

Proposals to Reorganise School Provision in the Pontypridd and Hawthorn Areas

Welsh Language Impact Assessment

Background

This assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Annex C of the School Organisation Code.

As part of our proposals in respect of the above, the Council is planning to undertake some reorganisation of Welsh medium primary education provision in this area of Rhondda Cynon Taf, which will not only improve and enhance the learning environment but also increase Welsh medium pupil capacity. It is proposed that the Council closes the Welsh medium stream of Heol y Celyn Primary School, which is a dual language school and YGG Pont Sion Norton; Welsh medium pupils attending both schools will transfer to a new, full Welsh medium school, that will be constructed on the former site of Heol y Celyn, in a new building that will be constructed to 21st Century School standards. This will of course be subject to parental preference.

Our proposals in respect of the Hawthorn area involve the closure of Hawthorn High School, Hawthorn Primary School and Heol y Celyn Primary School, and the creation of a new, 3 – 16 ‘all through’ school on the sites of Hawthorn High and Hawthorn Primary, which are immediately adjacent to each other. The pupils from these schools, together with the pupils from the English medium stream of Heol y Celyn will transfer to the new school, subject to parental preference.

Access to Welsh Medium Education

The vacated Heol y Celyn site will be cleared and a new Welsh medium community primary school will be constructed in its place. This new building will be constructed to 21st Century Schools’ standards and will be a much improved provision compared with the two current school buildings. Information on current building condition and suitability is contained within the consultation document. The capacity of the new school building will be 480 pupils, plus 60 Nursery places, which represents an increase over the existing YGG Pont Sion Norton combined with the Welsh stream of Heol y Celyn of almost 100 places. It is considered that this capacity will be sufficient to cater for current and forecasted pupil demand and it will also allow for growth in the Welsh medium sector.

Pontypridd already has a Welsh medium primary school with surplus capacity of 81 at YGG Evan James and to the north of Pontypridd, YGG Abercynon also has surplus capacity of 54. The consultation responses has suggested that there is a demand for pupil places specifically for a new Welsh medium school in Glyncoch and a demand to maintain the existing YGG Pont Sion Norton. The current demand projections and parental preferences suggest that this is not justified within these communities. A new larger school in the Heol y Celyn area, plus the existing Welsh medium primary school

in Pontypridd at YGG Evan James, and YGG Abercynon, meets future demand for the whole of Pontypridd and provides parents with choice. Nevertheless, this will be closely monitored to ensure that any growth in demand is met with an appropriate and measured response from a school organisation and planning perspective.

The Council is fully committed to the Welsh Government Cymraeg 2050 target and increasing our Welsh medium places through the delivery of our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme, as well as expanding our early years' provision, significantly increases capacity at targeted gaps to provide additional access points for Welsh Medium Education. In effect growing the language and increasing the opportunities at 'grass roots'.

The Council has invested substantially since 2012 in Welsh medium education and is committed to increasing provision and investing millions in improving the learning environment for existing learners and the number of Welsh medium spaces in our schools.

Any services provided by both YGG Pont Sion Norton and Heol y Celyn outside of school hours, such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and other community facilities will continue in the new building. Any links with outside organisations such as the Urdd, Menter Iaith etc will be maintained and hopefully strengthened and expanded.

Cylch Meithrin Rhydyfelin does offer wrap around care and the new school will offer more opportunities for this provision to grow, and more opportunities for the Meithrin to work more collaboratively with the school. The nursery provision in the new school will not be dual language, it will be Welsh medium. The current Heol Y Celyn Primary School and YGG Pont Sion Norton both offer full-time nursery provision and there is no reason to expect changes in this provision in the new school. However, decisions relating to the duration of nursery placements is a governing body consideration.

The new school building will have a community room facility and the headteacher will be encouraged to consider using this facility to increase participation in the Welsh language, such as offering opportunities to parents and other community members to learn Welsh.

