

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JUNE, 2014

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG
LEARNING**

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IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN TREBANOG

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise Members of the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of a proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants School, and transfer pupils to Cymmer Infants School, subject to parental preference in January, 2015.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:-

- 2.1 Note the information contained within the attached consultation report, which includes details of items of correspondence received during the consultation exercise and notes of the various meetings held.
- 2.2 Consider the contents of the attached Consultation Report and to agree to its immediate publication as required by Welsh Government;
- 2.3 Agree to progress the proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants School to the next stage of the review process by issuing an appropriate statutory notice.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will recall that, at the meeting of Cabinet held on 19th April 2014, approval was given to begin a process of formal consultation on a proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants School, and transfer education provision to Cymmer Infants School, in January 2015.

- 3.2 This is the first consultation process in respect of a school closure proposal undertaken under the new arrangements outlined in the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code, which came into force on 1st October 2013. These new arrangements stipulate that a Consultation Report must be prepared prior to the publication of any statutory notices which will progress the proposal. It further states that this Report must be published within 13 weeks of the end of the consultation period, which was 12th May 2014.
- 3.3 The Consultation Report prepared in respect of this particular proposal is attached at Appendix A for your attention. It contains information in respect of meetings held to discuss the proposal, with copies of the detailed notes taken at these meetings. It also contains details of correspondence received together with the responses given to the points raised in this correspondence.
- 3.4 It must be noted that there has been an extremely limited response to this particular consultation process; only two items of correspondence were received (one of which was the views of Estyn on the proposal) and only 23 persons attended the open evening held to provide further information on 7th May 2014.
- 3.5 As required by Welsh Government, the Consultation Report at Appendix A **must** be published electronically, on the Council's website. In addition, hard copies **must** be available on request. This **must** take place before the proposal is published. Welsh Government specify that the following **must** be advised of the availability of the consultation report:
- Pupils, parents (and where possible prospective parents) carers and guardians, and staff members of schools which are subject to the proposals; and
 - Consultees who had requested notification.
- 3.6 The following **must** receive either a hard copy of the consultation report or be emailed a link to the Council's website:
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan Authority for the area in which any school likely to be affected is located;
 - Any other appropriate religious body for any school likely to be affected by the proposals;
 - The governing body of any school which is the subject of the proposals and of other schools likely to be affected by the proposals, including those that might receive any displaced pupils;
 - The Welsh Ministers;
 - Assembly Members (AMs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) representing the area served by/intended to be served by any school which is the subject of the proposals;
 - Estyn;

- Teaching and staff trade unions representing teachers and other staff at any school which is the subject of the proposals;
- Central South Regional Education Consortium;
- South East Wales Transport Authority;
- The Police and Crime Commissioner;
- The local Communities First Partnership;
- In the case of proposals affecting nursery provision, any independent providers who may be affected;
- The Children and Young People's Partnership and/or the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

4. THE STATUTORY PROCESS

4.1 If Members decide to progress to statutory notice, the statutory notice for this proposal will:

- refer to the Closure of Rhiwgarn Infants School, and transfer of the pupils and educational provision to Cymmer Infants School, subject to parental preference;
- be published on 5th September 2014 and will allow for a 28 day period for objections, ending on 3rd October 2014. If any objections are received, in accordance with the new Code an Objection Report will be prepared. This matter will then be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet, probably in October 2014 for Members to receive and consider the Objection Report and to make a final decision on this proposal.

5. SUMMARY

Members are asked to consider the contents of the attached Consultation Report, to agree to its immediate publication and to give officers approval to publish an appropriate Statutory Notice to progress this proposal.

APPENDIX A TO THE CABINET REPORT

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CONSULTATION REPORT

PROPOSAL: TO CLOSE RHIWGARN INFANTS' SCHOOL, WITH ALL PUPILS TRANSFERRING TO CYMMER INFANTS' SCHOOL ON 1ST JANUARY, 2015

1. Purpose of the Consultation Report

This report is prepared in accordance with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code, statutory document 006/2013. Its purpose is to inform the outcome of the consultation held during the period 31st March 2014 to 12th May 2014 between all stakeholders and interested parties listed below.

2. Who did we consult with?

A copy of a consultation document which fully outlined and explained the Council's proposal was sent to the following stakeholders. The document was also published on the Council website at www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

- The Governing Bodies of Rhiwgarn Infants' School, Cymmer Infants' School and Cymmer Junior School
- Pupils of Rhiwgarn Infants' School
- Pupils of Cymmer Infants' School
- Parents, carers, guardians, and staff members of Rhiwgarn Infants' School and Cymmer Infants' School
- Other governing bodies of neighbouring primary schools
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan Authorities
- Welsh Minister for Education & Skills
- Member of Parliament for the Rhondda
- 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
- Assembly Member for the Rhondda and regional Assembly Members for the area

Copies were also sent to all local authorities that share a boundary with Rhondda Cynon Taf.

