

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

13TH MAY, 2014

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN ABERLLECHAU

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to outline proposals to close Aberllechau Primary School and to seek Members approval to begin the relevant, and required statutory consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members note the information contained within this report and give formal approval to commence consultation on the proposal to close Aberllechau Primary School, with pupils transferring to Pontygwaith Primary School in January 2015.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Rhondda Cynon Taf has 110 schools for pupils in the primary age range. Currently, there are 93 all age primary schools, 1 nursery schools, 11 infant schools (ages 3 or 4-7) and 5 junior schools (ages 8-11).
- 3.2. Over the past 10 years, the Council has sought to move towards a single larger primary school model for 3 to 11 years amalgamating separate infant and junior schools through an organic approach, and also closing small primary schools, incorporating them in to larger more educationally and financially viable primary schools. The schools amalgamated or closed most recently include infant, junior and some nursery schools in Abercynon, Comin (Aberdare Park), Cwmbach, Cwmclydach, Glanffrwd, Glantaf, Maerdy, Penrhiwfer, Ynysboeth, Ynyswen and Ynyshir.
- 3.3. The Estyn Inspection of the Council in 2012, has highlighted that the Council needs to:
 - ***“Raise education standards in all schools; and***
 - ***Reduce surplus places.”***
- 3.4. The following proposal seeks to address these recommendations for the communities of Wattstown and Pontygwaith.

- 3.5. To progress any school reorganisation the Council has to follow the guidance issued by Welsh Government, called the School Organisation Code. The Welsh Government has introduced a new School Organisation Code which came into effect from 1 October 2013. The Code on School Organisation ('the Code') is made under Sections 38 and 39 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 ('the 2013 Act').
- 3.6. The Code contains the following elements:
- It imposes requirements in accordance with which relevant bodies (or persons exercising a function for the purpose of the discharge, by a local authority or the governing body of a maintained school, of functions in Part 2 (changes which require proposals)) must act. Failure by a relevant body to comply with the requirements set out in this Code may result in a complaint to the Welsh Ministers or to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Where mandatory requirements are imposed by the Code or by the 2013 Act or another statute or statutory instrument, it is stated that the relevant bodies **must** comply with the particular provision. Where practices are prohibited, it is stated that the relevant bodies **must not** use this practice.
 - It includes statutory guidance to which relevant bodies **must** have regard and sets out the policy context, general principles and factors that should be taken into account by those bringing forward proposals to reconfigure school provision and by those responsible for determining proposals. Where guidance is given by the Code, it is stated that relevant bodies **should** follow this guidance unless they can demonstrate that they are justified in not doing so.
 - It provides a description of the statutory requirements set out in the 2013 Act.
- 3.7. The New Code is very prescriptive in respect of who should be consulted in respect of any proposal and sets out clear expectations of what should be included in the Consultation document. A copy of the draft Consultation Document is attached in the Appendix to this Report.
- 3.8. The arguments for and against the proposal which would previously have been set out in the Report to Cabinet are clearly spelt out in the Consultation Document.

4. THE CLOSURE OF ABERLLECHAU PRIMARY SCHOOL, WITH THE TRANSFER OF EDUCATION PROVISION TO PONTYGWAITH PRIMARY SCHOOL

What is the basis for the proposal?

- 4.1 In recent years, Estyn has sharpened its approach to inspection of schools and local authorities and has raised the bar in respect of what it considers to be good and excellent provision. Furthermore, Estyn has taken a very hard line on local authorities in Wales that have weaknesses in key areas such as

corporate governance, educational standards, attendance levels, surplus places and safeguarding.

4.2 Estyn's conclusion in March 2012 on the quality of education services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf was:

- **Overall Judgement – Adequate** (Strengths outweigh areas for improvement);
- **Capacity to Improve – Adequate.**

4.3 In addition Estyn made the following recommendations for the Council:

- R1 - raise standards in schools particularly in key stage 4;
- R2 - improve attendance rates in all schools;
- R3 - improve the evaluation and analyses of data across service areas and partnerships to drive improvements in outcomes for learners;
- R4 - use the full powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in schools;
- R5 - reduce surplus places; and
- R6 - improve the rigour and the level of scrutiny and challenge across all services and partnerships.

4.4 Over the past eighteen months the Council had focused its attention on these six recommendations, and in particular Recommendations 1, 2 & 5, which will have the greatest impact on pupil achievement in our schools. As a result, schools that, when compared with similar schools across Wales based on free school meals, are in the third and fourth quartiles are being subject to significant challenge, scrutiny and support. Where there is little evidence of significant progress, the Council is intervening using a range of its powers. One of the powers is to close schools that over an extended period continue to under-perform providing an education to children that is not good enough.

4.5 Estyn also highlighted that the Council had the highest number of surplus places in Wales and that action had to be taken to address this issue. This was followed up by a letter from the Welsh Government Minister for Education & Skills in June 2012 that instructed the Council to take action in respect of surplus places or the Welsh Government would take responsibility for removing the surplus places.

