

AGENDA ITEM 2**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL****CABINET****22nd OCTOBER, 2015****IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN FERNDALE****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to outline proposals that seek to close Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to the nearby Darran Park 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 following proposal; -

To close Ferndale Infants School and transfer its pupils, and education provision to Darran Park Primary School.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Rhondda Cynon Taf has 105 schools for pupils in the primary age range. Currently, there are 91 all age primary schools, 1 nursery school, 8 infant schools (ages 3 or 4-7) and 5 junior schools (ages 8-11).
- 3.2. The Council seeks to minimise transitions between schools amalgamating separate infant and junior schools through a phased approach, and also closing small schools, incorporating them in to larger more educationally and financially viable primary schools. The schools amalgamated or closed since 2012 include primary, infant, junior and some nursery schools in Abercynon, Cwmbach, Ynysboeth, Glanffrwd, Glantaf, Aberllechau and Rhiwgarn. Pentre Primary School was the most recent closure, closing on 31st August 2015.
- 3.3. The Estyn Inspection of the Council in 2012, recommended that the Council should:-
 - ***“Raise education standards in all schools; and***
 - ***Reduce surplus places.”***

3.4. The following proposal seeks to address these recommendations.

4 THE CREATION OF A LARGER, MORE VIABLE PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR FERNDALE

4.1 The basis for this proposal and the educational rationale behind it is fully outlined and explained in the consultation document that is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. If Members give authorisation to commence statutory consultation on this proposal, this document will be widely circulated to all prescribed consultees as advised by the relevant legislation.

4.2 Ferndale Infants' School is a Community School located at North Road, Ferndale and the school site consists of a modern style building, constructed in 1985. The school is located just 0.4 miles from Darran Park Primary School, this is also the school that the pupils of Ferndale Infants ordinarily transfer to for their education at Key Stage 2 (Juniors).

4.3 Darran Park Primary School is a Community Primary School located at Brook Street, Ferndale. The school site consists of a brick building originally constructed in the 1940's as a grammar school, which was extensively refurbished and remodelled in 1996 to create a Primary school, following the closure of Ferndale Junior School. The total sum invested 20 years ago amounted to over £1million.

4.4 In summary, the proposal seeks to invest a further £400K in remodelling and improving the site and building of Darran Park Primary School, to create a larger, more viable Community Primary School for this area. The funding to enable this will come from within existing Education capital budgets.

4.5 No decisions have yet been taken in relation to the future of the Ferndale Infants' School building should these proposals be agreed. However, given the age and good condition of this building, an alternative educational use for it will be considered in the first instance.

5. TIMESCALE, CONSULTATION AND THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING

5.1 The process for closing schools is set out in the Welsh Government statutory code document 006/2013 – the School Organisation Code. The Code sets out the policy context and general principles for reviewing the supply of school places and sets out the factors that need to be taken into account by those bringing forward proposals. It also outlines the format of the consultation process and identifies the key stakeholders that must be consulted.

5.2 The initial consultation of the closure proposal for Ferndale Infants will involve all key stakeholders as outlined in the Code. This consultation will take place over a 8 week period and the proposed timetable for the whole process is as follows:

- Consultation period 2nd November 2015 to 31st December 2015
- Report back to Cabinet on consultation – January 2016

- Statutory Notices published (if approved by Cabinet) for a 28 day period – February 2016
- Report back to Cabinet on outcome of statutory notice period and details of objections received, with an appropriate recommendation – March 2016

The School Organisation Code now makes provision for local authorities to determine their own statutory proposals.

- 5.4 The proposal will be for Ferndale Infants' School to close on 31st August 2016, with pupils transferring to Darran Park Primary, subject to parental preference on 1st September 2016. Work to improve Darran Park and ensure that it has sufficient capacity to comfortably accommodate all children, resident within its catchment area both now and in future years will be undertaken prior to this date.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Council considers that there are considerable benefits to be gained from creating larger, more financially viable Primary schools, which minimises the transition between schools. The experience of educational authorities and schools across the UK is that such 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.
- 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.