3. The Proposal

The proposal consulted upon is to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School and transfer all the pupils to Cymmer Infants' School. The existing school buildings at Cymmer Infants' School would be remodelled and improved to accommodate the additional pupils. It is proposed that Rhiwgarn Infants' School would close on 31 December 2014 with the pupils transferring to Cymmer Infants' School on 1 January 2015.

If this proposal proceeds, the longer term plan, when sufficient capital resources are available, is to create a new school for the Cymmer ward, incorporating Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools. A separate consultation would be carried out in the future, with the remaining schools, if sufficient capital funding becomes available.

Details of the proposal and the rationale behind it are fully outlined in the consultation document that was circulated to all the stakeholders listed overleaf which is attached as Appendix 1.

4. The Consultation Process

All stakeholders identified in Section 2 overleaf were sent paper copies of our consultation documentation. The following meetings were also convened. Detailed notes of all of the above meetings were taken and are attached in the respective Appendix. These notes detail all questions raised, comments and statements made with responses provided where appropriate.

- Monday 7th April, 2pm – School Council, Rhiwgarn Infants' School – Appendix 2;
- Monday 7th April, 4pm – Staff and Governing Body, Rhiwgarn Infants' School – Appendix 3;
- Tuesday 8th April, 2pm – School Council, Cymmer Infants' School – Appendix 4;
- Tuesday 8th April 4pm – Staff and Governing Body, Cymmer Infants' School – Appendix 5.

An open evening/exhibition was held at Cymmer Infants' School on 7th May 2014, the purpose of which was to provide further information on the proposal, answer any questions and give parents in particular the opportunity to view the facilities available for their children at the recommended receiving school. Officers from Education and Lifelong Learning and Early Years and Childcare were in attendance. This event was attended by 23 persons, which included school staff, governors, parents and members of the local community.

5. Summary of Responses to Consultation

Responses to the matters raised at the meetings outlined above are, as indicated, summarised in the notes of the meetings attached as Appendices 2 to 5.

Other than a response to the proposal from Estyn, we have received only one questionnaire response, and a summary of the points raised by the individual, together with our responses to these issues are as follows:

- **Short notice given of consultation and not enough communication from school or PTA.**

Response – this consultation has been conducted strictly in accordance with guidance published in the Welsh Government’s School Organisation Code and all statutory requirements, including the length of the consultation period have been met. Both schools distributed the consultation document to all parents and carers on the day they were delivered, which was the first day of the consultation period, namely 31 March 2014. The PTA has no formal part to play in this process although they are more than welcome to respond to the consultation if they wish.

- **Transport should be provided due to the age of the children concerned.**

Response – A full assessment of the walking route has been undertaken by our Highways Division using nationally recognised criteria published by Road Safety GB. This assessment has shown that the walking route between Trebanog and Cymmer does not meet the criteria to be classified as dangerous. The route also does not meet the distance criteria for transport provision to be considered either.

The View of Estyn (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales) of the Overall Merits of the Proposal.

Estyn has responded to the consultation and a full copy of their response is set out in Appendix 6. The summary of Estyn’s response is set out below:

“This report has been prepared by Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn.

However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer. The consultation proposal is from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Summary/ Conclusion

- *Are the proposals likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area?*

It is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the current standards of education in the area and in all probability improve the standards".

6. Conclusion

The consultation has not raised any issues that should defer this proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School and transfer the pupils to Cymmer Infants' School.

The recommendation to be considered at a meeting of the Council's Cabinet to be held on 23rd June 2014 is that a statutory notice be published, to progress this proposal. If this is agreed by Cabinet, the statutory notice will be published on Friday, 5th September 2014 and it will allow for a 28 day period (ending at 5pm on Friday, 3rd October 2014) during which any person may lodge an objection to the proposals.

At the end of the objection period, an Objection Report will be compiled, summarising any objections received, this Report will be published within 28 days of the end of the objection period detailed above. The outcome of this part of the process will be considered by Cabinet again at their meeting to be held in October 2014, for a final decision on the proposal to be made.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF
RHIWGARN INFANTS' SCHOOL WITH ALL THE PUPILS
TRANSFERRING ON 1 JANUARY 2015
TO CYMMER INFANTS' 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 Rhiwgarn Infants' School and transfer all the pupils to Cymmer Infants' School. The existing school buildings at Cymmer Infants' School would be remodelled and improved to accommodate the additional pupils. It is proposed that Rhiwgarn Infants' School would close on 31 December 2014 with the pupils transferring to the new school on 1 January 2015.

If this proposal proceeds, the longer term plan, when sufficient capital resources are available, is to create a new school for the Cymmer ward, incorporating Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools. A separate consultation would be carried out in the future, with the remaining schools, if sufficient capital funding becomes available.

Who will we consult with?

