



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28TH JUNE 2023

PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE (COUNCILLOR R LEWIS)

AUTHOR(S):

Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services and
Andrea Richards, Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Following the report to Cabinet from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services, on the [26th September 2022](#), regarding the proposal to develop a new special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), the purpose of this report is to:
- 1.2 Seek formal approval to begin the relevant and required statutory consultation for the proposal to open a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT. The consultation will also include the introduction of catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT, these are:
 - Park Lane Special School
 - Ysgol Hen Felin
 - Ysgol Ty Coch.
- 1.3 Provide an update to Cabinet, regarding the submission of the variation to the approved Strategic Outline Programme in accordance with the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning funding approval processes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the content of this report.
- 2.2 Give formal approval to commence a statutory consultation with relevant stakeholders on the proposal to:

- 2.2.1 Build a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site.
- 2.2.2 Introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT (as listed in 1.2), to better meet and manage the demand for special school places.
- 2.2.3 Note that children and young people who wish to remain in their existing special school special school placements following the catchment changes can continue to do so. However, all new placements will be informed by the revised catchment areas once the changes are implemented so that learners attend their local special school.
- 2.2.4 Subject to 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, give formal approval to report back to Cabinet to consider the Consultation Report and determine whether to publish the Consultation Report and approve the publication of the proposal in the form of a Statutory Notice.
- 2.2.5 Subject to 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, give delegated authority to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to make any minor changes required to the draft Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A) prior to its publication and the statutory consultation commencing.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To acknowledge the statutory duties placed upon the Council to deliver the obligations of the [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#) (ALNET Act 2018), will compound the pressures placed on special schools and the Council's capacity to provide a statutory provision for the pupils who require it.
- 3.2 To secure appropriate special school provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and mitigate against potential long-term budgetary pressures for the Council resulting from out of county and independent placements.
- 3.3 To better meet and manage the demand for special school places across RCT, helping to ensure that pupils are allocated places in the special school nearest their home.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Previous reports presented to Cabinet by the Director of Education and Inclusion Services ([25th February 2021](#), [4th October 2021](#) and [26th September 2022](#)) highlighted the pressures faced by our special schools as the number of pupils placed in these specialist provisions are increasing on an annual basis. Children's needs are becoming more complex and there is a need to meet demand for placements for some of our most vulnerable children living in RCT. The data presented clearly showed that the demand on the Council's special school provision was significant and the trend data indicated that this pressure would continue to rise. Since February 2021, the special school population has grown by 94 learners which is a significant growth.

- 4.2 The previous reports presented to Cabinet (linked in 4.1) also described the limitations of each special school site, and the conclusion reached was that all opportunities to significantly extend and increase capacities had been explored and, where possible, undertaken. Since the last report was presented to Cabinet on [26th September 2022](#), works funded by the Council, to maximise the available space on our special schools has continued to be an ongoing priority. By September 2023, an additional two-classrooms will be added to Park Lane Special School and by September 2024, a three-classroom extension will be added to Maesgwyn Special School.
- 4.3 Options and alternatives to expand the existing special school sites have been exhausted and the only feasible alternative is to build a new 3 to 19 special school on a new site, significantly growing the special school provision within RCT and increasing the number of special schools in RCT from four to five. Creating a highly specialist 21st century special school environment will enable the Council to meet the needs of pupils requiring access to highly specialist therapeutic facilities, equipment and resources required to meet all needs, including complex medical and health needs.
- 4.4 Given the considerable changes planned in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the [ALNET Act 2018](#), building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and creating further capacity in our current provision, will also ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.
- 4.5 Following the report to Cabinet from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services on the [26th September 2022](#), the Council's 21st Century Schools Team have successfully submitted a variation to the approved Strategic Outline Programme to the Welsh Government in accordance with the Sustainable Communities for Learning funding approval processes. The agreed capital funding envelope to deliver a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT had increased to £53.4 million, with the Welsh Government funding this project by up to 75.0%.

5. WHERE ARE WE NOW

- 5.1 There are currently 670 pupils (PLASC, 2023) accessing four special schools across RCT with a range of needs, these are:
- Maesgwyn Special School, Cwmdare, Aberdare
 - Park Lane Special School, Trecynon, Aberdare
 - Ysgol Hen Felin, Ystrad, Tonypany
 - Ysgol Ty Coch, Tonteg, Pontypridd
 - Buarth y Capel, Ynysybwl, Pontypridd (satellite site of Ysgol Ty Coch for learners with very complex ASD).
- 5.2 However, as previously reported, it has become increasingly apparent that the special schools currently available are insufficient to meet the growth in demand. In view of this, a data analysis exercise has been undertaken. Further information on each special school is provided within the draft Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A), including information on the educational provision, age range of pupils and an overview of each special school site, including property condition information and suitability ratings.

- 5.3 The capacity of each special school is not included. In accordance with [Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales 2011 \(021/2011\)](#), the capacity assessment method applied to all community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools in Wales does not apply to nursery, special schools, or pupil referral units. Pupils are placed in special schools based on an assessment of their needs; therefore, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity.'
- 5.4 The Council's school modernisation programme has been successfully making excellent progress in modernising our school estate, meeting demand for places and expanding pupil places where required. The Council has been building new schools, remodelling, and redeveloping schools across RCT providing 21st century learning environments for our pupils, staff, parents/carers and the wider community.

6. NEW 3 TO 19 SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RCT ON A NEW SITE

- 6.1 As outlined in 4.1 to 4.5, and as part of the continuation of the Council's school modernisation programme, investment is needed to provide a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT. It is also proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT, to better meet and manage the demand for special school places, ensuring pupils are allocated places in the special school nearest their home.
- 6.2 The 3 to 19 special schools across RCT are:
- Park Lane Special School
 - Ysgol Hen Felin
 - Ysgol Ty Coch.
- 6.3 The rationale for bringing the proposal is set out in detail in the draft Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A).
- 6.4 Alongside this proposal, further options to expand the Post 16 Specialist Provision off school sites will need to be explored, and further options or alternatives to expand the existing site at Buarth y Capel may be proposed separately at a later date in accordance with the [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#).
- 6.5 The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the [Equality Act 2010](#).
- 6.6 The majority of pupils (75.9%) currently accessing the special schools across RCT use home to school transport. The new 3 to 19 special school will have dedicated on-site drop off and pick up facilities making this process safe, less disruptive for the community and manageable for staff.
- 6.7 The investment would also include a review of safe routes to school and, if required, an investment in improvements to walkways, road crossings and traffic calming measures to ensure the required safety standards are met. This is the approach the Council has implemented in other communities through

delivering the 21st Century Schools Programme with significant improvements and investment made.