APPENDIX 1

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF FERNDALE INFANTS' SCHOOL, WITH THE TRANSFER OF ITS PUPILS TO DARRAN PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL, FROM 1ST SEPTEMBER 2016.

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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 Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School. Work to remodel Darran Park and improve its accommodation will be required prior to any transfer of pupils taking place.

It is proposed that Darran Park Primary school shall have a total capacity of at least 360 places after remodelling work is completed, which includes Nursery provision. It will have an admission number of 45 per year group and the same number of Nursery places (45) will be available. Additional Nursery pupils can be accommodated by utilising spare capacity from within the school, if required. The age range of pupils to be admitted will be unchanged, i.e. 3 – 11 years and the school will remain an English Medium Community Primary School. The admission of pupils will be managed by the local authority; on implementation of the proposals it is intended that all pupils attending Ferndale Infants' shall automatically transfer to Darran Park Primary school, subject to parental preference.

The designated local authority (LA) class for pupils with special educational needs, which caters for pupils at Foundation Phase with complex learning difficulties currently based at Darran Park Primary School will remain at the school following the transfer of pupils from Ferndale Infants'.

Who will we consult with?

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

- The Governing Bodies of Ferndale Infants' and Darran Park Primary Schools
- Pupils of Ferndale Infants' and Darran Park Primary Schools
- Parents, carers, guardians, and staff members of Ferndale Infants' and Darran Park Primary Schools
- Other governing bodies of neighbouring primary schools
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan Authorities
- Welsh Minister for Education & Skills
- Assembly Members for the Rhondda Cynon Taf constituencies and regional Assembly Members for the area
- Members of Parliament for the Rhondda Cynon Taf constituencies
- Estyn
- 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
- Cwm Taf Local Health Board
- The Early Years and Childcare Partnership

What will the consultation process entail?

The consultation will start on the 2nd November 2015 and will be completed at 5pm on 31st December 2015. The feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a report presented to the Council's Cabinet in January 2016. 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 decide, 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 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, 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 September 2016.

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 Ferndale. 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 Ferndale Infants' School and transfer its pupils to Darran Park Primary School. The existing school building of Darran Park Primary will be remodelled with additional capacity provided, refurbished and improved to benefit all of the pupils who will attend.

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
Ferndale Infants' School	Governors and Staff Meeting	xxxx November 2015, 4 – 6pm	Ferndale Infants' School
Darran Park Primary School	Governors and Staff Meeting	Xxxx November 2015, 4 – 6 pm	Darran Park Primary School
Ferndale Infants' School	School Council	(date as above) 2.30 – 3.00 pm	Ferndale Infants' School
Darran Park Primary School	School Council	(date as above), 2.30 – 3.00 pm	Darran Park Primary School
Both Schools and members of the local community	Parents and public drop in session and exhibition	xxxx December 2015, 4 – 6pm	Darran Park Primary School

A consultation questionnaire is attached, it will also be available at the drop-in session detailed above and on the Council's internet site at <http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/en/councildemocracy/consultations/currentconsultation/schoolsconsultations/schoolconsultations.aspx>

The questionnaire also enables consultees to register their wish to be notified of the publication of the consultation report to the Council's Cabinet.

You are also welcome to put your views, or any questions you may have on the proposals 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 Thursday, 31st December 2015.**

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 provided 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 – Ferndale Infants' School

Ferndale Infants' School (Ferndale Infants') is a Community School located at North Road, Ferndale and the school site consists of a modern style building, constructed in 1985. The Council has invested £11K of capital investment and £40K on general maintenance in this school since 2009. Based on the results of the Welsh Government commissioned building survey of all schools Ferndale Infants' is graded a B for condition and a B for suitability, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building respectively. This means that the building condition overall is satisfactory, but is identifying minor remedial works.

As this is a consultation process, no decisions have yet been made in respect of this proposal, including any future use of the Infants' school building. However, if the proposal is eventually agreed, we will actively seek an alternative educational use for the building in the first instance, prior to any consideration of disposal of it.