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

- The Governing Bodies of Rhiwgarn Infants' School, Cymmer Infants' School and Cymmer Junior School
- Pupils of Rhiwgarn Infants' School
- Parents, carers, guardians, and staff members of Rhiwgarn Infants' School and Cymmer Infants' 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
- 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 31 March 2014 and will be completed at 5pm on 12 May 2014. The feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a report presented to the Council's Cabinet in June 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 Trebanog. 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 Rhiwgarn Infants' School and the transfer of its provision, pupils and staff to Cymmer Infants' School. The existing school buildings at Cymmer Infants' School would be remodelled and improved to accommodate the additional pupils.

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
Rhiwgarn School	Infants'	Governors and Staff Meeting	7th April 2014, 4 – 6pm	Rhiwgarn Infants' School
Cymmer School	Infants'	Governors and Staff Meeting	8th April 2014, 4 – 6pm	Cymmer Infants' School
Rhiwgarn School	Infants'	School Council	7th April 2014, 2 – 3pm	Rhiwgarn Infants' School
Cymmer School	Infants'	School Council	8 th April 2014, 2 – 3pm	Cymmer Infants' School
Both Schools and members of the local community		Parents and public drop in session and exhibition	7th May 2014, 4 – 6pm	Cymmer Infants' 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 www.rctcbc.gov.uk

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 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 Monday 12 May 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 – Rhiwgarn Infants’ School

Rhiwgarn Infants’ School (“Rhiwgarn”) is a Community School located at Waun Wen, Trebanog, Porth, 0.8 of just one mile from Cymmer Infants’ School. It consists of two CLASP buildings constructed in 1965. Over the last few years the Council has invested £140K of capital investment in this school, including refurbishment to pupil toilets, replacement windows and doors, improvement to foundation area classrooms. Based on the results of the Welsh Government commissioned building survey of all schools, Rhiwgarn is graded B for suitability and B for sufficiency, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building respectively.

However the backlog maintenance figure is still £335K and this does not include costs of improvements to meet the 21st Century School criteria.

The pupil numbers in Rhiwgarn 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.

Rhiwgarn Infants’ School					
No on roll in January	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total statutory aged Pupils	39	29	35	38	35
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	20	19	20	14	17

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

Rhiwgarn Infants' School								
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2013 (Actual)	2014 (Actual)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018
Statutory aged pupils	72	38	35	33	32	35	36	50.00%
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	-	14	17	18	18	18	18	-

Rhiwgarn Infants' School was inspected in March 2011. Estyn judged the school's current performance to be Good and the school's prospects for improvement to be Adequate. As a result Rhiwgarn was placed in an Estyn Monitoring Category.

Estyn reported that the current performance of the school is good because:

- many pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points during their time at the school;
- the curriculum provides an appropriate variety of learning opportunities which meet the needs of most pupils well;
- the school is welcoming and friendly to all pupils and visitors; and
- successful partnerships with the community provide valuable experiences for pupils that the school alone could not provide.

Prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- the headteacher has a sound understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school and has a clear vision for its future; and
- standards and provision have improved in recent years as a result of a few specific improvements which the headteacher has led.

However:

- roles and responsibilities are not clear enough or shared appropriately among teaching and support staff; and
- self-evaluation does not involve all staff in assessing outcomes and does not take enough account of the views of staff, governors, parents/carers and other stakeholders.

In order to improve further, Rhiwgarn needs to:

R1 - improve pupils' social and life skills, particularly independent learning and thinking skills;

R2 - make sure pupils arrive in good time to begin the school day;

R3 - ensure that the quality of teaching and support is consistently good or better;

R4 - improve the accuracy and consistency of assessment;

R5 - have clear and appropriate job descriptions for teaching and support staff;

R6 - set targets for school improvement and performance management that link closely to raising pupils' standards; and

R7 - ensure that self evaluation involves all staff and takes full account of the views of all stakeholders.

Estyn completed its monitoring visit in July 2012 after focusing on the key issues identified in the 2011 inspection. The Inspector determined that Rhiwgarn had not made enough progress in the key areas for action identified in the inspection of the school in May 2011. As a result, Estyn determined that the school was in need of Significant Improvement.

In September 2013, Estyn revisited the school and the inspectors determined that the school had again made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations identified in the 2011 inspection and that the school was in need of Special Measures.

The Governing Body and the Council are ensuring the necessary actions are being taken to improve the standards of education within Rhiwgarn as a matter of urgency.

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:

"Rhiwgarn Infants' is currently in Category D within the Central South Consortium's system of categorisation of effectiveness (A-D). This is because the School is in Special Measures."

The tables below set out the performance of Rhiwgarn 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 66.2%.

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	66.67%	3	27.27%	4
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	88.89%	2	27.27%	4
Language literacy and communication skills English	77.78%	2	45.45%	4
Mathematical development	88.89%	1	45.45%	4

* - 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

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013 (Provisional)
% attendance	88.87%	4	93.68%	1	90.55%

Information on the Schools – Cymmer Infants' School

Cymmer Infants' School (Cymmer Infants') is a Community School located at Graigwen Road, Cymmer, Porth, to the rear of Cymmer Junior School and the school site consists of a traditional Victorian building, constructed in 1914. The Council has invested £125K of capital investment in this school since 2009, including refurbishment to pupil toilets, disabled toilet, replacement windows and doors, improvement to foundation area classrooms and rebuilding of the retaining walls. However the backlog maintenance figure is still £324K 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 Cymmer Infants is graded a B for suitability and a B for sufficiency, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building respectively.