- 6.8 The report to Cabinet from the Chief Executive on the [15th May 2023](#), confirmed the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypany is being released for the potential development of a new special school, noting that any proposal would be subject to the requirements of the Welsh Government's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#). As such, this consultation proposes that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT be built on the vacated Clydach Vale site in Tonypany. This site is proposed as the preferred location following a site appraisal process. A number of vacant sites within RCT have been appraised using the following criteria:
- Ownership
 - Have an adequate site area
 - Have satisfactory access which is capable of being improved
 - Is free from any visual incumbents
 - Is a viable development opportunity subject to a detailed feasibility study.
- 6.9 On applying the appraisal criteria to the identified sites, and following several site visits undertaken by Officers from the Council's Directorate of Corporate Estates and the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services, all the other sites were discounted with the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypany, being identified as the preferred location for the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT.
- 6.10 Placement into special schools is currently agreed by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Access and Inclusion Service Panels with pupils being placed in the nearest suitable special school to their home where possible. However, to better manage the allocation of special school places across RCT, the proposal also seeks to introduce defined catchment areas for all of the 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.
- 6.11 On opening, pupils already attending other 3 to 19 special schools that will then reside within the catchment area of the new special school, will be given the option to relocate to the new school. To note this will not be mandatory and this will be down to parental/carer choice. However, once the catchment changes come into effect, the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Access and Inclusion Service Panel will place new pupils into specialist provision according to the newly defined catchment boundaries.
- 6.12 Maps identifying the proposed special school catchment areas are included within the Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A). Maesgwyn Special School will not be included in this process as it offers a different provision to the other special schools in RCT. As well as the new 3 to 19 special school, the proposed new catchment areas will cover Park Lane Special School, Ysgol Hen Felin and Ysgol Ty Coch.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Council must satisfy its public sector duties under the [Equalities Act 2010](#) (including specific Welsh public sector duties). Pursuant to these legal duties Councils must, in making decisions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations based on protected characteristics.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment is being prepared in respect of the proposal and will be published on the Council's website for the duration of the consultation period, together with a Consultation Document that outlines the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Government's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#).

8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment is being prepared in respect of the proposal and will be published on the Council's website for the duration of the consultation period, together with a Consultation Document that outlines the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Government's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#).

9. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

9.1 The consultation processes in respect of the proposal will be undertaken under the arrangements outlined in the Welsh Government's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#). These arrangements stipulate that consultation must be undertaken when the proposals are at a formative stage and that Consultation Documents must be prepared and circulated to prescribed consultees, as well as being published on the Council website.

9.2 The draft Consultation Document for the proposal outlined in this report is attached at Appendix A, although it should be noted that this remains a working document which may be subject to some minor changes before the Consultation Document is formally published and the consultation process commences.

9.3 The proposed consultation period, if it is agreed to progress this matter, would run from 3rd July 2023 to 14th September 2023.

9.4 The proposed consultation timetable for completion of each action is set out in the table that follows:

New 3 to 19 Special School in RCT – Proposed Consultation Timeline		
Action	Detail	Dates
Cabinet Permission to Consult	Cabinet to consider the proposal and give approval to commence consultation	28 th June 2023

New 3 to 19 Special School in RCT – Proposed Consultation Timeline

Action	Detail	Dates
Public Consultation	A Consultation Document would be published on the Council's website for a minimum of six weeks	3 rd July 2023 to 14 th September 2023
Report back to Cabinet	Cabinet would consider the Consultation Response Report and determine whether to publish the Report and approve the publication of the proposal in the form of a Statutory Notice	October 2023
Publish Statutory Notice	The Statutory Notice must be published for a 28 day period (if approved by Cabinet)	November 2023
Decision by Cabinet	Report back to Cabinet on outcome of Statutory Notice period and details of (any) objections received, with an appropriate recommendation	January 2024
Implementation	In accordance with Cabinet decision either status quo or implementation of proposal	Status Quo: N/A. New school: September 2026

10. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Should the proposal go ahead, a significant capital investment would be required. Funding will be secured via the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme at an intervention rate of 75.0%. Costs will be developed alongside the consultation process and approvals sought in line with the Council's decision-making procedures.
- 10.2 Revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the schools' delegated budget and any potential increases in home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is developed and incorporated into the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements.

11. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 Section 315 of the [Education Act 1996](#) requires Councils to ensure that ALN provision is kept under review. In addition, the [ALNET Act 2018](#) requires Councils to keep under review the arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area and consider whether these are sufficient.
- 11.2 Powers for Councils to develop school organisation proposals are governed by the:
- The [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#)
 - The Welsh Government's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#).
- 11.3 Council's must, when exercising functions under Part 3 of the [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#), act in accordance with any relevant requirements contained in the Welsh Government's [School](#)

[Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#) and must have regard to any relevant guidelines contained in it.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN, NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

12.1 There are links to Making a Difference, the Council's Corporate Plan for the years between 2020 and 2024, specifically:

- **People:**

- Encouraging all residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles and maintain their mental wellbeing:
 - Delivering new indoor and outdoor sporting facilities and enhancing existing sporting facilities such as changing rooms and outdoor play areas.
- Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do:
 - Improving the social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the range of specialist services available.

- **Places:**

- Ensuring RCT is one of the safest places in Wales, with high levels of community cohesion where residents feel safe:
 - Supporting the voluntary, community and faith sectors to help build active communities, creating the capacity for meeting the needs of residents within their communities.

- **Prosperity:**

- Ensuring we have good schools, so all children have access to a great education:
 - Improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities
- Helping people into work and better paid employment:
 - Offering employment schemes and apprenticeships in the Council, on the regeneration sites, and through other Council contractors.

12.2 There are links to the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Strategic Plan for the years between 2021 and 2024, specifically:

- **Strategic Priority 3:**

- Ensuring equity and support for vulnerable pupils and their families.

- **Strategic Priority 5:**

- Delivering 21st century learning environments and innovative services for our pupils and communities.

12.3 Due regard has been made to all seven wellbeing goals and the five ways of working, as contained within the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) which requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of decisions on communities to prevent consistent issues such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

12.4 The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the seven wellbeing goals by:

- **A Prosperous Wales** - Should the proposal proceed, construction will be competitively tendered, thereby achieving best value for money. Main contractors will be asked to advertise work on Sell2Wales which could provide opportunities for local businesses to tender for the construction. This could provide opportunities for local business to engage with the main contractor for inclusion in their supply chain, via 'Meet the Buyer' events. This would support economic activity in the area.
- **A Resilient Wales** – The proposal could improve the sustainability of school buildings in the Council's portfolio through a commitment to achieving zero-carbon buildings and building to BREEAM excellent standards.
- **A Healthier Wales** – The new school will be a fully accessible and integrated community school with a dedicated area designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day. Accommodation will consist of enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities.
- **A More Equal Wales** – The new school and the way in which it will be used will bring neutral or positive socio-economic impacts to all of the vulnerable groups.
- **A Wales of More Cohesive Communities** – Fully accessible and integrated community school with a dedicated area designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
- **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language** – Although the new school will be English medium, Welsh is taught as part of the curriculum and all pupils will benefit from having the opportunity to be taught in brand new facilities fit for the 21st century.
- **A Globally Responsive Wales** – The new school could build upon the good working practices and initiatives already in place to further develop extra-curricular activities to encourage healthy lifestyles for the school community. zero-carbon buildings and building to BREEAM excellent standards.

12.5 The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the five ways of working by:

- **Long Term** – The proposal forms a part of the Council's wider 21st Century Schools Investment Programme and contributes to the delivery of sustainable schools fit for the 21st century and supports the better strategic management of the Council's education estate. Given the considerable changes in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN, with the implementation of the [ALNET Act 2018](#), building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT,

and creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

- **Prevention** – The Council believes that the proposal represents the best opportunity to safeguard and sustain educational standards for the future and provides a platform for further improvement through significant investment in permanent and fit for purpose facilities.
- **Integrations** – The new school will be a fully accessible and integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
- **Collaboration** – The Council will continue to work effectively with internal and external partners to ensure the new 3 to 19 special school meets the short and long term needs of pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community.
- **Involvement** – The proposal is made in accordance with the [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#) and seeks the views of a prescribed list of stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community. As such face to face meetings will be arranged with the staff, school councils and governing bodies.

12.6 As stated in 7.1 and 7.2, an Equality Impact Assessment which further details the contribution of the proposal to the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) is being prepared.

13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

13.1 Given the considerable changes in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with the implementation of the ALNET Act (2018), the proposal to build a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations and as such is a strategic proposal relevant to all wards.