The pupil numbers in Ferndale Infants' over the past five years are shown below and are obtained from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) which must be undertaken 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.

Ferndale Infants' School					
No on roll in January	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total statutory aged pupils	56	54	47	39	40
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	24	17	22	25	21

Over the next five years the pupil forecasts for Ferndale Infants', which are calculated in accordance with guidance issued by Welsh Government, are as follows:

Ferndale Infants' School										
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2015 (Actual)	(2015 % surplus places)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% surplus places in 2020	
Statutory aged pupils	75	40	(46.6%)	35	38	36	36	34	54.67%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	24	21		23	21	21	19	18		

Ferndale Infants' School was inspected by Estyn in November 2011 and the school's current performance was deemed good, with its prospects for improvement also good.

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

- R1** Ensure that more able pupils' extended writing skills are developed appropriately
- R2** further strengthen the links between the school's monitoring procedures and its self-evaluation
- R3** provide better opportunities for parents to contribute to the self-evaluation arrangements.

Since September 2012, the Council's School Improvement Services have been provided by the Central South Consortium, a regional school improvement service 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, in the current categorisation (2014 data):

"Ferndale Infants' is currently classed as an 'Amber' school within the National School Improvement and Categorisation Matrix (Green, Yellow, Amber, Red). This is because of the inconsistent performance of pupils when compared to similar schools."

The tables below set out the performance of Ferndale Infants' 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 in receipt of free school meals (all pupils) is 38.6%.

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

	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile*	2014	2014 Benchmark Quartile*	2015	2015 Benchmark Quartile*
Foundation Phase Indicator	77.8	2	72.7	3	80.0	3
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	94.4	2	81.8	4	100	1
Language literacy and communication skills English	77.8	3	81.8	3	86.7	2
Mathematical development	94.4	1	81.8	3	86.7	2

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

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

	2013 %	2013 Benchmark Quartile	2014 %	2014 Benchmark Quartile	2015 %	2015 Benchmark Quartile
% attendance	92.9	2	93.0	4	94.5	N/A published December

Information on the Schools – Darran Park Primary School

Darran Park Primary School (Darran Park) is a Community Primary School located at Brook Street, Ferndale, just 0.4 miles from Ferndale Infants'. The school site consists of a brick building originally constructed in the 1940's as a grammar school, which was extensively refurbished and remodelled in 1996 to create a Primary school. The Council has invested £313K of capital investment in this school since 2009, including replacement roofing, new energy efficient lighting, upgrades to classrooms and refurbishment of pupil toilets. The Council will continue with this programme of investment in forthcoming years, to ensure that the building is maintained to a good standard. Based on the results of the Welsh Government commissioned building survey of all schools Darran Park is graded a B for condition and a B for suitability, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building respectively.

The pupil numbers in Darran Park over the past five years are shown below and are obtained from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) which must be undertaken in January each year.

Darran Park Primary School					
No on roll in January	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total statutory aged pupils*	249	252	271	262	247

* Excludes the LA SEN class

Over the next five years the pupil forecasts (excluding the LA SEN class) for Darran Park, which are calculated in accordance with guidance issued by Welsh Government, are as follows:

Darran Park Primary School								
Capacity of the School	2015 (Actual)	(% surplus places 2015)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% surplus places in 2020
315	247	(21.5%)	256	251	243	246	233	26%
Pre-nursery and nursery pupils	40		42	38	37	36	33	

The following table depicts the capacity and numbers on roll at Darran Park in future years should these proposals proceed:

Darran Park Primary School incorporating Ferndale Infants' pupils								
Capacity of the School (proposed)	2015 (Actual)	(% surplus places 2015)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% surplus places in 2020
315	287	(8.8%)	291	289	279	282	267	15.2%
Pre-nursery and nursery pupils	61		65	59	58	55	51	

Darran Park Primary School was inspected by Estyn in February 2011. The school's current performance was deemed to be good, and its prospects for improvement also good.

