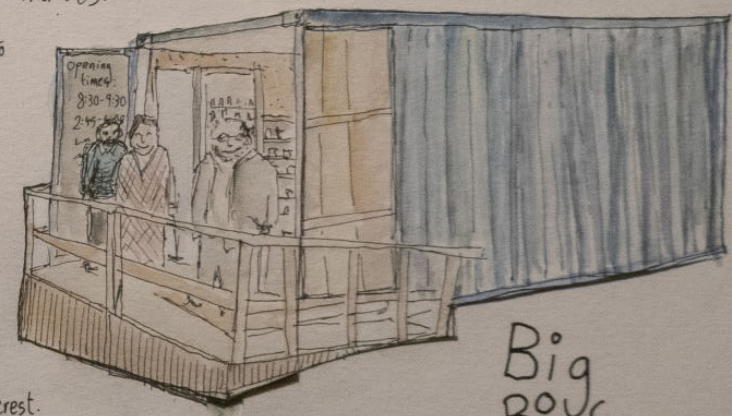
The Big Boes Bwyd (Big Food Box) project is a series of Pay as You Can food shops. Run alongside schools and aimed at families, the shops are comprised of two shipping containers and additional spaces such as growing areas. Its goals are to enable education about food and combat food insecurity.

Its goals and outcomes are explicitly linked to the goals of the curriculum for Wales mentioned earlier. There are currently 66 Big Boes Bwyd centres across south Wales, supported by the Welsh Government and a number of charities.

Any money earned is put back in to the running of the shops. Each centre costs around £20,000 to set up.

Barriers to Big Boes Bwyd:

- Time table rigidity.
- Lack of personal interest.
- Lack of staff confidence/competence.
- School too focused on numeracy and literacy.
- Lack of genuine interest from senior leadership.



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Waterloo City farm

Waterloo City farm (Oasis farm Waterloo) is an urban farm. Created by Fielden Fowles on a plot of disused land lent by the local hospital, the farm runs workshops that educate children about food. It is also occasionally used as a venue for various activities and performances as well as being the location of Fielden Fowles's offices.



Typically 9 people attend at a time for 2.5 hours on a recurring basis.

The farm provides regular support to 44 young people.

It hosts monthly family days for the local community.

86% of pupils are in year 8 or 9.
42% of pupils have SEND.
61% had improved mental well-being.

58% had higher self-esteem.

Free weekly activities over summer.

The Big Bocs Buyd (Big food Box) project is a series of Pay as you Can food shops. Run alongside schools and aimed at families, the shops are comprised of two shipping containers and additional spaces such as growing areas. Its goals are to enable education about food and combat food insecurity.

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What would make Big Bocs Buyd even better?

Bigger, more food, open for longer.
Vegetarian options.
More diverse food on offer.
Used by more people.
Freshly prepared meals.
More visible on the school site.
Move site, put up signs, have a cafe.

Big Bocs Buyd

from Big Bocs Buyd - full evaluation of Phase 3.

My proposition for programme centres around learning about food. Taking inspiration from the precedents - it needs to have provision for cooking spaces, growing spaces, and flexible teaching spaces to allow the children a choice of learning environments, in line with the needs of autistic people.

It will be used alongside the existing provisions for teaching autistic people as complimentary facilities that give stronger ties to the community. Ancillary spaces will include a pay as you feel food shop and café, providing paid work experience opportunities and affordable meals to those that need them.

To give many people access to its benefits, the intended use case is serving multiple cohorts like Waterloo City Farm. Encouraging children and staff who attend to get involved in similar projects in their own schools. Following this precedent, the programme will host small groups of 10-15 children + visiting staff with onsite staff to run the school, shop, and café (5-6).

Site Selection



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The site chosen as this school's home is the old Elysium Cinema. One of two sites that are completely unoccupied, it stands to gain the most from redevelopment. Other benefits include its historic surrounding space and its proximity to the train station. The old hall's walls and surrounding vegetation could help reduce the noise entering the farm from the environment, mitigating some of the often-overwhelming noises of city life.

Transcript

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Potential Sites

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Free weekly activities over summer. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Big Bocs Bwyd

Meaning big food box in English, Big Bocs Bwyd is a Pay As You Feel shop run out of a shipping container, with a smaller container for secure storage. These shops are often enhanced with additional outdoor spaces such as growing areas or poly tunnels, enabling further learning about food. The Big Bocs Bwyd project is explicitly linked to the goals of the Curriculum for Wales that were mentioned earlier in this book. There are currently 66 Big Bocs Bwyd centres across south Wales, supported by the Welsh Government and a number of charities.

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What would make Big Bocs Bwyd even better?

Nearly all groups wanted to make the shop bigger, selling more food, staying open for longer and getting more people to use it.

Some groups of children wanted greater variety and to make the food on offer more diverse.

Vegetarian options and freshly prepared ready meals to take away were also ideas that they put forward.

Making Big Bocs Bwyd more visible on the school site was suggested so that a greater number of people would use it.

Suggestions such as moving its site, putting up signs and having a café might encourage people use it more.

Barriers to Big Bocs Bwyd:

Timetable rigidity

Lack of personal interest.

Lack of staff confidence/competence.

School too focused on numeracy and literacy.

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Site selection ⁽¹⁹⁾

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References

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