14. CONCLUSION

14.1 In accordance with Section 315 of the [Education Act 1996](#), councils are required to ensure that ALN provision is kept under review. In addition, the [ALNET Act 2018](#) requires councils to keep under review the arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area and consider whether these are sufficient. Building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

14.2 The proposed investment to open a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site provides the opportunity for more pupils with ALN to benefit from improved educational facilities and learning environments.

14.3 Noting that on opening, pupils already attending other 3 to 19 special schools that will then reside within the catchment area of the new special school, will be given the option to relocate to the new school. This will not be mandatory,

and this will be down to parental/carer choice. However, once the catchment changes come into effect, the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panel will place new pupils into specialist provision according to the newly defined catchment boundaries.

- 14.4 It is recommended therefore, that Members give approval to officers to commence the consultation processes necessary, in accordance with the Welsh Government's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#), to achieve the proposal outlined in this report.

Other Information:

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer(s):

Andrea Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation

Lisa Howell, 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28TH JUNE 2023

**Item: PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA
CYNON TAF**

Background Papers

Appendix A – Draft Consultation Document

Officer to contact(s):

Andrea Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation

Lisa Howell, 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS



CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO OPEN A NEW 3 TO 19 SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The Consultation Document and Appendices are also available on the 'Get Involved' page on the Council website.

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh.

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Introduction

The Council wishes to seek the views of stakeholders on the proposal to open a new English medium 3 to 19 special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) for 180 pupils, however this will be subject to undertaking further feasibility and progressing with the detailed design of the new school. The new special school will provide education for pupils with a range of additional learning needs (ALN) including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

It is proposed that the new school will be built in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypany, and it will open no later than the 2026 academic year. The new school is in addition to the four special schools already open in RCT.

It is also proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT, these are:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch.

The proposal is made in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018). Section 2.1 of the School Organisation Code 2018 refers to elements of school organisation that require the publication of proposals, including:

- The opening of a maintained school (including special school).

Who will we consult with?

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

- The governing bodies of:
 - Park Lane Special School
 - Ysgol Hen Felin
 - Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.
- Parents/carers, prospective parents/carers (where possible), and staff members of:
 - Park Lane Special School
 - Ysgol Hen Felin
 - Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.
- Pupils of:
 - Park Lane Special School
 - Ysgol Hen Felin
 - Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.
- Neighbouring local authorities
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan authorities
- Welsh Ministers

- Members of the Senedd for the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf constituencies and regional Members of the Senedd for the area
- Members of Parliament for the Rhondda, Cynon, and Taf constituencies
- Estyn
- Teaching and staff trade unions
- Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
- Police and Crime Commissioner for the area
- Childcare providers
- Mudiad Meithrin
- Menter Iaith
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
- Children and Young People's Partnership
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board
- Welsh Language Commissioner.

What will the consultation process entail?

The consultation will start on 3rd July 2023 and will be completed at 17:00 on 14th September 2023. Feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a Consultation Report presented to the Council's Cabinet during October 2023. This Consultation Report will be available for all persons to view on the Council's website and copies can be obtained on request from the address detailed on page 4.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the Consultation Report and decide, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, amend the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If the Council's Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of the proposal.

If the Council's Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposal, a Statutory Notice will be published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2018 requires that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal can do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections **must** be made in writing or by email, and sent to the Council within 28 days of the date on which the Statutory Notice was published.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the outcome of the Statutory Notice at the next available Cabinet meeting and determine the proposal.

If there are objections, the Council's Director of Education and Inclusion Services will publish an Objection Report providing a summary of the objections and the response to them within seven days of the day of the determination of the proposal. This Objection Report will also be available for all persons to view on the Council's website and copies can be obtained on request from the address detailed on page 4.

If the Council's Cabinet approve the proposal, it will be implemented in accordance with the date stated in the Statutory Notice or any subsequently modified date.

What do you have to consider?

The remainder of this Consultation Document sets out the rationale for the proposal. We would like you to consider the information and to hear your views as to whether you support the proposal.

How do you make your views known?

Face to face meetings will be arranged with the staff, school councils and governing bodies as follows:

School(s) Affected	Group	Time/Date	Venue
1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	Governing Bodies and Staff of: 1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	1. 20 th July 2023 at 15:30 2. 19 th July 2023 at 15:30 3. 17 th July 2023 at 15:30	1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch
1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	School Councils of: 1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	1. 18 th July 2023 at 10:00 2. 19 th July 2023 at 10:00 3. 17 th Ysgol Ty Coch at 13:30	1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch

A drop in session will also be arranged so that members of the public can discuss the proposal with Officers from the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services and provide any feedback at the session. This will be held on Tuesday 22nd August 2023 between 15:00 to 18:30 at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

A Consultation Response Form is attached on page 30. The Consultation Response Form will also be available in the meetings detailed above and on the Council's website on the 'Get Involved' page.

The Consultation Response Form enables consultees to indicate if they wish to be notified of the publication of the Consultation Report, once presented to the Council's Cabinet.

Consultees are also welcomed to put their views, comments, and any questions in writing to:

Director of Education and Inclusion Services 21 st Century Schools Ty Trevithick Abercynon CF45 4UQ	OR	schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk
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All correspondence should be received no later than 17:00 on 14th September 2023.

Please note that responses to the consultation will not be counted as objections to the proposal unless expressly requested. Objections can only be forwarded following the publication of the Statutory Notice.

The views of children and young people

The Council has acknowledged that the voice of children and young people is about involving them as active participants in the development, delivery, management, and improvement of their educational experience.

Children and young people have a right to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be heard and considered in accordance with their age and maturity. As such, the Councils Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services 21st Century Schools Team will ensure that suitable arrangements are made to involve children and young people as active participants throughout this consultation process, and if a decision is made to progress the proposal, throughout the implementation process.

The Council will consult with the children and young people who attend:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

This will be done by producing a children and young people's version of the Consultation Document and Consultation Response Form. As detailed on page 4, the Council will hold a meeting with the School Councils of:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

To discuss the proposal and guide the School Council through the children and young people's version of the Consultation Response Form. These consultation sessions will have the support of school-based specialist staff to support pupils and assist with the engagement process. Feedback from this meeting will be collated and summarised, and a Consultation Report will be presented to the Council's Cabinet for consideration once the consultation period has ended.

Community, Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessments

As set out in the School Organisation Code 2018, it is a requirement to publish Community, Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessments. These have been produced and are appendices to this Consultation Document and are also available on the Council's website:

- Appendix A – Community Impact Assessment
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix C – Welsh Language Impact Assessment.

Section One – Background to the Proposal

Where we are now...

Considerable changes have been made in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET Act 2018) requires Councils to keep under review the arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area and consider whether they are sufficient. The ALNET Act 2018 is supported by the statutory Additional Learning Needs Code 2021.

For pupils with significant needs who experience difficulties in coping with mainstream education, specialist provisions are required. The Council has a range of specialist provisions which include:

- Forty-five Learning Support Classes
- Two Pupil Referral Units
- Four Special Schools (three for pupils aged 3 to 19 and one for pupils aged 11 to 19).

Placement into these specialist provisions is agreed by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels.

There are currently 670 pupils (Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), 2023) accessing four special schools across RCT with a range of needs, these are:

- Maesgwyn Special School, Cwmdare, Aberdare
- Park Lane Special School, Trecynon, Aberdare
- Ysgol Hen Felin, Ystrad, Tonypany
- Ysgol Ty Coch, Tonteg, Pontypridd
 - Buarth y Capel, Ynysybwl, Pontypridd (satellite site of Ysgol Ty Coch).