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

- R1** Raise standards in English and mathematics by building on recent improvements, so that end of key stage results reflect pupils' achievements
- R2** Continue to develop staff areas of expertise, team work and distributed management arrangements
- R3** Enhance the provision for information communications technology (ICT), so that pupils in all classes have immediate access to computers as an integral part of their learning.

Since September 2012, the Council's School Improvement Services have been provided by the Central South Consortium, a regional school improvement service 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, in the current categorisation (2014 data):

"Darran Park is currently classed as a 'Yellow' school within the National School Improvement and Categorisation Matrix (Green, Yellow, Amber, Red). This is because the school has many strengths, with evidence of self improvement activities which have had an impact on improved outcomes for pupils. Self evaluation is robust and evaluative and identifies the appropriate areas for development'.

The tables that follow set out the performance of Darran Park 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 22.5%.

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

	2013	2013 Benchmark Quartile*	2014	2014 Benchmark Quartile*	2015	2015 Benchmark Quartile*
Foundation Phase Indicator	77.4	3	72.7	4	78.4	4
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	83.9	4	86.4	4	91.9	4
Language literacy and communication skills English	77.4	4	77.3	4	83.8	4
Mathematical development	83.9	3	81.8	4	86.5	4

* - benchmark quartiles – 1 being the highest, 4 the lowest. This data includes the performance of the pupils in the LA designated SEN class, who are placed in this school by the LA and do not necessarily live in the catchment area.

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

	2013 %	2013 Benchmark Quartile	2014 %	2014 Benchmark Quartile	2015 %	2015 Benchmark Quartile
Core Subject Indicator	81.8	3	90.9	1	91.7	2
English	81.8	4	90.9	2	94.4	2
Maths	86.4	3	92.7	1	94.4	2
Science	84.1	4	90.9	2	91.7	3

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

	2013 %	2013 Benchmark Quartile	2014 %	2014 Benchmark Quartile	2015 %	2015 Benchmark Quartile
% attendance	93.3	3	94.3	2	95.2	N/A published December

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.

Rhondda Cynon Taf's education services was inspected by Estyn in March 2012, at which time the following recommendations were made :

- **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 three years 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.

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 of statutory school age;
- 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.

Ferndale Infants' and Darran Park have been assessed against the aforementioned criteria:

- The schools are 'paired' with each other, i.e. the children usually progress from the one to the other;
- The schools are located on sites that are in close proximity to each other;
- Darran Park has a current (January 2015) surplus places level of 21%; however, the comparable figure at Ferndale Infants' is 46%;
- Both schools have mixed aged classes;
- Pupil attendance has been mixed over the past 4 years when compared to similar schools in Wales, although Darran Park is now showing some improvement.

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

What is the educational case for closing Ferndale Infants' and creating a larger 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 Primary school for the communities of Ferndale and Blaenllechau will:

- **Improve educational outcomes;**
 - Create a Foundation Phase department 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 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 standards of teaching and learning, which otherwise would not have been available;
- **Improve leadership and management;**
 - Provides the opportunity for the Headteacher 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;
 - An increased range of expertise;
 - Improved opportunities for staff interaction /co-ordination.

It is proposed that Darran Park will be remodelled and its teaching accommodation improved, to ensure that there are sufficient school places for children resident in its catchment area both at the present time and in the future. The school building will therefore be further refurbished , together with provision of improved outdoor learning and play spaces for pupils. This will entail remodelling of the existing playgrounds for creative play and the utilisation of the 'all weather' pitch in the adjacent public park (also called Darran Park) which is directly adjacent to the school, sharing a boundary wall and fence. Additional footpaths, fencing and gates will be installed to ensure the school has direct and secure access to the park from the school grounds.

A larger Primary School for Ferndale will be able to provide greater flexibility and opportunity for pupils due to an extended, more enhanced and secure financial situation. Overall, the single, larger Primary School will be more financially viable than the Infants' and Primary schools in their current form.

What will this Proposal mean for the school pupils?