4.6 The Elected Members have accepted Estyn's recommendations and have undertaken a review of our school provision. The criteria we have used for selecting schools for review is one or more of the following:

- Surplus places in excess of 25% of published capacity;
- Buildings that are beyond economic repair/not fit for purpose;
- Financially unviable (usually due to a sharp fall in pupil numbers);
- Schools considered to be 'small' schools, i.e. schools with 90 or fewer pupils;
- Separate infant and junior schools in close proximity;
- 'Paired' schools, i.e. where children progress from one of the schools to the other;

- Mixed aged classes where there are more than two age groups in one class;
 - Schools considered to be at risk, based on their academic Key Stage data and the quality of the leadership, of meeting Estyn's criteria as a school in need of significant improvement or special measures.
- 4.7 Aberllechau Primary School and Pontygwaith Primary School have been assessed against the aforementioned criteria:
- Both schools have surplus places in excess of 25%;
 - Aberllechau is a "small" school with less than 90 mainstream pupils;
 - Aberllechau has a maintenance backlog of £539k, which equates to £7,926 per pupil;
Pontygwaith has a maintenance backlog of £435k, which equates to £4,065 per pupil;
 - Both schools have mixed aged classes, Aberllechau has 3 (which includes a mixed Key Stage class) and Pontygwaith has 5
- 4.8 The educational performance and pupil attendance of both schools is consistently in the third and fourth quartiles when compared to similar schools in Wales.
- 4.9 The opportunity exists to bring the two schools together to create a larger, more educationally viable school.
- 4.10 Members will recall that they considered a proposal to close Aberllechau Primary School in September 2009, and after a public consultation agreed to retain the School but continue to monitor the educational performance of the School. Cabinet agreed that if there has not been a significant improvement since the Estyn Inspection in 2008, a comprehensive review of the future of the School will be undertaken.
- 4.11 Over the past few years, the Council and more recently Central South Consortium has provided considerable support to Aberllechau Primary in terms of support to the leadership and management and improvements to the school buildings. Furthermore, since September 2013, the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher of the School has been meeting the Director of Education to discuss and monitor the progress of the School. Central South Consortium categorise all schools in the region on the basis on a number of factors with the greatest weight being applied to educational outcomes, leadership and the quality of teaching. All schools are graded A to D, with A being the highest and D the lowest performing school, causing significant concern.
- 4.12 Aberllechau Primary School is graded a D school, and it is the opinion of senior school improvement practitioners in the Consortium and the Council that the School's performance is equivalent to that in need of Significant Improvement or Special Measures.
- 4.13 Therefore, as Director, I consider that:

- The Governing Body and Headteacher of the School have had sufficient time, resources and support to address the educational under-performance in the School;
- The best course of action for the pupils of Aberllechau Primary School is to close the School at the end of the calendar year and transfer the pupils to Pontygwaith Primary School.

5 TIMESCALE, CONSULTATION AND THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING

- 5.1 The process for closing schools has changed due to the new Code.
- 5.2 The Code on School Organisation ("The Code") is made under Sections 38 and 39 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The Code came into force on 1 October 2013 and applies in respect of all school proposals published by way of a statutory notice after that date. Proposals to close a school have to follow the following process:
1. The Council's Cabinet considers the Code and authorises a consultation on the changes to the schools;
 2. At the start of the consultation period the Council **must** provide consultees with a consultation document and give them at least 42 days in which to respond, with at least 20 of these days being school days. If the Council considers it appropriate meetings are held with stakeholders during the consultation period;
 3. Consultation comments are collated and summarised by the Council. This summary together with the Council's officers own responses and Estyn's views of the proposal is published in a consultation report within 13 weeks of the end of the consultation period and presented to the Council's Cabinet for consideration;
 4. The Council's Cabinet decide whether to proceed with the changes within 6 months of the end of the consultation period. If the decision is to proceed, Step 5 is taken. If a new option emerges during the consultation which the Council's Cabinet wish to consider, then Steps 1-3 are repeated;
 5. Statutory notice is published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The notice **must** be published on a school day and with 15 school days (not including the day of publication) in the notice period;
 6. The Council's Cabinet must issue its decision on the proposal within 16 weeks of the end of the objection period;
 7. If written or e-mailed objections are received, the Council **must** publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them within 7 days of the determination of the proposal (where the Council is determining its own proposals); or, in all other cases, within 28 days of the end of the objection period;
 8. If the proposals receive approval / the Council determine to implement them, they should be implemented in accordance with the date given in the statutory notice, or any subsequent modified date.
- 5.3 The consultation will start on the 2 June 2014 and will be completed at 5pm on 18 July 2014. The feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a report presented to the Council's Cabinet in September 2014.

- 5.4 The Council's Cabinet will consider the report and will consider, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, make changes to the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If the Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of this proposal for the foreseeable future.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Council considers that there are considerable benefits to be gained from creating larger primary schools. The experience of educational authorities and schools across the UK is that such primary schools offer a more consistent and secure model upon which schools can plan, manage and deliver the very best educational experience for pupils over time. This has been supported by an Estyn Report dated 2 December 2013 that evidences the fact that larger schools outperform small schools.
- 6.2 It is recommended, therefore, that Members give approval to officers to commence the consultation processes necessary to achieve the proposal outlined in this report.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE
OF ABERLLECHAU PRIMARY SCHOOL
WITH ALL THE PUPILS TRANSFERING
ON 1 JANUARY 2015 TO
PONTYGWAITH PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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Introduction

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council wishes to seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders on the proposal to close Aberllechau Primary School and transfer all the pupils, including the Council's special educational needs class, to Pontygwaith Primary School. It is proposed that Aberllechau Primary School would close on 31 December 2014 with the pupils transferring to Pontygwaith Primary School on 1 January 2015.

Who will we consult with?