The pupil numbers in Cymmer Infants' 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. 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.

Cymmer Infants' School					
No on roll in January	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total statutory aged pupils	65	69	62	71	61
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	27	28	39	33	42

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

Cymmer Infants' School								
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2013 (Actual)	2014 (Actual)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018
Statutory aged pupils	95	71	61	77	74	78	80	15.8%
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	-	33	42	36	37	35	35	-

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

Cymmer Infants School								
Projected No on roll in January	Capacity of the School	2014 (Actual)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018	
Statutory aged pupils	125	96	105	109	109	114	8.9%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	-	59	54	55	53	53	-	

To accommodate the additional pupils from Rhiwgarn, Cymmer Infants' will be remodelled and additional classroom space built onto the existing building to increase the capacity by up to 60 pupils. The improvements to Cymmer Infants' are estimated to cost £250K and will be met out of existing Council capital resources. The work to provide the additional accommodation will be undertaken before any transfer of pupils occurs.

Cymmer Infants' School was inspected by Estyn in October 2008 under the old Inspection Framework, which has subsequently changed. Cymmer Infants' School was inspected against seven key questions and received one grade 1 and six grade 2s, where grade 1 is the highest grade and grade 5 the lowest.

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

- R1** Work in conjunction with parents to improve the attendance of pupils
- R2** Continue to develop strategies to improve pupils' bilingual skills and confidence to use incidental Welsh on a regular basis; and
- R3** Continue to develop pupils' involvement in their own learning so they clearly understand what they have to do in order to improve their work. develop further the assessment and tracking of pupil's progress.

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:

"Cymmer Infants' is currently in Category B within the Central South Consortium's system of categorisation of effectiveness (A-D). This is because: attainment continues on an upward trajectory, teaching is good and leadership is having a positive impact on standards and provision."

The tables below set out the performance of Cymmer 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 with free school meals is 42.1%.

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	85.71%	1	83.33%	1
Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity	90.48%	2	91.67%	2
Language literacy and communication skills English	85.71%	1	83.33%	1
Mathematical development	85.71%	2	87.50%	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

	2011	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013 (Provisional)
% attendance	91.33%	3	92.23%	3	92.36%

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. Rhiwgarth Infants’ School is such a school.

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.

Rhiwgarn has been assessed against the aforementioned criteria:

- Rhiwgarn has surplus places in excess of 25%;
- Rhiwgarn and Cymmer Infants' are "small" schools with less than 90 pupils of statutory school age;
- Between the two schools there is a maintenance backlog of £659K, which equates to £6,045 per pupil;
- Rhiwgarn has mixed aged classes;
- The educational performance of Rhiwgarn is in the fourth quartile when compared to similar schools in Wales;
- Pupil attendance at Rhiwgarn and Cymmer Infants' has consistently been in the third and fourth quartiles when compared to similar schools in Wales. Rhiwgarn's pupil attendance improved in 2012 but significantly decreased in 2013;
- Rhiwgarn is judged by Estyn to be "a school in Special Measures" and therefore a school causing serious educational concerns.

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

What is the educational case for closing Rhiwgarn Infants' and transferring the pupils to Cymmer Infants' 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 infants' school for the communities of Cymmer and Trebanog 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.

There is sufficient space at Cymmer Infants' School, with some remodeling of the existing accommodation and building a small extension, to accommodate all the pupils of Rhiwgarn and encompass the catchment area of Trebanog. Cymmer Infants' will be able 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 Cymmer Infants' School will be more financially viable than the two infants' schools in their current form.

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, Cymmer Infants' will have greater than 90 pupils of statutory school age which will equate to 4 teachers for 3 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.

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 Rhiwgarn, 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;
- 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 Cymmer Infants' 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.

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 Rhiwgarn that live in Trebanog, who opt to attend Cymmer Infants', 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 Cymmer Infants' will be within 1.5 miles of this school. The Council has assessed the safety of the route between Trebanog and Cymmer Infants' and consider it to be a safe route to school.

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 Cymmer and Trebanog 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 Cymmer Infants' School would determine any changes.

As this is not creating a new school provision, the senior management and governing body of Cymmer Infants' 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 Rhiwgarn 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 Trebanog?

The Cymmer ward is a Communities First Area and is part of the new Porth Communities First region that has recently secured Communities Funding matched with Pupil Deprivation Grant funding to support educational improvement across the Porth cluster of schools. Trebanog is also a Flying Start Area.

Within Trebanog, the Waun Wen Community Centre, close to Rhiwgarn Infants', 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 Rhiwgarn Infants' School. If the proposal proceeds, it is proposed that the English medium Flying Start provision is retained at the site at Rhiwgarn Infants' but that only one of the two school buildings remain.