To note, despite data and information from Maesgwyn Special School being included within this document for consistency, given the age range of the pupils at the school and the education provided which differs from the other special schools, Maesgwyn is not considered to be affected by these proposals.

RCT has an excellent range of special schools. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the special schools currently available are disproportionate to the demand for them. In view of this, a data analysis exercise has been undertaken. This Consultation Document provides an overview of each special school site, including property condition information and suitability ratings along with a range of data, including the:

- Total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023

- Total number pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2017 and 2023 separated by each special school
- National curriculum year of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools during the academic year 2023.

The capacity of each special school is not included. Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales (021/2011) outlines the capacity assessment method for calculating school capacities. This capacity assessment method applies to all English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided mainstream primary and secondary schools in Wales, it does not apply to nursery and special schools, or Pupil Referral Units. Pupils are placed in special schools by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels based on an assessment of their need; as such, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity'.

Likewise, pupil projections have not been included. It should be noted that it is difficult to project demand for special schools, as projections are dependent on several factors and historical trends and birth rates are not dependable factors. Variations in the range of needs of pupils can develop and alter over time and special schools have seen a significant growth in the complexity of the ALN of pupils.

Special Schools Across RCT

Maesgwyn Special School

Maesgwyn Special School is in the Cwmdare area of Aberdare. It is a special school for pupils aged 11 to 19 with a range of ALN including severe learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and autistic spectrum disorders.

Pupils are taught through a bespoke curriculum with a balance between academic, life and vocational skills options that enable pupils to mature into adult life.

Maesgwyn Special School is graded as a B for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £11,850. The school building consists of a CLASP type construction main block.

Over the last five years, approximately £944,000 has been invested into Maesgwyn Special School. Recent works to the site include extensive remodelling of the external area providing a new Multi-Use Games Area, the addition of a skill centre for teaching construction skills, an allotment for horticulture and an animal care centre. Future works to the site include the addition of a three-classroom extension by the academic year 2024.

As previously reported, this special school is not considered to be affected by this proposal.

Park Lane Special School

Park Lane Special School is in the Trecynon area of Aberdare. It is a special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, enabling them to experience a range of skills, the emphasis being on life and vocational skills. Pupils are regularly taken into the community where they apply the skills, they learn to real life situations. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

Park Lane Special School is graded as a C for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £238,800. The school building consists of a CLASP type construction main block together with a small extension that was added in 2011 to provide additional space for post 16 pupils. The site is very constrained with access and onsite parking limited.

Over the last five years, approximately £495,000 has been invested into Park Lane Special School. Future works to the site include the addition of a two-classroom mobile accommodation by the academic year 2023. Once completed there are limited options to further expand the existing site.

Ysgol Hen Felin

Ysgol Hen Felin is in the Ystrad area of Rhondda. It is a special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, enabling them to experience a range of skills, the emphasis being on life and vocational skills. Pupils are regularly taken into the community where they apply the skills, they learn to real life situations. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

There are also several pupils who attend Ysgol Hen Felin who should attend Buarth y Capel, however, the travelling distance and established relationships with staff at Ysgol Hen Felin discourages pupils from attending Buarth y Capel.

Ysgol Hen Felin is graded as a B for condition and an A for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £58,000. It is a single storey building situated in a residential area in the same grounds as a leisure centre. The school has an all-weather playing surface within a large sensory garden, kitchen, coffee shop, sensory facilities and hydrotherapy pool.

Over the last five years, approximately £495,000 has been invested into Ysgol Hen Felin. Works to the site include significant investment in the external play areas and several adaptations to allow more generic teaching spaces to be created, that unfortunately has been to the detriment of specialist teaching and learning areas. There are no further options or alternatives to expand the existing site.

Ysgol Ty Coch

Ysgol Ty Coch is in the Tonteg area of Pontypridd. It is a special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, enabling them to experience a range of skills, with an emphasis placed on developing life and vocational skills. Pupils are regularly taken into the community where they apply the skills, they learn to real life situations. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

Ysgol Ty Coch is graded as an A for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £227,661. The original site, which is a brick built, single storey building is situated in a residential area. The facilities available to pupils include a fully functioning kitchen, hairdressing salon, workshop, horticulture training, café, and car washing.

Over the last five years, approximately £946,000 has been invested into Ysgol Ty Coch. Works to the site include the addition of a classroom extension which has increased the size of the school but reduced the amount of outside play area. The site is very constrained with access and onsite parking limited, as such there are no further options or alternatives to expand the existing site.

Buarth y Capel

Buarth y Capel is a satellite site of Ysgol Ty Coch and is in the Ynysybwl area of Pontypridd, approximately seven miles from Ysgol Ty Coch. It was established in September 2014 to meet the needs of pupils aged 14 to 19 with a diagnosis of severe/profound autistic spectrum disorders who had previously met generic special school criteria and who require specialist and bespoke provision.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, devised from the 14 to 19 Learning Pathways, enabling them to experience a range of skills. The emphasis of these skills includes life and vocational skills. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

Buarth y Capel is graded as a B for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £214,570. The site is a single-story building, set in grounds.

Over the last five years, approximately £335,000 has been invested into Buarth y Capel. Works to the site include a complete refurbishment to suit the needs of older pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, which include specialist therapy areas. Further options or alternatives to expand the existing site, may be proposed separately at a later date in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018).

Post 16 Specialist Provision

In addition to the four special schools across RCT, the Council also works in partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd to provide specialist provisions for post 16 pupils. This specialist post 16 provision frees up much needed space across the four special schools whilst also providing pupils with the opportunity to gain experience of college life and to transition into this setting at post 16.

The Council, in partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd, currently provide three separate specialist provisions for post 16 pupils, one for pupils at Maesgwyn Special School at Coleg y Cymoedd's Aberdare campus, one for pupils at Ysgol Hen Felin at Coleg y Cymoedd's Llwynypia campus, and one for pupils from Ysgol Ty Coch at Coleg Y Cymoedd's Nant Garw campus.

Further options to expand the partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd may be proposed separately in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018).

Out of County Specialist Provision

In addition to the four special schools across RCT and the Council's partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd to provide specialist provisions for post 16 pupils, a number of pupils attend out of county specialist provision. This is due to the lack of highly specialist provision available across RCT. The table that follows outlines the total number and cost of pupils who accessed their education in out of county specialist provision between the academic years 2020 and 2022.

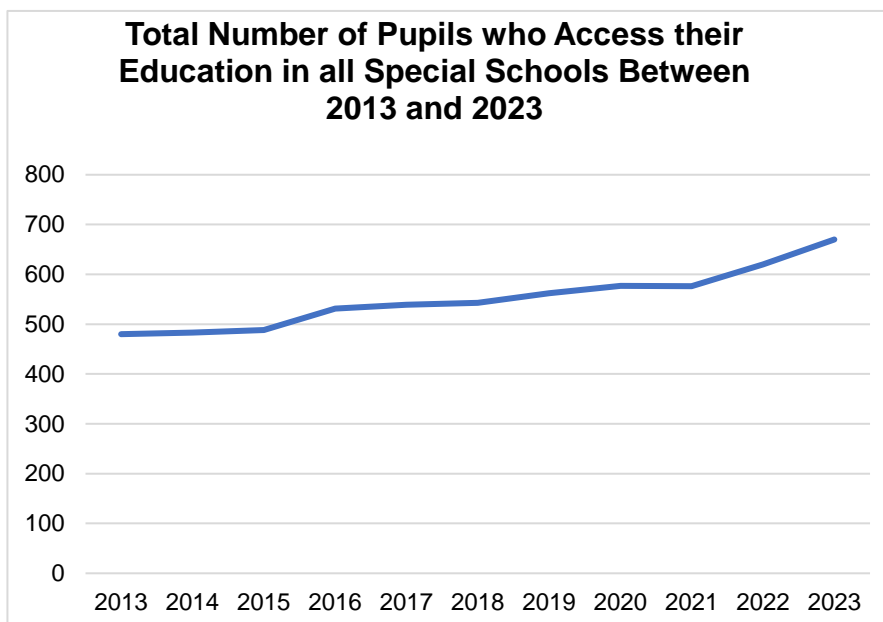
Total Number and Cost of Pupils who Accessed their Education in Out of County Specialist Provision Between the Academic Years 2020 and 2022		
Academic Year	Total	Cost
2020	93	£2,323,397
2021	97	£2,490,591
2022	85	£2,209,137

Data Analysis

The following data analysis is based on data derived from the PLASC unless otherwise stated. It is intended to outline the children and young people with ALN in RCT.