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

- The Governing Body of Aberllechau Primary School
- Pupils of Aberllechau Primary School
- Parents, carers and staff members of Aberllechau Primary School
- Other governing bodies of neighbouring primary schools
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan Authorities
- Welsh Minister for Education & Skills
- Assembly Member for the Rhondda and regional Assembly Members for the area
- Member of Parliament for the Rhondda
- Estyn
- Cwm Taf Local Health Board
- The Governing Body of Pontygwaith Primary School
- Pupils of Pontygwaith Primary School
- Parents, carers and staff members of Pontygwaith Primary School
- Parents, carers, staff and governors of Ynyshir Primary School
- Teaching and staff trade unions
- Central South Education Consortium
- South East Wales Transport Association
- South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner
- The local Communities First Partnership
- The Early Years and Childcare Partnership

What will the consultation process entail?

The consultation will start on the 2nd June 2014 and will be completed at 5pm on 18 July 2014. The feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a report presented to the Council's Cabinet in September 2014. This consultation report will be available for all persons to view on the Council internet site and copies can be obtained on request from the addresses detailed on Page 5 of this document.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the report and will consider, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, make changes to the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If the Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of this proposal for the foreseeable future.

If the Cabinet decides to proceed with the proposal a Statutory Notice is published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 requires that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal has the opportunity to 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 proposal was published.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the outcome of the statutory notice at the next available Cabinet meeting and determine whether to implement the proposal.

If there are objections, the Council's Director of Education & Lifelong Learning will publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and his response to them within 7 days of the day of the determination of the proposal, or within 28 days of the end of the objection period (as appropriate). This report will also be available for all persons to view on the Council's internet site and copies can be obtained on request from the addresses detailed on Page 5 of this document.

If the Council's Cabinet approve the proposal, the proposal will be implemented in accordance with the date given in the statutory notice or any subsequently modified date. In the case of this proposal the implementation date is 1st January 2015.

What do you have to consider?

The remainder of the consultation document sets out the rationale for the proposed change to primary education provision in Aberllechau, Wattstown. We would like you to consider the information contained within this document and to hear your views as to whether or not you support the proposal to close Aberllechau Primary School, with the transfer of its provision, pupils and staff to Pontygwaith Primary School.

How do you make your views known?

Consultation events will be held and you are welcome to attend the appropriate meeting.

School Affected	Group	Time/Date	Venue
Aberllechau Primary	Governors and Staff Meeting	Xth June 2014, 4 – 6pm	Aberllechau Primary School
Pontygwaith Primary	Governors and Staff Meeting	Xth June 2014, 4 – 6pm	Pontygwaith Primary School
Aberllechau Primary	School Council	Xth June 2014, 2 – 3pm	Aberllechau Primary School
Pontygwaith Primary	School Council	Xth June 2014, 2 – 3pm	Pontygwaith Primary School
Both Schools and members of the local community	Parents and public drop in session and exhibition	X th June 2014, 4 – 6pm	Pontygwaith Primary School

A consultation questionnaire is attached, will also be available at the drop-in session detailed above and on the Council's internet site at www.rctcbc.gov.uk

You are also welcome to put your views, comments and any questions you have in writing to:

Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
School Organisation and Planning Unit
Ty Trevithick,
Abercynon CF45 4UQ Telephone (01443) 744227 Fax (01443) 744201

E-mail schoolplanning@rctednet.net

All correspondence should be received no later than 5pm Friday 18 July 2014.

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

All schools affected by this proposal are English medium schools and therefore all the consultation documents are via the English language. If a Welsh language copy of the consultation document is required, please contact the above address.

Background to the proposal

Information on the Schools – Aberllechau Primary School

Aberllechau Primary School ("Aberllechau") is a Community Primary School located at Victoria Terrace, Wattstown, and the school site consists of two, traditional Victorian buildings, constructed in 1887. The Council has invested £292k in the school buildings since 2009, however the backlog maintenance figure is still £539,000 and this does not include costs of improvements to meet the 21st Century School criteria. Based on the results of the Welsh Government commissioned building survey of all schools, Aberllechau is graded a C for suitability, and C for sufficiency, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building respectively.

The pupil numbers in Aberllechau over the past four years are shown below and are obtained from the statutory annual pupil count (PLASC) which must be undertaken in January each year. Aberllechau also hosts a Council Special Educational Needs class which provides places for children from across the County Borough, and which does not provide a specific provision to the children in the Aberllechau catchment. As a result, the number of pupils in the special class is shown separately. The numbers shown exclude nursery age pupils, as we are required to exclude these from the table by the Welsh Government's Statutory School Organisation Code, however we have shown the nursery numbers separately.

Aberllechau Primary School				
No on roll in January	2011	2012	2013	2014
Mainstream pupils	63	58	64	59
SEN Class	8	7	4	4
Total	71	65	68	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	6	17	15	7

Over the next five years the pupil forecasts for Aberllechau Primary School, which are calculated in accordance with guidance issued by Welsh Government, are as follows:

Aberllechau Primary School								
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2014 (Actual)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018	
Mainstream pupils	97	66	67	67	66	67	31%	
SEN Class	8	4	4	4	4	4	50%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	13	14	14	15	14	14	-	

Aberllechau Primary School was inspected by Estyn in February 2008 and judged as requiring significant improvement. As part of the Welsh Government's requirements for schools requiring significant improvement, Estyn undertook a follow-up inspection in December 2009 focusing on the key issues identified in the inspection. The outcome of the follow-up inspection was that Aberllechau was judged to have made good progress in relation to the recommendations for improvement identified in the inspection in February 2008. As a result of this progress Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales removed the school from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

Estyn also set out that, in order to build upon the progress made to date, the school should:

- R1** continue to raise standards of achievement of all pupils;
- R2** ensure that all pupils have work that is matched well to their needs and abilities;
- R3** develop further the assessment and tracking of pupil's progress;
- R4** continue to improve attendance rates throughout the school; and
- R5** address the issue relating to pupils' wellbeing brought to the attention of the headteacher and governing body during the inspection.