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 Cymmer Infants' School Governing Body, a summary of the known budgetary impacts is set out overleaf.

	Rhiwgarn Infants' (Current)	Cymmer Infants' (Current)	Cymmer Infants' (Future)	Revenue Savings
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Annual Revenue Budget based on 2013/14 budget	£267K	£434K	£657K	£44K

Building improvements will be made to Cymmer Infants' School to address the maintenance backlog and increase the available accommodation at the School. It is estimated that the total cost of this work will be in the region of £250K, and will be funded as a rolling programme of investment from within existing capital resources.

What are the disadvantages of this proposal?

Increasing the intake into Cymmer Infants' School and closing Rhiwgarn Infants' 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. Cymmer Infants' School after the transfer will be the size of an average infants' department of an average Rhondda Cynon Taf primary school, 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 Cymmer Infants' 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 Trebanog pupils to go to school.

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

The current position is that we have two small schools a mile apart, 71 surplus places between the two schools, low levels of attendance in both schools and educational standards very low in Rhiwgarn Infants' School as evidenced by Estyn placing the school in Special Measures.

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

- Close Rhiwgarn Infants' School and transfer the pupils to Cymmer Infants' School – the proposal;
- Close both schools and create a new school on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools;
- Close both schools and Cymmer Junior School and create a new school on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools;
- Federate the two or three schools, maintaining the two or three school buildings but with one governing body and Headteacher.

At present, we do not have the capital resources to create a new infants' or primary school for the Cymmer ward and if the capital resources did become available, a new school would be a priority for the Council.

In respect of the option to federate the governing bodies, which would create a two or three -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 three sites to a high standard, as opposed to having to undertake costly work at two or three.

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 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. If objections are received, the Council **must** publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them within 28 days of the end of the objection period;
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@rctcbc.gov.uk

The Proposal

The proposal is to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School and transfer all the pupils to Cymmer Infants' School. It is proposed that Rhiwgarn Infants' School would close on 31 December 2014 with the pupils transferring to Cymmer Infants' 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 (eg 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 12 May 2014.

APPENDIX 2

Notes of a meeting held with members of the School Council of Rhiwgarn Infants' School, 7th April 2014.

Present: Mrs Sue Walker, Head of Primary Achievement
Mrs Julie Hadley, Head of School Organisation, Planning and Governance
Ms Beth Atkins, Acting Headteacher, Rhiwgarn Infants' School
Six pupils, members of the School Council (from Reception to Year 2)

Mrs Walker explained why this meeting had been arranged, which was to talk with the children about the possible closure of the school and to ask them how they felt about this. The children explained that they were aware of this, as the Chair of Governors had visited the school a few days ago and had told them about the plans.

Mrs Walker asked the children what they thought about the proposal. The children replied that they were worried about the school closing as they would miss their teachers. They were asked if any of them had older brothers or sisters at Cymmer – some said they had, but they had already left Cymmer Junior to attend Porth Comprehensive.

The children also said that they were worried about not having new friends – some would go to other schools in the area if Rhiwgarn closes, including Williamstown and Tonyrefail, but the majority said they would go to Cymmer Infants'. One child had cousins in Cymmer Infants'. One pupil was in Year 2 at Rhiwgarn, so she would be leaving to attend Cymmer Junior in September in any case.

The children were asked what they enjoyed most about attending Rhiwgarn Infants' – they all said they enjoyed doing maths and would miss this the most. It was explained that Cymmer Infants' has the same maths lessons available to the children as Rhiwgarn.

The children were asked whether they knew anyone, or had friends already attending Cymmer Infants' – most said that they had. They were asked if they were worried about anything else at all, they all replied that they were not.

The children were asked if they used computers a lot in school – they said they did and were reassured that this would continue in Cymmer Infants'. They were asked about their School Council meetings, what they usually discussed and how many children were on the Council – only the six present today.

The children were asked if they wanted to ask any questions at all about this proposal and to ask about whatever they wanted to know. One child asked why the school was closing – he was told there were many reasons, including the fact that it is very small. He also said he was going to miss his friends –he was assured that most of them would be transferring to Cymmer Infants' as well if this goes ahead.

Mrs Walker and Mrs Hadley thanked the children for coming to talk to them, and said that they would be remaining in the school - if anyone thought of any more questions they could come back and ask. The children also thanked the officers for coming to see them in their school.

Notes of a meeting held with the staff and Governing Body of Rhiwgarn Infants' School on 7th April 2014.

Present : Mr Chris Bradshaw, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
Mrs Sue Walker, Head of Primary Achievement
Miss Andrea Richards, Head of 21st Century Schools
Mrs Julie Hadley, Head of School Organisation, Planning and Governance
18 members of staff and governors.

Mr Bradshaw opened the meeting by introducing all of the officers present. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School, as detailed in the consultation document that had been widely circulated. He outlined the reasons that this proposal is being considered at this time, and went through the statutory process that is to be followed.