The table that follows outlines the total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023.

Total Number of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools Between the Academic Years 2013 and 2023											
	Academic Year (PLASC)										
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	480	483	488	531	539	543	562	577	576	620	670



The graph above outlines the same trend.

- The data and graph demonstrate an increase in the number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023.
- The total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023 has increased by 39.5%. This is an increase of 190 pupils from 480 pupils to 670 pupils.

The table that follows outlines the total number pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2017 and 2023 separated by each special school.

Total Number of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools Between the Academic Years 2017 and 2023 Separated by Each Special School						
Academic Year	Special School (PLASC 2023)					Total
	Maesgwyn Special School	Park Lane Special School	Ysgol Hen Felin	Ysgol Ty Coch	Buarth y Capel	
2017	132	101	169	126	11	539
2018	130	93	178	134	8	543
2019	127	97	179	153	6	562
2020	130	88	186	159	14	577
2021	119	93	184	171	9	576
2022	125	109	194	179	13	620
2023	126	123	211	197	13	670

The data above indicated that:

- Pupil numbers at Maesgwyn Special School have remained consistent between the academic years 2017 and 2023

- **Since the academic year 2020, pupil number at Park Lane have increased by 39.7%.** This is an increase of 35 pupils from 88 pupils to 123 pupils
- Since the academic year 2017, pupil numbers at Ysgol Hen Felin have increased by 24.8%. This is an increase of 42 pupils from 169 pupils to 211 pupils
- **Since the academic year 2017, pupil numbers at Ysgol Ty Coch have increased by 56.3%.** This is an increase of 71 pupils from 126 pupils to 197 pupils
- Pupil numbers at Buarth y Capel have remained consistent between the academic years 2017 and 2023
- **The total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2017 and 2023 has increased by 24.8%.** This is an increase of 131 pupils from 539 pupils to 670 pupils.

Over the previous ten academic years, the total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools has increased by 39.5% and following this trend over the next five to ten academic years, the number of pupils who access their education in all special schools is expected to increase.

The table that follows outlines the national curriculum year of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools during the academic year 2023.

National Curriculum Year of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools During the Academic Year 2023							
Year Groups	National Curriculum Year	Special School (PLASC 2023)				Total	
		Maesgwyn Special School	Park Lane Special School	Ysgol Hen Felin	Ysgol Ty Coch (Including Buarth y Capel)		
Nursery - Year 2	Pre-Nursery	N/A	0	1	0	1	120
	Nursery	N/A	7	6	7	20	
	Reception	N/A	9	14	13	36	
	1	N/A	8	15	8	31	
	2	N/A	9	11	12	32	
Years 3 - 6	3	N/A	14	18	13	45	154
	4	N/A	9	12	9	30	
	5	N/A	5	11	25	41	
	6	N/A	7	15	16	38	
Years 7 - 9	7	17	9	22	18	66	171
	8	14	16	13	17	60	
	9	15	2	18	10	45	
Years 10 - 11	10	22	4	11	19	56	94
	11	12	5	10	11	38	
Years 12	12	8	7	8	10	33	131

National Curriculum Year of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools During the Academic Year 2023						
Year Groups	National Curriculum Year	Special School (PLASC 2023)				Total
		Maesgwyn Special School	Park Lane Special School	Ysgol Hen Felin	Ysgol Ty Coch (Including Buarth y Capel)	
12 - 14	13	21	4	10	14	49
	14	17	8	16	8	49
Total		126	123	211	210	670

The data indicates:

- The national curriculum year with the highest percentage of pupils was year seven with 9.8% (9.8%) of pupils
- This was closely followed by national curriculum year eight with 8.9% (60%) of pupils
- The year groups with the highest percentage of pupils were years 7 to 9 with 25.5% (171%) of pupils.

It is difficult to provide a breakdown of the needs of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools given the complex nature of any ALN diagnosis, and the range of needs that the 3 to 19 schools in RCT cater for. It is proposed that the new school opens for pupils with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment. For consistency, this then provides the same provision as the other 3 to 19 special schools in RCT offering parity of provision across all 4 schools.

What is the basis for the proposal?

Over the last five years, the Council has invested approximately £3.28 million into all special schools to maximise the space available. By the academic year 2023, a two-classroom mobile accommodation will be added to Park Lane Special School and by the academic year 2024, a three-classroom extension will be added to Maesgwyn Special School. Once completed, there will be no further options or alternatives to expand the existing special school sites.

Over the previous ten academic years, between the academic years 2013 and 2023, the total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools has increased by 39.5%. Apart from the academic year 2021, the total number of pupils who have accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023 has increased year on year. Over the next five to ten academic years, the number of pupils who access their education in all special schools is expected to increase. However, it should be noted that it is difficult to project demand for special schools, as projections are dependent on several factors and historical trends and birth rates are not dependable factors. Variations in the range of needs of the pupils can develop and alter over time and special schools have seen a significant growth in the complexity of the ALN of pupils.

Options and alternatives to expand the existing special school sites have been exhausted and the only feasible alternative is to build a new English medium 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site, significantly growing the special school provision within RCT and increasing the number of special schools from four to five. Creating a highly specialist 21st century special school environment will enable the Council to meet the needs of pupils requiring access to highly specialist therapeutic facilities, equipment and resources required to meet all ALN, including complex medical and health needs.

Pupils are placed in special schools by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels based on an assessment of their need; as such, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity'. When analysing each special school, the highest percentage of pupils reside in the area that special school is located in. However, to better manage the allocation of special school places across RCT, it is proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

Given the considerable changes in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018, building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

The Council believes that the proposal represents the best opportunity to safeguard and sustain educational standards for the future and provides a platform for further improvement through significant investment in permanent and fit for purpose facilities.

What alternative options have been considered?

Options and alternatives to expand the existing special school sites have been exhausted and the only feasible alternative is to build a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site.

It is proposed that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT be built on the soon to be vacated Council Headquarters in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypany. This site is proposed as the preferred location following an appraisal of other sites. Each site was appraised on its ability to meet the following criteria:

- Ownership
- Have an adequate site area
- Have satisfactory access which is capable of being improved
- Is free from any visual incumbents
- Is a viable development opportunity subject to a detailed feasibility study.

On applying the appraisal criteria to the identified sites, and following several site visits undertaken by Officers from the Council's Directorate of Corporate Estates and the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services, all the other sites were

discounted with the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypany, being identified as the preferred location for the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT.

Further feasibility focussed on the preferred site resulted in it being identified as the chosen location for the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT and the site to be taken forward to consultation.

In accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018, alternative options were also identified and consciously considered. Some of the benefits and disadvantages of each of the discounted options are listed in the table that follows:

Option	Benefit	Disadvantages
Retain the status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No capital investment required by the Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council cannot meet its statutory obligations in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018 • Children and young people with ALN will not have their needs met • Increased pressure on parents/carers • Increase ALN educational tribunals • Increase in cost of placing pupils in specialist provisions out of county
Expansion of existing special schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less capital investment required by the Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council cannot meet its statutory obligations in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018 • Children and young people with ALN will not have their needs met • Increased pressure on parents/carers • Increase ALN educational tribunals • Increase in cost of placing pupils in specialist provisions out of county • Options and alternatives to expand the existing special

Option	Benefit	Disadvantages
		school sites have been exhausted
Expansion of Post 16 Provision to alleviate pressures on existing specials schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Post 16 pupils with ALN will have their needs met • Frees up much needed space across the four special schools • Provides pupils with the opportunity to gain experience of college life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be opportunities to expand Post 16 Provision
Out of county specialist provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some children and young people with ALN will have their needs met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in cost of placing pupils in specialist provisions out of county • Does not provide a long term solution

Benefits and Disadvantages, Risks and Mitigation Factors

The benefits and disadvantages of the proposal are highlighted below, as is information as to how any identified risks can be managed by the Council.

Benefits
A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could deliver a significant improvement in the quality of the educational provision, having a significant positive impact upon the educational performance of the pupils and staff morale.
The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT will be designed to be energy efficient and will include renewable energy systems including photovoltaic panels and rainwater harvesting. The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT will be built to achieve net Zero Carbon in operation, be built to BREEAM Excellent standards, contributing to both the Council's commitment to becoming a 'carbon free Council by 2050' and the Welsh Government's Climate Change Strategy.
The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010.
The new school will be a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
The external areas will allow staff, pupils, and the community to experience a greater breadth of teaching and learning experiences.

Disadvantages			
The capital cost of the new school will be significant. The Council and the Welsh Government via the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme will fund this with a more favorable intervention rate afforded to special schools at 75.0%.			
The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could cause some anxiety for some pupils, staff and parents/carers.			
Risks	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating Action(s)
Approval – Parents/carers choose not to send their children to the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Councils Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services 21st Century Schools Team will ensure that suitable arrangements are made to involve parents/carers and children and young people as active participants throughout this consultation process, and if a decision is made to progress the proposal, throughout the implementation process
Proposal to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT – Parents/carers choose not to send their children to their catchment 3 to 19 special school in RCT.	Low	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See above
Home to School Transport – Increased home to school transport costs	Medium	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the schools' delegated budget and any potential increases in

			home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is develops
Staff – Cannot appoint staff to the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT	Low	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The needs of all special schools will be prioritised. The Council is committed to retaining staff and will, as has been the case with the delivery of other 21st century schools previously throughout RCT, work with staff and Trade Unions to ensure the change process is dealt with sympathetically and supportively and that there will be opportunities to engage with staff as the proposal progresses

Where we'd like to be...

It is proposed to open a new English medium, 3 to 19 special school in RCT for 180 pupils, however this will be subject to undertaking further feasibility and progressing with the detailed design of the new school. The new school will provide education for pupils with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

It is proposed that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT will be built in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypany, and it will open no later than the 2026 academic year. The new school is in addition to the four special schools across RCT.

The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

Accommodation will consist of:

- Modern, flexible learning environments for all pupils, a hall/dining area, and specialist teaching and learning areas to cater for the needs of all pupils.
- A hydro-therapy pool plus other therapy, sensory and stimulating specialist equipment.
- A dedicated area within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
- Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities.

- Traffic management systems including on-site pupil bus drop off, and on-site staff parking.



Example of a typical multi-purpose learning resource area.



Example of external play area.



Example of outdoor learning area.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

All Local Authorities in Wales must produce a WESP. The WESP is a long-term language planning tool which sets the direction for the strategic planning, delivery and growth in Welsh medium and Welsh language education. Through the WESP, and effective strategic planning and investment, the Council aims to contribute significantly to achieving the vision of one million people in Wales being Welsh speakers by 2050 as set out in Cymraeg 2050. The Council's current WESP can be viewed and downloaded from the Council website via:

[Welsh in Education Strategic Plan \(WESP\) 2022 – 2032 | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/welsh-in-education-strategic-plan-wesp-2022-2032)

There are seven outcomes within the Council's WESP, two of which are:

- More opportunities for pupils to use Welsh in different contexts in school
- An increase in the provision of Welsh medium education for pupils with ALN in accordance with the duties imposed by the ALNET Act 2018.

Although the new school will be English medium, Welsh is taught as part of the curriculum and all pupils will benefit from having the opportunity to be taught in brand new facilities fit for the 21st century.

The aim is to embed positive habits and attitudes towards the Welsh language through purposeful planning to promote the informal use of the Welsh language amongst pupils inside and outside schools. Facilitating the use of the Welsh language across the curriculum and in wider contexts in schools, to ensure a continuum of linguistic progression to support pupils in the transition between year groups, offers all pupils the opportunity to become fully bilingual and aligns with the Curriculum for Wales 2022. The new school will be encouraged and supported to do this through the achievement of the 'Cymraeg Campus' Welsh Language Charter, a framework to promote and increase the use of Welsh.

In addition, the new school will be a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day. Use of the facilities could include opportunities for third parties to offer Welsh medium learning classes for adults. An example of this can be seen in Tonyrefail Community School, where Welsh medium learning classes for adults are held in the community facilities. This could contribute towards the Welsh Government's ambitious goal of creating a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050 and the WESP.

Admission Arrangements

Pupils are placed in special schools by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels based on an assessment of their need; as such, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity', and there is no published admission number. When analysing each special school, the highest percentage of pupils reside in the area that the special school is located in. However, to better manage the allocation of special school places across RCT, it is proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

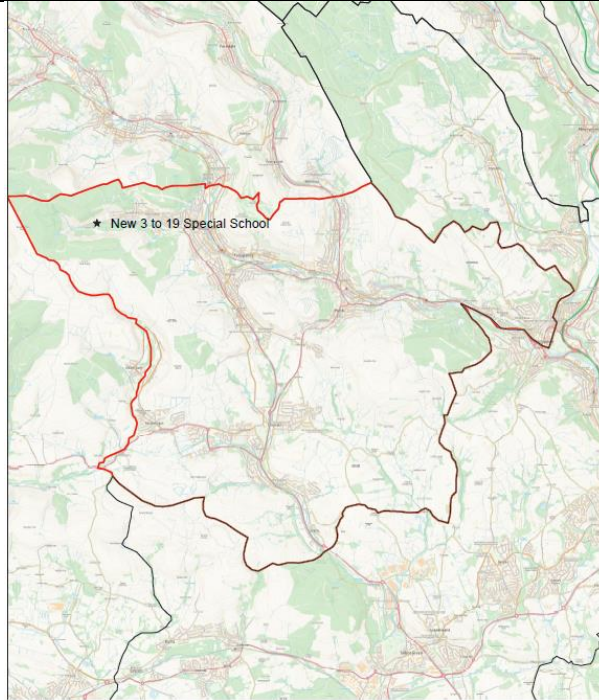
The proposed catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT are based on existing secondary school catchment areas (with a few exceptions). As previously reported, this special school is not considered to be affected by this proposal.