The tables below set out the performance of Aberllechau for the key measures of educational performance over the past three years and compare the school to similar schools across Wales based on free school meals. The three year average of the percentage of pupils with free school meals is 32.5%.

Percentage of pupils at the end of Year 2 achieving at least outcome 5, and the Foundation Phase Indicator

	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile*	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile*
Foundation Phase Indicator	33.3%	4	72.7%	4
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	41.7%	4	90.9%	3
Language literacy and communication skills English	50.0%	4	72.7%	4
Mathematical development	66.7%	4	90.9%	2

* - benchmark quartiles – 1 being the highest, 4 the lowest.

Percentage of pupils at the end of Year 6 who have achieved the expected level

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile
Core Subject Indicator	83.3%	1	75.0%	4	54.6%	4
English	83.3%	1	75.0%	4	63.6%	4
Maths	83.3%	2	87.5%	2	72.7%	4
Science	83.3%	2	87.5%	3	54.6%	4

Percentage of half-day sessions attended by pupils of statutory school age during the academic year

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013 (Provisional)
% attendance	90.97%	3	90.92%	4	91.70%

Since September 2012, the Council's School Improvement Services have been provided by the Central South Consortium, a regional school improvement services for the five local authorities of Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan. The Consortium categorises the performance of each school in the region

and considers that: *“Aberllechau is in Category D within the Central South Consortium’s system of categorisation of effectiveness (A-D). This is because overall performance does not compare well with that of similar schools; too much teaching has been of an adequate quality; standards in pupils’ books and teachers’ expectations of achievement vary widely; a consistently used approach to assessment and pupil tracking is yet to be embedded; and senior leaders do not yet have a strong enough impact on improving pupil outcomes”*.

Information on the Schools – Pontygwaith Primary School

Pontygwaith Primary School (“Pontygwaith”) is a Community Primary School located at Graig Street, Pontygwaith, just one mile from Aberllechau. It also consists of two, traditional Victorian buildings, constructed in 1896. Over the last few years, there has been considerable capital investment in this school, part funded by the Governing Body and match funded by the Council, including major roof repairs, renewal of external doors and windows, toilet refurbishment, improved security, new reception and administrative areas, refurbished play areas and installation of dedicated kitchen and dining facilities. Welsh Government approved building grades are B for both suitability and sufficiency. However, the backlog maintenance figure is still £435k (which consists mainly of future works required to mechanical and electrical services) and this does not include costs of improvements to meet the 21st Century School criteria. .

The pupil numbers in Pontygwaith over the past four years is shown below based on the statutory annual pupil count in January each year. The numbers shown exclude nursery age pupils, as we are required to exclude these from the table by the Welsh Government’s Statutory School Organisation Code; however we have shown the nursery numbers separately.

Pontygwaith Primary School				
No on roll in January	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total	107	97	107	102
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	23	24	20	21

Over the next five years the pupil forecasts for Pontygwaith Primary School, which are calculated in accordance with guidance issued by Welsh Government, are as follows:

Pontygwaith Primary School								
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2014 (Actual)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018	
Total	188	113	109	109	105	105	45%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	26	21	23	23	23	23	-	

If the proposal was to be implemented in the future and the parents/guardians of the Aberllechau pupils choose to transfer their pupils to Pontygwaith the five year forecasts will be as follows:

Pontygwaith Primary School (including the pupils transferred from Aberllechau Primary School)							
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018	
Mainstream pupils	188	176	176	171	172	9%	
SEN Class	8	4	4	4	4	50%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	26	37	38	37	37	-	

If pupils numbers from within the revised catchment area of Pontygwaith increase above the existing capacity of the School, there are opportunities to reconfigure the interior of the School to accommodate a further 30 pupils at least, including additional Nursery capacity . This can be achieved by minor internal remodelling, and converting the spare classroom currently used as an Intervention Room back to its original use, ie a teaching base classroom. This work will be undertaken before any transfer of pupils occurs to accommodate all nursery pupils.

Pontygwaith Primary School was inspected in March 2011. Estyn judged the school's current performance to be Good and the school's prospects for improvement also to be Good.

Estyn reported that the school is good because:

- most pupils make effective progress and achieve good standards;
- most pupils' behaviour and motivation for learning are good;
- the quality of teaching and assessment is good;
- there is a good range of exciting learning experiences; and
- there is an inclusive school ethos.

Furthermore, also Estyn also concluded that the school has strong prospects for improvement because the recently appointed headteacher provides very effective

leadership and vision for improvement. The school's comprehensive self-evaluation process leads to accurate judgements about performance. Plans for improvement focus well on key priorities. Recent work by staff has already brought about improvements in pupils' oracy skills and behaviour.

In order to improve further, Pontygwaith Primary School needs to:

- R1 - raise standards for more able and talented pupils;
- R2 - improve attendance and punctuality; and
- R3 - ensure that marking regularly includes constructive comments to help pupils make progress.

The tables below set out the performance of Pontygwaith for the key measures of educational performance over the past three years and compare the school to similar schools across Wales based on free school meals. The three year average of the percentage of pupils with free school meals is 43.2%.

Percentage of pupils at the end of Year 2 achieving at least outcome 5, and the Foundation Phase Indicator

	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile*	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile*
Foundation Phase Indicator	80%	1	68.75%	3
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	90%	2	68.75%	4
Language literacy and communication skills English	80%	3	68.75%	4
Mathematical development	80%	2	75.0%	3

* - benchmark quartiles – 1 being the highest, 4 the lowest.