In making the proposed change, most things will not change for the children at all; indeed, there are several perceived benefits that can be realised:

- Some may have a longer or a different route to school;

- 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;
- The teachers and teaching assistants may be different, however, a number of the teachers and teaching assistants should, with the agreement of the Darran Park 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 engage in a wider range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- Transition between the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 will be 'seamless' in a Primary School
- Pupils will not have to physically transfer schools at the end of Year 2

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.

The catchment area of Darran Park will not change, as it currently incorporates that of Ferndale Infants'; the two schools have the same catchment area. The Council's policy regarding free school transport, will continue to apply. Pupils currently resident within the catchment area of these schools do not qualify for free transport at present on distance criteria as the distances from home to school are less than the 2 miles this Council now provides transport at. Transport is however provided from the village of Blaenllechau due to the walking route not being considered to be available. This provision will continue, but will be subject to regular review.

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 Ferndale and Blaenllechau 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 Darran Park would determine any changes.

As this is not creating a new school provision, the senior management and governing body of Darran Park 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 Ferndale Infants', 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.

What will be the likely impact of the Proposal on the communities of Ferndale and Blaenllechau?

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. The overall effect of the proposals is considered to be neutral. A copy of the community impact assessment and equalities impact assessment are available from the contact details at the start of this document and are also available on the Council website using the link provided on page 5 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 Darran Park's Governing Body, a summary of the known budgetary impacts is set out overleaf.

	Ferndale Infants' (Current)	Darran Park Primary (Current)	Darran Park Primary (Future)	Revenue Savings
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Annual Revenue Budget based on 2015/16 budget	281	916	1,054	143

Building improvements will be made to both current school buildings and sites to address the maintenance backlog and improve the accommodation and facilities at Darran Park Primary School. It is estimated that the total cost of this work will be in the region of £400K, and will be funded by the Council from within existing resources.

There may be redundancy costs associated with these proposals, which are not possible to quantify at the current time. This Council has had a successful track record in the past of minimising the need for compulsory redundancies, by offering alternative placements for displaced staff at other schools in the County Borough, under a formal arrangement it has between its' schools. No redundancy costs have therefore been identified, but in the event of staff choosing this option, all such costs will be met centrally by the LA.

What are the disadvantages of this proposal?

Some parents may feel that 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. Darran Park Primary School after the closure of Ferndale Infants' will still only be the size of slightly above average Rhondda Cynon Taf primary school, with just under 290 statutory age pupils in attendance and there are many much larger, very successful primary schools in the County Borough.

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 temporary 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.

The Council does not consider that there are any specific risks associated with the implementation of this proposal and has not, therefore, considered any measures to manage or mitigate such risks.

What alternative options have been considered other than the closure of Ferndale Infants' School?

The current position is that we have a small Infants' school with pupils' transferring into a Primary School (with its own Infant Department) that is just 0.4 miles away, 103 surplus places between the two schools, relatively low levels of attendance in the Infants' school and Ferndale Infants' in an 'Amber' category for support purposes.

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

- Close Ferndale Infants' School and transfer the pupils to Darran Park Primary School – the proposal;
- Close both schools and create 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.

At present, we do not have an alternative suitable site to build a brand new school for the Ferndale ward.

In respect of the option to federate the governing bodies, this would create a two -site school under one Headteacher and one governing body. Two separate legal entities would continue employing two sets of staff. This option would not enable the educational benefits that accrue from deploying the teachers across both schools and improving the standards of teaching and learning that arise from creating a single school. Both schools would still be subjected to separate inspections by Estyn also.

Therefore, the other 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 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 26 weeks 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. If objections are received, the Council **must** publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them before the end of 7 days beginning with the day of its determination;
7. The Council's Cabinet must decide to issue its decision on the proposal within 16 weeks of the end of the objection period;
8. If the proposals receive approval 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@rctednet.net

The Proposal

The proposal is to close Ferndale Infants' and transfer all the pupils to Darran Park Primary School. It is proposed that the school would close on 31 August 2016 with the pupils transferring to Darran Park on 1 September 2016.

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 (eg parent of a pupil at named school, governor at named school etc.)

4. Name (optional)

5. Please provide contact details if you wish to be notified of publication of the consultation report

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than 31st December 2015.