Nearly 70% of the pupils that currently attend YGG Pont Sion Norton use Home to School Transport, and the location of the new school in Rhydyfelin would enable 100% of those pupils currently within the catchment of YGG Pont Sion Norton to qualify for free Home to School Transport. Therefore, for the vast majority of pupils attending YGG Pont Sion Norton access to school clubs and extra-curricular activities will remain unchanged. It is common for learners accessing Welsh medium education to be transported to and from school and access to before/after school activities can be a challenge in these cases.

The school bus route distances of the new routes proposed will be shorter than the current school bus routes travelled. The Transport Unit have calculated the routes, and the average overall distance travelled for those pupils who already use school transport will be shortened by just over 1 mile per day.’ The actual distances are recorded in the table below. It is acknowledged that traffic congestion can cause issues for all road users and impact on travel times at certain times of the day, however this is something that can be difficult to control.

Contract 163/01 - Ynysybwl Terminus	AM Mileage	PM Mileage
YGG Pontsionnorton (Current)	10	5.5
Heol y Celyn Primary (Proposed)	7.1	7.3

Contract 163/02 - Ynysybwl / Coed y Cwm	AM Mileage	PM Mileage
YGG Pont Sion Norton (Current)	9.5	5
Heol y Celyn Primary (Proposed)	6.6	6.8

Contract 163/03 - Glyncoch	AM Mileage	PM Mileage
YGG Pont Sion Norton (Current)	8.3	3.8
Heol y Celyn Primary (Proposed)	5.4	5.6
	AM Mileage	PM Mileage
Average Overall Distance Variation	-2.9	1.8

Those pupils who currently do not travel to YGG Pont Sion Norton by bus, as they live within the 1 ½ mile in-catchment walking distance, will qualify for free Home to School Transport to the new school. The furthest that these pupils will have to travel to school will be 4.5 miles each way to the new school.

To confirm the available service bus routes, there is a direct bus to Heol Y Celyn from Glyncoch, but from Ynysybwl and Cilfynydd it would require a change of bus in Pontypridd Bus Station which is no different to the current situation for parents from Glyncoch and Ynysybwl. Currently parents from Glyncoch and Ynysybwl needing to attend YGG Pont Sion Norton in an emergency via public transport are currently required to change buses at Pontypridd Bus Station, as is also the case for learners who live in these areas attending secondary education in YG Garth Olwg.

It is recognised that these changes will affect parents who live in Cilfynydd but for those that live in the other communities referenced in the objections the status quo will be maintained. RCT is experienced in providing safe transport for pupils upwards from the age of 3, and this service is provided in line with the School Transport Policy. The Council currently transports over 2,000 primary age pupils to school, of which over

250 are in their first year of school (aged 3-4). All primary school contracts are operated by drivers and passenger assistants that have been cleared by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). The safety and well-being of our pupils is paramount to us at all times.

Information on the standards of provision at both of the existing schools were contained within the consultation document. It must be stressed that YGG Pont Sion Norton is a well-established, successful school and whereas this proposal involves its closure, its provision will in fact be relocated to a brand new building to be constructed less than 2 miles away from its current site. We would therefore expect this new school to closely replicate and, hopefully improve upon the current provision and high standards currently available at YGG Pont Sion Norton.

One of the main targets outlined in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-2020 is to increase the number of children receiving education through the medium of Welsh, which will assist the local authority in working towards the Welsh Government target of having 1 million people in Wales able to speak Welsh by 2050. One of the ways highlighted to work towards achieving this is to consider making our three dual language schools, of which Heol y Celyn is one, in to full Welsh medium provisions. We consider that this proposal will achieve this aim and in addition, the extra pupil capacity in a new, state of the art building will hopefully encourage more parents to choose a Welsh medium education for their children.

In addition, following the recent consultation on the Welsh Government's draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plans Regulations (Wales) 2019 guidance which advocates an increase in Welsh medium education provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), and in accordance with the ALN and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, RCT will consult on establishing a Welsh medium Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 ALN provision in the new school.

Further information is considered in the Equality Impact Assessment in Appendix C to this report.