Percentage of pupils at the end of Year 6 who have achieved the expected level

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile
Core Subject Indicator	75%	2	70%	3	55.6%	4
English	75%	3	70%	4	55.6%	4
Maths	72.7%	3	70%	4	66.7%	4
Science	69.7%	4	70%	4	66.7%	4

Percentage of half-day sessions attended by pupils of statutory school age during the academic year

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013 (Provisional)
% attendance	91.17%	3	90.86%	4	91.08%

The Central South Consortium School Improvement Service considers that: *“Pontygwaith is currently in Category B within the Central South Consortium’s system of categorisation of effectiveness (A-D). This is because: although educational standards have generally been variable when compared to similar schools, the school is the most deprived in the family of schools and has cohorts of less than 10 pupils. When individual value added is tracked, the school gives value to all pupils. Teaching is usually good and leadership is effective”.*

Information on the Schools – Ynyshir Primary School

Aberllechau’s catchment area also borders that of Ynyshir Primary School (“Ynyshir”) which is located at Llanwonno Road, Ynyshir, just 1.4 miles from Aberllechau. Ynyshir is housed in a new 21st Century School building, opened in 2010. Whilst, in the future, Aberllechau will be within Pontygwaith’s catchment area, parents **may** wish to choose to apply for a place for their child at Ynyshir, if there are spaces available in the relevant year groups. As Ynyshir Primary School may be affected by this proposal, it has been included within the consultation to provide information to parents and carers.

The available forecast spaces at Ynyshir are as follows:

Ynyshir Primary School								
Projected No on roll in January	No in	Capacity of the School	2014 (Actual)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018
Total		270	206	203	216	224	229	15%
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils		38	38	41	43	41	41	-

(spare capacity within the school overall can be utilised to accommodate the potential additional Nursery age pupils)

Estyn inspected Ynyshir in May 2009 and concluded that Ynyshir is a good school, which is purposefully led. Pupils are well taught and they make good progress. Estyn recommended that in order to improve the school in the areas inspected, the staff and governing body need to:

- R1 rationalise the roles of subject co-ordinators and the distribution of responsibilities across the senior management team;
- R2 improve the access to the equipment to teach ICT;
- R3 strengthen provision so that all pupils have greater opportunities to experience a sense of awe and wonder;

R4 extend the role of the governing body in calling the school to account; and
R5 raise levels of attendance.

The tables below set out the performance of Ynyshir for the key measures of educational performance over the past three years and compare the school to similar schools across Wales based on free school meals. The three year average of the percentage of pupils with free school meals is 32.8%.

Percentage of pupils at the end of Year 2 achieving at least outcome 5, and the Foundation Phase Indicator

	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile*	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile*
Foundation Phase Indicator	78.6%	3	63.3%	4
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	100%	1	100%	1
Language literacy and communication skills English	85.7%	4	70%	4
Mathematical development	78.6%	2	78.3%	4

* - benchmark quartiles – 1 being the highest, 4 the lowest.

Percentage of pupils at the end of Year 6 who have achieved the expected level

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile
Core Subject Indicator	69.7%	3	75.8%	4	83.3%	2
English	72.7%	3	84.8%	3	86.7%	2
Maths	72.7%	3	75.8%	4	83.3%	3
Science	69.7%	4	75.8%	4	83.3%	3

Percentage of half-day sessions attended by pupils of statutory school age during the academic year

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013 (Provisional)
% attendance	89.7%	4	91.8%	4	92.62%

The Central South Consortium School Improvement Service considers that Ynyshir is *“in Category C within the Central South Consortium’s system of categorisation of effectiveness (A-D). This is because: standards are variable year on year, however teaching is generally good and leadership is beginning to have a positive impact on standards at key stage 2 and provision generally”*.

What is the basis for this Proposal?

In recent years, Estyn has sharpened its approach to inspection of schools and local authorities and has raised the bar in respect of what it considers to be good and excellent provision. Furthermore, Estyn has taken a very hard line on local authorities in Wales that have weaknesses in key areas such as corporate governance, educational standards, attendance levels, surplus places and safeguarding.

Estyn’s conclusion in March 2012 on the quality of education services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf was:

- **Overall Judgement – Adequate** (Strengths outweigh areas for improvement);
- **Capacity to Improve – Adequate.**

In addition Estyn made the following recommendations for the Council:

- R1 - raise standards in schools particularly in key stage 4;
- R2 - improve attendance rates in all schools;
- R3 - improve the evaluation and analyses of data across service areas and partnerships to drive improvements in outcomes for learners;
- R4 - use the full powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in schools;
- R5 - reduce surplus places; and
- R6 - improve the rigour and the level of scrutiny and challenge across all services and partnerships.

Over the past eighteen months the Council had focused its attention on these six recommendations, and in particular Recommendations 1, 2 & 5, which will have the greatest impact on pupil achievement in our schools. As a result, schools that, when compared with similar schools across Wales based on free school meals, are in the third and fourth quartiles are being subject to significant challenge, scrutiny and support. Where there is little evidence of significant progress, the Council is intervening using a range of its powers. One of the powers is to close schools that over an extended period continue to under-perform providing an education to children that is not good enough.

Estyn also highlighted that the Council had the highest number of surplus places in Wales and that action had to be taken to address this issue. This was followed up by a letter from the Welsh Government Minister for Education & Skills in June 2012 that instructed the Council to take action in respect of surplus places or the Welsh Government would take responsibility for removing the surplus places.