As well as the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, the proposed new catchments will cover Park Lane Special School, Ysgol Hen Felin and Ysgol Ty Coch. These are proposed as:

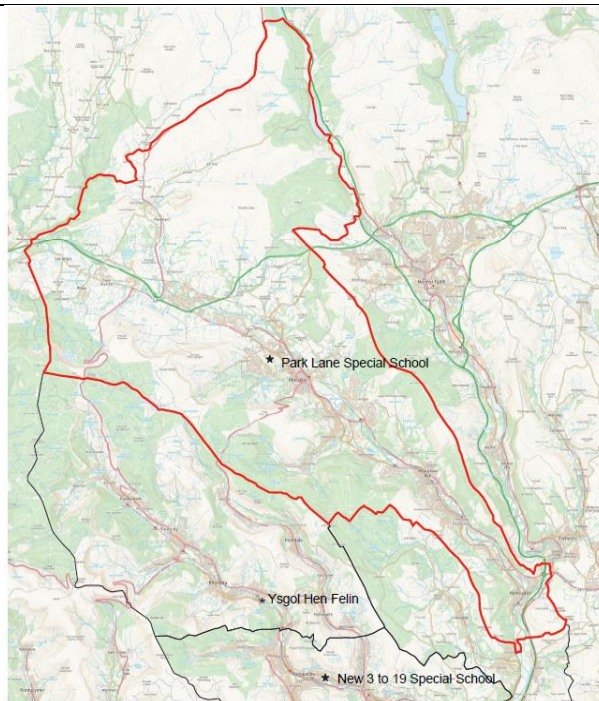
- **New 3 to 19 Special School in RCT** – Combining the catchment areas of Porth Community School, Tonyrefail Community, Ysgol Nant Gwyn (minus Pontrhondda Primary) and Coedylan Primary School and Trehopcyn Primary School
- **Park Lane Special School** – Combining the catchment areas of Aberdare Community School and Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
- **Ysgol Hen Felin** – Combining the catchment areas of Ferndale Community School, Treorchy Comprehensive, Pontrhondda Primary
- **Ysgol Ty Coch** – Combining the catchment areas of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive, Hawthorn High, Pontypridd High (minus Coedylan Primary School and Trehopcyn Primary school) and Y Pant Comprehensive.

The table that follows outlines maps identifying the proposed 3 to 19 special school catchment areas.

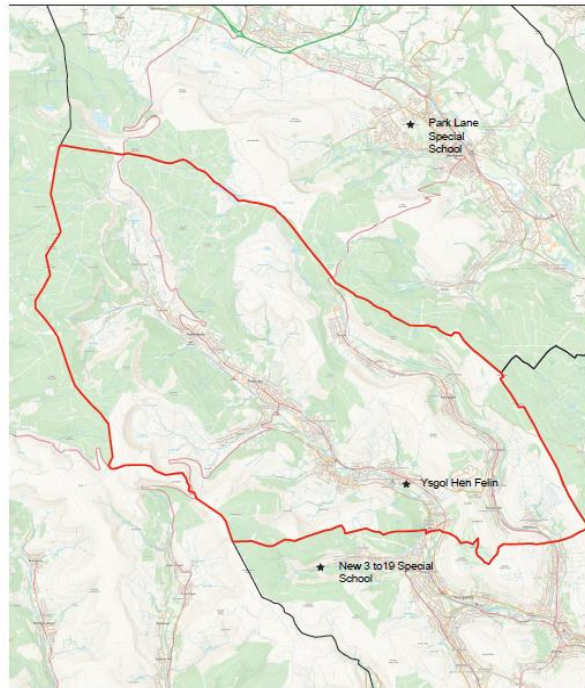
Maps Identifying the Proposed 3 to 19 Special School Catchment Areas



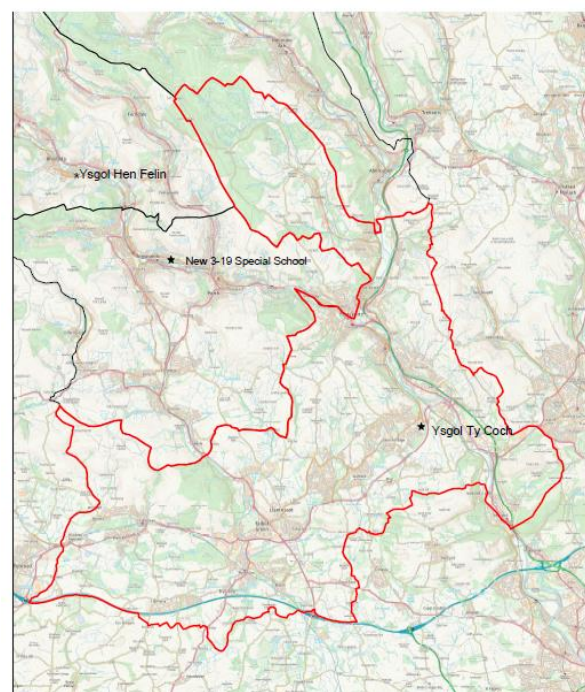
New 3 to 19 Special School.



Park Lane Special School.



Ysgol Hen Felin.



Ysgol Ty Coch.

On opening, pupils already attending other 3 to 19 special schools that will then reside within the catchment area of the new special school, will be given the option to relocate to the new school. To note this will not be mandatory and this will be down to parental/carers choice. However, once the catchment changes come into effect, the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panel will place new pupils into specialist provision according to the newly defined catchment boundaries.

Section Two – The Likely Impact of the Proposal

The educational case for the proposal

The proposal forms a part of the Council's wider Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and contributes to the delivery of sustainable schools fit for the 21st century and supports the better strategic management of the Council's education estate.

In addition to this, school organisational proposals should highlight the educational benefits that any change will offer, particularly in relation to overall improvements in standards, but also in terms of the social and emotional development of children and young people, which would usually impact beneficially on their overall achievement and outcomes.

Park Lane Special School

Parklane Special School's most recent Estyn Inspection was in March 2017. The table that follows summarises the outcomes of this inspection.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes: Park Lane Special School	
Inspection Area	Judgment
Date of Inspection	March 2017
The School's Current Performance	Good
The School's Prospects for Improvement	Adequate
Key Question 1: How Good are Outcomes	Good
Key Question 2: How Good is Provision	Good
Key Question 3: How Good are Leadership and Management	Good

Estyn set out several recommendations to implement to make improvements to the quality of the education provision on offer. The points that follow summarise the recommendations made by Estyn.

1. **Recommendation One** – Increase the opportunities for pupils who are more able to access accredited courses that provide them with suitable challenge.
2. **Recommendation Two** – Implement effective procedures for moderating pupils' work.
3. **Recommendation Three** – Address the safety issue related to traffic management noted during the inspection.
4. **Recommendation Four** – Strengthen self-evaluation to ensure that it effectively identifies all areas for improvement.
5. **Recommendation Five** – Engage all staff in evaluating the work of the school and planning the improvements needed.

Ysgol Hen Felin

Ysgol Hen Felin's most recent Estyn Inspection was in January 2015. The table that follows summarises the outcomes of this inspection.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes: Ysgol Hen Felin	
Inspection Area	Judgment
Date of Inspection	January 2015
The School's Current Performance	Good
The School's Prospects for Improvement	Good
Key Question 1: How Good are Outcomes	Good
Key Question 2: How Good is Provision	Good
Key Question 3: How Good are Leadership and Management	Good

Estyn set out several recommendations to implement to make improvements to the quality of the education provision on offer. The points that follow summarise the recommendations made by Estyn.

1. **Recommendation One** – Address fully the safeguarding concerns identified by the inspection team.
2. **Recommendation Two** – Improve the use of data to analyse and compare the performance of all groups of pupils, track progress and inform planning.
3. **Recommendation Three** – Make sure that the school's self-evaluation is more evaluative and clearly identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses.
4. **Recommendation Four** – Improve the school's policies and plans by making them more robust, in line with current government guidelines and linked effectively together.