The meeting was then opened for any questions, comments or statements:

- Why is the opening evening for parents being held in Cymmer Infants'? Advised that this was to enable parents to look at the facilities available at that school and to view the plans/proposals for improvements.
- We request a parents meeting be held at Rhiwgarn. CB advised that this would be considered if there is sufficient interest in the proposal from the local community.
- Attendance is an issue now and we also have a breakfast club here. It will take longer to travel to Cymmer and attendance is likely to suffer. Advised that there are schools in similar socio-economic positions to this one, with similar distances to travel and attendance at these schools is good. Cymmer Infants' also has a breakfast club.
- Will a bus be provided? Advised no, as the distance between the schools is less than 1.5 miles and the route is not classed as dangerous. Travel to many areas in RCT involves the negotiation of steep hills, this area is no different.
- If nursery education becomes part time, parents with more than one child in different year groups may potentially have to make 4 journeys a day. Advised that the responsibility to take children to and from school lies with parents, so cannot comment further. This applies across RCT. Cymmer are considering providing either full time nursery provision or wrap around care in the afternoons.
- £335k needs to be spent on this school. How much will be needed if only Flying Start is to remain? Advised that this is not known at this stage, but the issue of outstanding maintenance is not the key reason for consideration of this proposal, the issues of educational standards and surplus places are far more important.
- Have impact assessments taken into account that Flying Start are remaining? Advised yes. Flying Start will have to meet all costs and could potentially close in the future. Advised that Flying Start is WG funded so the project could change in the future in any case. Flying Start are fully aware of all matters connected with this proposal and it also provides the opportunity for them to expand if necessary.
- Flying Start has not contributed at all towards the costs of running this school to date but are now going to take over the running of the whole site? Why is this the case? How much will it cost to keep the school open solely for Flying Start? Information was provided.
- CB reiterated that the main reasons for consideration of this proposal are the poor educational standards at Rhiwgarn and the surplus places. He advised that he considered that the children will access higher standards of provision at Cymmer Infants'. Rhiwgarn has 50% of its places surplus and we have an obligation to reduce this. RCT still has too many schools in this position.

- The best option to you would be to build a new school. It is a waste of time closing Rhiwgarn now, especially as it is improving. It would be better to wait until a new school can be built. The advantages of larger school models were outlined.
- When would you consider creating a Primary School? Advised that this is under consideration.
- Parking is a major issue at Cymmer. You will be increasing this by up to 50 cars, have you considered the impact of this? This is a major concern, has this been looked at? Advised that the route to school will be properly assessed using recognised criteria regarding safety etc.
- It is unrealistic to expect people to walk to Cymmer due to the hill.
- Outside space at Cymmer is limited and the yard is used for parking. There is more room at this school, why not bring the Cymmer children here? Advised that this cannot be considered as this school is not large enough to accommodate all of the pupils, Cymmer is the larger building and this school can accommodate everyone.
- Cymmer's Nursery is very good, but will it be able to accommodate all of the pupils? Their hall is also very small, smaller than Rhiwgarn's plus it is used for storage. Advised that Cymmer is large enough to cater for all Infant age pupils who require a place, including Nursery children and that its hall is in fact larger than the one at Rhiwgarn. The issue of storage at Cymmer can be looked at.
- Will building modifications create problems at Cymmer? Advised no, better use will be made of existing facilities.
- Cymmer also has mixed age classes. Advised that with more children entering the school means that this scenario will be less likely in future. Information on how Cymmer manages their space and their class management was given. A sketch plan of the layout of this school was displayed.
- Your information is very vague. We need to know exactly what you are going to do at Cymmer. We need more information, what you have provided is not enough to alleviate our concerns. Advised that RCT has always delivered works promised during consultations in respect of adaptations to buildings. An offer was made for the staff and governors to visit other schools where such work has been undertaken previously to see examples of such work. More information will be provided for the open evening on 7th May.
- Why was a decision taken to close this school in January, for some children this may mean having to move schools three times in one year, September would be a better option. Advised that the LA wishes to move quickly due to the fact that the school is in special measures. January 2015 is the earliest opportunity to do this, but if there are any delays in the process it can be changed to September 2015.
- This school could be turned around in 6 months. September 2015 would be a more preferable date. Examples of other school reorganisation proposals with a January implementation date were provided. It was stressed that children are very flexible and adaptable to change.
- This is a rushed proposal, no thought has been given to the children, it is wrong. You haven't given the school time to get out of the special measures category. CB advised that three years has passed since the original Estyn inspection and standards at this school have slipped even further in this time, something this LA is not prepared to accept.
- Why not close this summer then (July 2014)? Advised that there is insufficient time to conduct the statutory process to enable this to happen.
- Is there an ulterior motive for closing this building? Advised no.
- Does the published capacity of 72 pupils include the Flying Start area, as it seems high? Advised no, but the capacity calculation can be checked if necessary.
- What will be the cost of improving Cymmer? Advised in the region of £250k, as outlined in the consultation document. It was originally £400k, but it has been revised down as it has been determined that less work is needed than first thought.