The Elected Members have accepted Estyn’s recommendations and have undertaken a review of our school provision. The criteria we have used for selecting schools for review is one or more of the following:

- Surplus places in excess of 25% of published capacity;
- Buildings that are beyond economic repair/not fit for purpose;
- Financially unviable (usually due to a sharp fall in pupil numbers);
- Schools considered to be ‘small’ schools, i.e. schools with 90 or fewer pupils;
- Separate infant and junior schools in close proximity;
- ‘Paired’ schools, i.e. where children progress from one of the schools to the other;
- Mixed aged classes where there are more than two age groups in one class;
- Schools considered to be at risk, based on their academic Key Stage data and the quality of the leadership, of meeting Estyn’s criteria as a school in need of significant improvement or special measures.

Aberllechau Primary School and Pontygwaith Primary School have been assessed against the aforementioned criteria:

- Both schools have surplus places in excess of 25%;
- Aberllechau is a “small” school with less than 90 mainstream pupils;
- Aberllechau has a maintenance backlog of £539k, which equates to £7,926 per pupil;
- Pontygwaith has a maintenance backlog of £435k, which equates to £4,065 per pupil;
- Both schools have mixed aged classes, Aberllechau has 3 (which includes a mixed Key Stage class) and Pontygwaith has 5. Please see details below:

Aberllechau Primary School	
Nursery/Reception	6 Nursery, 13 Reception
Year 1/2/3	10 Pupils Year 1, 6 Pupils Year 2, 8 Pupils Year 3
Year 4/5/6	9 Pupils Year 4, 9 Pupils Year 5, 11 Pupils Year 6
Pontygwaith Primary School	
Reception/Year 1	15 Reception, 7 Year 1
Year 1/2	15 Pupils Year 1, 11 Pupils Year 2
Year 3/4	15 Pupils Year 3, 8 Pupils Year 4
Year 4/5	10 Pupils Year 4, 7 Pupils Year 5
Year 5/6	6 Pupils Year 5, 17 Pupils Year 6

The educational performance and pupil attendance of both schools is consistently in the third and fourth quartiles when compared to similar schools in Wales.

The opportunity exists to bring the two schools together to create a larger, more educationally viable school.

What is the educational case for closing Aberllechau Primary School and transferring the pupils to Pontygwaith Primary School?

School organisational change should point to 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, which would usually impact beneficially on their overall achievement and outcomes.

It is the Council's view that creating a larger school for the communities of Wattstown and Pontygwaith will:

- **Improve educational outcomes;**
 - Create larger Foundation Phase and KS2 departments that will promote the sharing of skills and expertise across more viable teams;
 - Provide teaching and support staff with more opportunity to develop professionally;
 - Enable greater opportunities for staff to move between key stages and further develop expertise;
 - Provide a more appropriate curriculum and wider extra-curricular opportunities which will improve attendance and educational outcomes;
- **Improve educational provision;**
 - Provide the conditions that will enable a broader and more diverse curriculum to be developed to better meet the needs of the school's young people and in ways that will be viable and sustainable over the longer term;
 - Improve the range and quality of facilities and learning resources available to the benefit of all pupils;
 - Enable greater continuity of support for vulnerable groups of pupils;
 - Allow for the potential for financial savings in terms of staffing structures and purchase of services, which accrue to a larger school; and
 - Broaden the range of extra-curricular and out-of-school activities and develop them in ways that are sustainable over the longer term;
 - The future capital investment benefits that would arise from the modernisation of one institution rather than two;
 - Create a school of a sustainable size for its catchment area by removing surplus capacity, providing greater educational and financial stability;
 - Release significant resources that will be reinvested in improving the buildings and in improving standards of teaching and learning, which otherwise would not have been available;
- **Improve leadership and management;**
 - Provides the opportunity for Headteacher's to distribute key leadership tasks such as child protection, literacy, numeracy, special educational needs etc to a greater number of staff. Often in a small school, the Headteacher takes responsibility for the vast majority of these tasks;
 - Creates leadership opportunities for other staff, and for others to specialise in key areas, which will enhance educational provision and outcomes;
 - Allow teaching and support staff access to a wider range of responsibilities:
 - Improved career prospects;

- Improved curriculum co-ordination;
- The opportunity to teach across a wider age range;
- An increased range of expertise;
- Improved opportunities for staff interaction /co-ordination.

These benefits apply equally to the mainstream and the SEN pupils in the schools. This argument is supported by Estyn in its recent report "School Size and Educational Effectiveness", that stated "*Pupils' standards are good or better in a higher proportion of large primary schools than small and medium-sized primary schools. This may be because large schools tend to have more expertise and capacity to address the needs of more vulnerable pupils and the more able and talented pupils.*"

There is sufficient space at Pontygwaith Primary School to accommodate all the pupils of Aberllechau, including the SEN Class, and encompass the catchment area of Wattstown, and to provide greater flexibility and opportunity for pupils due to an extended, more enhanced and secure financial situation. By being larger the School can provide a greater degree of stability at all levels and provide the ability to employ more teaching and support staff. This will allow the School to cover a wider range of curriculum expertise. Overall, the single, larger Primary School will be more financially viable than those it will replace.

There are also teaching staff benefits, which should improve teaching standards within the School. Currently, pupils are taught in mixed age groups. If the proposal proceeds, Pontygwaith Primary School will have greater than 170 pupils of statutory school age (excluding the SEN class) which will equate to 6 teachers for 7 age groups. Therefore, the majority of pupils will be taught in their own age group, which makes it considerably easier for the class teacher to provide an appropriate curriculum and support for all pupils. This should result in higher standards of teaching and learning and better educational outcomes.