Ysgol Ty Coch

Ysgol Ty Coch's most recent Estyn Inspection was in March 2017. The table that follows summarises the outcomes of this inspection.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes: Ysgol Ty Coch	
Inspection Area	Judgment
Date of Inspection	June 2017
The School's Current Performance	Excellent
The School's Prospects for Improvement	Excellent
Key Question 1: How Good are Outcomes	Excellent
Key Question 2: How Good is Provision	Excellent
Key Question 3: How Good are Leadership and Management	Excellent

Estyn set out several recommendations to implement to make improvements to the quality of the education provision on offer. The points that follow summarise the recommendations made by Estyn.

1. **Recommendation One** – Improve the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language development.

2. **Recommendation Two** – Ensure that teachers provide specific feedback to pupils to help them improve their work.
3. **Recommendation Three** – Strengthen a very few areas of self-evaluation processes to ensure sufficient focus on the progress that pupils make.

Impact on ALN Provision

It is the Council's view that a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could have a major positive impact on all five Estyn inspection areas, as well as more generally in enhancing the quality of education and support for children with ALN, this is detailed as follows:

<p>1. Standards</p>	<p>The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Accommodation will consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern, flexible learning environments for all pupils • A hydro-pool and specialist teaching and learning areas • Specialist equipment • A dedicated area within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day • Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities • Traffic management systems including on-site pupil bus drop off, and on-site staff parking. <p>All of which would support the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT to raise standards and make progress against Estyn's inspection areas.</p>
<p>2. Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning</p>	<p>The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Accommodation will consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern, flexible learning environments for all pupils • A hydro-pool and specialist teaching and learning areas • Specialist equipment • A dedicated area within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day • Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities • Traffic management systems including on-site pupil bus drop off, and on-site staff parking.

	All of which would support the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT to raise standards and make progress against Estyn's inspection areas.
3. Teaching and Learning Experience	A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would ensure that staff are able to provide a balanced curriculum at all stages in line with the new Curriculum for Wales – 2022. A 21 st century learning environment could also provide pupils with greater flexibility and therefore greater choice and opportunities in their learning experience.
4. Care, Support and Guidance	<p>A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could build upon the good working practices and initiatives already have in place.</p> <p>Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities could provide opportunities to further develop extra-curricular activities to encourage healthy lifestyles for the school community.</p> <p>The new school will be a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.</p>
5. Leadership and Management	A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, would remove the burden of time consuming and expensive maintenance issues, which could allow staff to focus on delivering the best teaching and learning and outcomes for their pupils.

What is the likely impact of the proposals on pupils?

It is anticipated that the proposed changes will not adversely impact upon pupils as this is creating a new school which can only enhance the current ALN provision on offer. Numerous benefits can be realised – the principal change will be to create a new 3 to 19 special school which will be built to 21st century school standards that should have a significantly positive impact upon the pupils who will attend.

The Welsh Government and the Council has adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which is expressed in seven core aims that all children and young people:

1. Have a flying start in life
2. Have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities
3. Enjoy the best possible health and are free from abuse, victimisation, and exploitation
4. Have access to play, leisure, sporting, and cultural activities
5. Are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised
6. Have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing
7. Are not disadvantaged by poverty.

The Council considers that the proposal benefits the children and young people who will attend the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT in accordance with the seven core aims set out above.

Further information relating to the impact of the proposal on pupils, including how the proposal contributes to all seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 and an assessment of the proposal on the five ways of working, can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment which is at Appendix B.

What is the likely impact of the proposal on staff?

We anticipate that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and the modern 21st century learning environments, will have a positive impact on staff morale, well-being, and retention.

As this will be a new school provision, a temporary governing body will be established if a decision to proceed with the opening is agreed. The main role of this temporary governing body will be to establish a staffing structure for the new school, appoint its senior management team and make decisions about the method of recruiting other staff to the posts that are available in the new school.

The number of staff required for the new school is likely to increase over time. The staffing requirements would align according to the increased school population which we anticipate will grow organically. Once open, the Governing Body of the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be responsible for the staffing structure which would be determined primarily by the numbers and educational needs of the pupils at the school and the budget available.

The Council has well established Human Resource policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change. The Council is committed to working with staff and Trade Unions to ensure the process is dealt with sympathetically and supportively and there will be numerous opportunities to engage with staff as the proposal progresses.

Financial implications of the proposal

The estimated capital cost of this proposal is £53.3 million. The Council and the Welsh Government via the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme will jointly fund this project, with the Welsh Government funding up to 75.0% of project costs, and up to 100% of costs directly associated with making the school Net Zero Carbon in operation. Detailed costs will be developed alongside the consultation process and approvals sought in line with the Council's decision-making procedures.

Any revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the schools' delegated budget and any potential increases in home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is developed.

Home to School Transport Provision

There is a statutory duty placed upon all local authorities in Wales to provide pupils with free transport to their nearest suitable school if they reside beyond safe 'walking distance' to that school. The term suitable school applies to the catchment area English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided mainstream primary school, secondary school or special school/class as appropriate. The law relating to safe 'walking distance' is defined as two miles for pupils of compulsory school age receiving primary education and three miles for pupils of compulsory school age receiving secondary education.

The Council has exercised the discretionary powers afforded to it under the provisions of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to make a more generous provision to pupils. The relevant information in relation to the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT is set out below:

- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for pupils receiving compulsory primary education at their nearest suitable school has been set at one and a half miles, instead of two miles as required by the Measure
- Free transport to their nearest suitable school, where places are available, is provided to pupils who meet the one and a half mile eligibility criterion from nursery (the start of the school term after their third birthday), rather than from the start of compulsory education (the start of the school term after their fifth birthday) as required by the Measure
- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for pupils receiving compulsory secondary education at their nearest suitable school has been set at two miles instead of three miles as required by the Measure
- Free transport is provided to post 16 pupils until the end of the academic year in which they attain their 19th birthday who meet the two mile eligibility criterion.

Further information in relation to the Council's Home to School transport provision can be viewed and downloaded from the Council website via:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ParkingRoadsandTravel/Travel/SchoolandCollegeTransport/SchoolandCollegeTransport.aspx>

Any revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the school's delegated budget and any potential increases in home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is developed.

Land and buildings information

It is proposed that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could be built on the soon to be vacated Council Headquarters in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypany. This site is proposed as the preferred location following an appraisal of other sites and is in the ownership of RCT Council, so no land acquisitions are required.

Consultation Response Form

To comply with its legal duty under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, and help the Council reach a decision on the proposal, it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions. Please note, any personal information given will not be shared and will only be used to provide you with feedback, should you request it. Any comments that could identify you will be anonymised in the Consultation Report produced. Completed Consultation Report Forms should be returned to:

**Director of Education and Inclusion Services
21st Century Schools Team
Ty Trevithick
Abercynon
CF45 4UQ**

or

Email: schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk

The proposal:

To open a new English medium 3 to 19 special school in RCT and the introduction of catchment areas for the 3 to 19 special schools.

Do you agree with the proposal? Yes No Not sure

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

Do you think the proposal could impact opportunities for people to use and promote the Welsh Language (Positive or Negative)?

Do you think the proposal in any way treats the Welsh Language less favourably than the English Language?



Name (optional):



Please provide contact details if you wish to be notified of the publication of the Consultation Report.

Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than no later than 17:00 on 14th September 2023.

The Council is committed to keeping your personal information safe and secure and keeping you informed about how we use your information. To learn about how your privacy is protected and how and why we use your personal information to provide you with services, please visit our Consultation privacy notice:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/DataProtectionandFreedomofInformation/DataProtection/serviceprivacynotices/ChiefExecutives/ConsultationPrivacyNotice.aspx>

and

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/DataProtectionandFreedomofInformation/DataProtection/DataProtection.aspx>