- No savings are being made here. Advised that any savings made will be long term and will remain in the Education budget, ringfenced for schools.
- Will all building work be completed before the children transfer? Advised yes, but a 'rolling programme' of maintenance and refurbishment which is planned irrespective of the outcome of this proposal will continue in future years.
- Why don't you keep the youngest children at Rhiwgarn? Advised that the preferred option is to bring the two small infants schools together to create a larger more viable school, under 21st Century Schools proposals in the future the long term option is to create a new Primary School in this area.
- Could you consider keeping the Nursery children here and create an Early Years Centre? Advised that this can be looked at.
- CB advised that HR support will be offered to staff should this proposal be agreed, every effort will be made to support staff and fully outline their options, such as redeployment or possibly VER if this is what they may want.
- We want the best for our children, but not to the detriment of the community
- A three way merger with Cymmer Infants' and Juniors was suggested a few years ago, why have you changed your original plans? Information was provided, it was also pointed out that many things have changed since this was first considered back in 2005, including the introduction of the 21st Century Schools Programme.
- I would again state that parking at Cymmer is a major issue. This is a major concern that must be looked at. Advised that it is accepted that this is a relatively difficult site (but which is not located on a main road) and that all possible options will be explored in conjunction with colleagues from the Highways Division.

CB closed the meeting by thanking all present for their attendance and marking his appreciation for the cordial way in which the meeting had been conducted.

Notes of a meeting held with members of the School Council of Cymmer Infants' School, 8th April 2014.

Present: Mrs Sue Walker, Head of Primary Achievement
Mrs Julie Hadley, Head of School Organisation, Planning and Governance
Mrs Marion Cage, Headteacher, Cymmer Infants' School
Eleven pupils, members of the School Council

Mrs Walker explained why this meeting had been arranged, which was to talk with the children about the possible closure of Rhiwgarn Infants' School and to ask them how they felt about this and how they felt about the children of Rhiwgarn joining their school. The children all said that they thought it was a good idea, they would have more friends, would play nicely with them and be kind to them. They were very enthusiastic at the idea. Some children said they had friends attending Rhiwgarn who would be transferring to Cymmer Juniors with them in any case.

Mrs Walker asked if there were lots of children attending this school already, the children answered yes. They were also asked if they would be happy if more children came here, they again answered yes. They said they would welcome the new children, they would be kind to them and not be nasty and would share things with them.

Mrs Walker asked the children what was the best thing about Cymmer Infants'. They replied playing with toys in the yard, doing maths and writing. Mrs Walker also asked them about breakfast club. The children replied that lots of children attend this, they can also read books, use the computers and do colouring, which they enjoy.

The children were asked how they travel to school. Some said by car, but the majority said that they walked. Most live at the bottom of the hill, but some children live at the top, nearer Rhiwgarn. They currently walk and do not have any problems with this.

The Year 2 pupils were asked which school they were going to attend in September. All said Cymmer Junior, some had brothers and sisters already attending this school. All said they were looking forward to transferring.

Mrs Walker asked whether they would want to change anything about Cymmer Infants'. The children replied that they would like more classrooms in the middle part of the school. They were asked whether they thought it was a good idea if the old outside shelter became a new classroom – they all liked this idea.

Mrs Walker and Mrs Hadley ended by thanking the children for talking to them and commented on how good they had all been.

Notes of a meeting with the staff and Governing Body of Cymmer Infants' School on 8th April 2014.

Present : Mr Chris Bradshaw, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
Mrs Sue Walker, Head of Primary Achievement
Miss Andrea Richards, Head of 21st Century Schools
Mrs Julie Hadley, Head of School Organisation, Planning and Governance
23 members of staff and governors.

Mr Bradshaw opened the meeting by introducing all of the officers present. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School, as detailed in the consultation document that had been widely circulated. He outlined the reasons that this proposal is being considered at this time, and went through the statutory process that is to be followed.

Mr Bradshaw stated that he considered Cymmer Infants' to be a good school and wanted the Rhiwgarn children to have the same educational opportunities. This proposal can only benefit the Rhiwgarn children and many children living in the catchment area of Rhiwgarn already attend Cymmer Infants'. The ideal scenario would be to create a Primary school at Cymmer in the future, when money becomes available.