If parents and carers from Aberllechau Primary School and its catchment area exercise their right to choose Ynyshir Primary School for their child in the future, the educational impact that this may have on Ynyshir Primary School will be similar to that above. Ynyshir, has just over 200 pupils on roll, with a capacity for 270. Subject to the Council's admissions criteria, Ynyshir is able to accommodate additional pupils up to the admissions limit of the School.

What is the likely impact of the Proposal on the school pupils?

In making the proposed change, many things will be different for the pupils from Wattstown, Pontygwaith and Ynyshir, depending on parents' exercising their right of choice, but some things will remain the same:

- Some may have a longer or a different route to school, and some may be transported to school by bus;
- The pupils in the classroom are more likely to be of their own age and there will be more opportunities to make friends with children of a similar age;

- Being in classes with predominantly their own age group, the teacher will be better able to offer the pupils a wider and more varied curriculum to support all learners, including the least and most able;
- For those pupils in the Special Educational Needs Class, the teachers and teaching assistants will be the same and will transfer with the pupils;
- The teachers and teaching assistants may be different, however, the majority of teachers and teaching assistants should, with the agreement of the Pontygwaith governing body, be able to transfer between the schools, if they wish to do so;
- There will be more competition for pupils in and outside the classroom which is what children require if they are to achieve good educational outcomes;
- Being part of a larger school creates opportunity to run school sports teams, debating team etc. The children attending the SEN Class will also have the opportunity to engage in a wider range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The principal change will be an improvement in the quality of the educational provision, and this should have a significant impact on educational performance of the pupils.

For those children from Aberllechau Primary School, that live in Wattstown, who opt to attend Pontygwaith, the Council's policy regarding free school transport will continue to apply. Nevertheless, we estimate that all the pupils living in the catchment area of Pontygwaith will be within 1.5 miles of this school. The Council has assessed the safety of the route between Wattstown and Pontygwaith and consider it to be a safe route to school. Nevertheless, the Council will seek to further improve the safety of the route through additional crossing points, wider pavements, and measures to reduce the speed of the traffic. Pupils that attend the SEN Class will continue to be transported from their home to the class relocated to Pontygwaith.

If parents/carers opt to attend Ynyshir Primary School, as Wattstown is not in the Ynyshir catchment area, no home to school transport will be provided.

The Welsh Government and the Council has adopted the UN 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.

We consider that this proposal benefits the children in the communities of Wattstown, Pontygwaith and Ynyshir in accordance with the seven core aims set out above.

What is the likely impact of the Proposal on the staff of the schools?

As with any major change, there could be some short term and possibly longer-term changes in the staffing structure. The governing body of Pontygwaith Primary School would determine any changes.

As this is not creating a new school provision, the senior management and governing body of Pontygwaith Primary will remain in post. Once the governing body has determined its new structure and staffing model, arrangements will be made to fill any vacant posts available, with advice given that priority consideration should be given to existing staff of Aberllechau Primary, should they make applications. The Council has well established Human Resource policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change.

If parents/carers exercise their choice and decide to attend Ynyshir Primary School, any changes to the numbers of children attending the School will be reflected in the funding allocated to the School. If additional staff are required, the Governing Body of Ynyshir will fill the vacant posts. We will request that the Governing Body give consideration to existing staff of Aberllechau Primary School, should they make applications.

What will be the likely impact of the Proposal on Wattstown?

Wattstown, Pontygwaith and Ynyshir are Communities First Areas and Wattstown is also a Flying Start Area. Wattstown is part of the new Porth Communities First region and Pontygwaith is part of the new Ferndale Communities First region. The two new regions already work collaboratively together and have recently secured Communities Funding matched with Pupil Deprivation Grant funding across the two regions to support educational improvement across the secondary school clusters of Porth and Ferndale.

Within Wattstown the Community Centre adjacent to Aberllechau Primary School will continue to offer a wide range of provision to young people and the community in partnership with other agencies including the Council.

The English medium element of Flying Start is based at Aberllechau Primary School. If the proposal proceeds, it is proposed that the English medium Flying Start provision is transferred to the Community facility at the Recreation Ground which houses the Welsh medium Flying Start provision for Wattstown. Currently, fifteen children access the English medium Flying Start in Wattstown and the Council's Flying Start team consider that the provision can be comfortably accommodated at the Recreation Ground.

If the proposal was to proceed, the Council would consider any offers to lease Aberllechau Primary School for an alternative purpose from any community organisation, and if no offer was forthcoming, the Council's preferred option would be to sell the site for redevelopment.

A community impact assessment and an equality impact assessment have been completed for this proposal. These will be updated after the consultation has been

completed to ensure that they include pertinent issues that have arisen and need to be taken into account. The community impact assessment and equality impact assessment will be presented to the Council's Cabinet in the report that sets out the consultation feedback received in respect of this proposal. A copy of the community impact assessment and equalities impact assessment are available from the contact details at the start of this document.

What are the financial implications of the Proposal?

The purpose of creating all through primary schools, as the principal model of school organisation is not driven by financial considerations. Savings that do arise initially benefit the remaining school, as they enable school improvements to be made, and then schools as a whole through redistribution of the savings across the County Borough.

A move from a position with, 'two schools-two budgets', to a single school with a single budget does result in a number of budgets being removed, or reduced, for example, there will only be one budget for a head teacher not two, but conversely the new single school is able to make significant savings from which it benefits. Although it is not possible to be precise about figures related to savings, as much would depend on future decisions of Pontygwaith Primary School Governing Body, a summary of the known budgetary impacts is set out below.

