

15th December 2023

Re: Pre-Scrutiny of a draft cabinet report: 'Proposals to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School'

Dear Cabinet Members,

I have been instructed by this Council's Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to convey the comments and observations of Members in relation to the **Proposals to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School** before its consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 18th December 2023

The Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee gave feedback and comments in respect of the proposal at its meeting on the 14th December 2023. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the recommendations from the Director of Education & Inclusion. In advance of scrutinising the content of the draft Cabinet report, Committee received representations from the two local members, Councillor Karen Morgan and Councillor Adam Rogers. The Chair also facilitated the opportunity for a member of the public to make representation upon this proposal.

Members can view the full discussion and debate of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny, in respect of this item of business [here](#)

In summary, the following points were raised:

- Members raised a number of concerns regarding home to school transport arrangements and potential additional costs the Council would incur, should these proposals be adopted. In particular, a number of members felt that the draft Cabinet report was lacking information with regards to these additional costs.
- A number of members sought reassurance that should Cabinet support the recommendations of the report, that 'age-appropriate travel' would be a priority particularly for younger pupils as they felt parents would be compelled to drive their children to school if this was not a consideration. In respect of this point members noted the potential additional carbon footprint created by the proposals. A number of members referenced a need for Cabinet to consider these proposals in the wider context of Climate Change, and the need to encourage residents to utilise active travel more in the future.
- A Member noted that with the yet unknown numbers of pupils qualifying and using home to school transport, the cost savings made may be minimal versus the costs of transporting pupils to schools using a more pollutive mode of transport.
- Cabinet were asked to consider the recommendations of the Director, in the context of the Future Generations & Well-being Act.

- A Member sought clarification on how the proposal will align with RCTCBC's educational goals and strategies but was pleased to hear that as a school reorganisation proposal, it would ensure that RCT has sustainable schools for the future and align with the Local Authority's five strategic priorities and maintain high quality standards.
- All members were sympathetic to the concerns of parents, but a number of members also acknowledged that allowing the number of surplus places to remain high would have a detrimental impact on the future financial viability of Rhigos Primary School and impact children's education in the future. A number of members cited these reasons, as important in Cabinet's deliberations.
- A member queried whether or not a business case could be made or had had been considered for investment in the repair and maintenance of the current school. A number of members acknowledged the recent investment in a new school for Hirwaun and the capacity available at this school. Many members referenced the improvement facilities and learning environment provided by a modern school.
- A number of Members sought reassurance that these concerns are mitigated, where possible, and should Cabinet be minded to progress with this proposal, the authority look to put in place sufficient support for pupils and parents during transition. In addition, that the school buildings, where appropriate, are used for community benefit. The example of after schools clubs or extra circular activities was referenced.
- A Member raised concern regarding the high volume of objections to the proposal particularly from the residents of Hirwaun and sought clarity on what improvements can be put in place to the access and egress to Hirwaun Primary School to ensure that it can safely accommodate further pupils who may travel by bus or by car. The Member also explored the importance of equity of access to provisions such as after school clubs and parents' evenings for those who can't access transport or where public transport may not be reliable (aligning with the anti-poverty agenda which is a priority of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee).
- A Member referred to Estyn's report (which they considered an important factor) and sought assurance that the standards of teaching in Hirwaun Primary School will be as good as that in Rhigos Primary School.

At the conclusion of the Committee's discussions in respect of the proposal, Members recognised the challenges that the proposal would present for individuals and the community should they be adopted by Cabinet and wished for their comments to be considered and conveyed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Hanagan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "H".

Christian Hanagan
Service Director Democratic Services and Communication