	Pontygwaith Primary (Current)	Aberllechau Primary (current)	Pontygwaith Primary (future)	Revenue Savings
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Annual Revenue Budget based on 2013/14 budget	493	385	732	146

Improvements will be made to Pontygwaith Primary School to address the future mechanical/electrical maintenance upgrades and further develop the accommodation at the School. It is estimated that the total cost of this work will be in the region of £450k, and will be funded as a three year rolling programme of investment from within existing capital resources.

Any capital receipts from the future sale of Aberllechau Primary School site will be used by the Council to invest in capital projects across the County Borough.

What are the disadvantages of this proposal?

Increasing the intake into Pontygwaith Primary School and closing Aberllechau Primary School will inevitably cause some disruption and uncertainty for a period of time, although experience shows that this can be kept to a minimum and the children's education does not suffer. For some pupils, there will be further to travel to get to school; the Council's policy regarding free school transport will continue to apply.

Some parents may feel that two smaller schools are better for pupils rather than one larger school – in other words there could be a view that smaller schools may be more personal and less daunting, particularly for new entrants. However, there are large, very successful primary schools in the County Borough that overcome the issues with starting school for the first time.

There will be staffing implications in that, for example, there will be need for only one Headteacher. Staff will be concerned about the security of their jobs which is why the Pontygwaith governing body will, as soon as possible, once the statutory processes are complete, address the staffing issues. In practice, governing bodies seek to keep as much continuity in the staffing as is possible in these situations.

The Council considers that the educational advantages of the proposal outweigh the short-term impact of the changes for pupils and parents and the additional distance for Wattstown pupils to go to school.

What alternative options have been considered other than the closure of Aberllechau Primary School?

The current position is that we have two small schools a mile apart, 110 surplus places between the two schools, low levels of attendance and educational standards when compared to similar schools in Wales, and both schools housed in Victorian buildings that are expensive to maintain.

The options available to the Council to improve educational performance and ensure the provision represents value for money are to:

- Close Aberllechau Primary School and transfer the pupils to Pontygwaith Primary School – the proposal;
- Close both schools and build a new school on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools;
- Federate the two schools, maintaining the two school buildings but with one governing body and Headteacher.

We have explored opportunities for a suitable site for a new school in Pontygwaith and Wattstown and no site is available to build a new school. Furthermore, the costs of building a new school will be in excess of £6m and the Council has no capital budget available, for the foreseeable future, for such an investment.

In respect of the option to federate the governing bodies, which would create a two-site school under one Headteacher and one governing body, this option would not remove the surplus places that currently exist, or enable the educational benefits that accrue from creating larger year groups and improving the standards of teaching and learning that arise from creating a single school. It would also not allow us to improve the learning environment for all pupils by being able to rationalise the building stock and upgrade one of the two sites to a high standard, as opposed to having to undertake costly work at both.

Therefore, these two options have been discounted and the preferred option is that proposed in this consultation document.

What is the statutory process to close a school?

The Code on School Organisation (“The Code”) is made under Sections 38 and 39 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The Code came into force on 1 October 2013 and applies in respect of all school proposals published by way of a statutory notice after that date. Proposals to close a school have to follow the following process:

1. The Council’s Cabinet considers the Code and authorises a consultation on the changes to the schools;
2. At the start of the consultation period the Council **must** provide consultees with a consultation document and give them at least 42 days in which to respond, with at least 20 of these days being school days. If the Council considers it appropriate meetings are held with stakeholders during the consultation period;
3. Consultation comments are collated and summarised by the Council. This summary together with the Council’s officers own responses and Estyn’s views of the proposal is published in a consultation report within 13 weeks of the end of the consultation period and presented to the Council’s Cabinet for consideration;
4. The Council’s Cabinet decide whether to proceed with the changes within 6 months of the end of the consultation period. If the decision is to proceed, Step 5 is taken. If a new option emerges during the consultation which the Council’s Cabinet wish to consider, then Steps 1-3 are repeated;
5. Statutory notice is published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The notice **must** be published on a school day and with 15 school days (not including the day of publication) in the notice period;
6. The Council’s Cabinet must issue its decision on the proposal within 16 weeks of the end of the objection period;
7. If written or e-mailed objections are received, the Council **must** publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them within 7 days of the determination of the proposal (where the Council is determining its own proposals); or, in all other cases, within 28 days of the end of the objection period;
8. If the proposals receive approval/the Council determine to implement them, they should be implemented in accordance with the date given in the statutory notice, or any subsequent modified date.

Consultation Response Pro-forma

In order to help the Council reach a decision, it would be very helpful if you could answer the following questions. Completed questionnaires should be returned to:

*Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
School Organisation and Planning Unit
Ty Trevithick
Abercynon
CF45 4UQ*

or by fax to 01443 744201, or e-mail schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk

The Proposal

The proposal is to close Aberllechau Primary School and transfer all the pupils, including the Council's special educational needs class, to Pontygwaith Primary School. It is proposed that Aberllechau Primary School would close on 31 December 2014 with the pupils transferring to Pontygwaith Primary School on 1 January 2015.

1. Do you agree with the proposal? Yes No Not sure

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

2. Please state any additional views or points which you would like to be taken into account (attach additional sheets if necessary)
-
-

3. Please indicate who you are (e.g. parent of a pupil at named school, governor at named school etc.)
-

4. Name (optional)
-

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than 18 July 2014.