The meeting was then opened for any questions, comments or statements:

- Rhiwgarn is in special measures. Some of their pupils have poor attainment. We do not want standards in this school to go down as a result. Will the school be given time to improve outcomes? Advised that the quality of teaching in Cymmer Infants' is strong. The Estyn inspection of the school may happen prior to the closure and any minor 'blip' in data would be accounted for. We would expect standards of the Rhiwgarn children to rise quickly.
- Mr Bradshaw stated that the school would have more pupils and the governors would determine any revised staffing structure as a result. This is an opportunity to appoint more staff, it will have no impact on current staff.
- Are you closing the Rhiwgarn building? Advised no, Flying Start provision will remain, but some of the buildings on the site could be removed.
- Are there any provisions to protect standards amongst children already in Cymmer Infants'? Advised that Rhiwgarn children are capable children.
- The statistics show otherwise. Will this disadvantage Cymmer pupils, will they get the same amount of staff time? Advised that if necessary, additional staff may be needed to maintain pupil:staff ratios. A larger cohort of staff means that responsibilities can be distributed amongst more staff. There may possibly be more TLR's available in a larger school, giving greater opportunity for career progression.
- Feedback was given on the earlier meeting with the school council. It was noted that the children appeared very enthusiastic at the idea of additional children joining their school.
- Will the proposal cover increased learning resources for the classes as well? Advised yes, and noted that surplus resources from Rhiwgarn will be available also.
- Information and details of the proposed extension to the school were provided.
- When will this work be done? Advised that it will be put in place by January 2015. Added that the work would be undertaken irrespective of the outcome of this proposal as it will enhance the facilities for all pupils.
- Will maintenance issues be addressed? Advised that all such works will be considered as part of the three year rolling programme of capital works at schools. This includes mechanical and electrical works and all will be prioritised.

- Will this work impact on our outdoor facilities, as our inspection is due in the Autumn Term? This will be looked at with a view to avoiding any disruption wherever possible.
- Will Estyn take this closure proposal in to account when they next inspect us?
- Mr Bradshaw asked those present what they thought in general of the proposal – the response was a positive one. Comment was made that it is sad to see a small school close, but the children will benefit by transferring to Cymmer Infants’.
- Small schools like these in close proximity do not make economic sense. The benefits of this proposal outweigh the negatives.
- Will the Rhiwgarn staff automatically transfer here? Advised that the governors of Cymmer will set the staffing structure and make any decisions arising from it. Rhiwgarn staff can apply for posts but governors are not duty bound to appoint them.
- Why bring this proposal forward now, why wasn’t this done last year? Advised that Rhiwgarn has been given considerable support and time to improve over the last 3 years but this has not occurred. The school is poor and the children are not getting the education they deserve.
- Mr Bradshaw advised that this proposal will make Cymmer Infants’ more viable both educationally and financially and will remove surplus places.
- Will transport be provided from Rhiwgarn? Advised no as the route and distance involved does not qualify for it. Many children from Trebanog already attend Cymmer Infants and Junior Schools and do not experience any problems. Safe Routes to Schools and parking issues will be looked at however.
- The path leading past YG Y Cymer is overgrown and dirty. Can it be looked at? Advised that this path is the responsibility of Ysgol Gyfun y Cymer and this will be referred to the Headteacher of that school.
- When will the building works be completed? Advised the target date is January 2015.

Mr Bradshaw closed the meeting by thanking all persons present for their attendance and valued input and comments.

Estyn's response to the proposal to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School.

Introduction

This report has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer. The consultation proposal is from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Summary/ Conclusion

- Are the proposals likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area?

It is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the current standards of education in the area and in all probability improve the standards.

Description and benefits

How well has the proposer:

- Given a clear rationale for the proposal?

The local authority has given a clear rationale of the expected benefits when compared with the status quo as outlined in the report.

- Set out clearly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo?

The expected benefits of the current proposal to discontinue the provision at this school and relocate the pupils to a neighbouring school are set out clearly and fairly. They include the following:

- Improved educational provision and consequent outcomes through:
 1. broader more diverse curriculum
 2. more appropriate curriculum and wider extra-curricular opportunities supporting improved attendance
 3. sharing of skills and expertise through the creation of a Foundation Phase
 4. department

5. better range and quality of learning resources
 6. greater continuity of support for vulnerable pupils
 7. majority of pupils taught in their own age group making it easier for teachers to ensure an appropriate level of challenge
- Staff development opportunities
 - Improved leadership and management
 1. Opportunity for distributed leadership to a greater number of staff
 2. Allow teaching and support staff access to a wider range of responsibilities
 - Financial advantages
 1. Potential savings in terms of staffing structures and purchases of services
 2. Future capital investment benefits that would arise from the modernisation of the one institution rather than the two
 3. Release significant resources to reinvest in the raising of standards

The proposer appears to have analysed the options appropriately. .

Managed any risks associated with the proposals?

- The council has considered appropriate risks and responses associated with both the closure of the school and if the closure does not proceed. The issues addressed include: the impact on the staff of the schools; the retention of the English medium 'Flying Start' provision; equality and community impact assessments.

Considered suitable alternatives and given good reasons as to why these have been discounted?

The council has considered other alternatives but discounted them for good reasons. These include:

1. closing both schools and creating a new school on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools.
 2. closing both schools and Cymmer Junior School and creating a new school on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools.
 3. Federate the two or three schools, maintaining the two or three school buildings but with one governing body and headteacher.
- Effectively shown how surplus places will be affected? If surplus places will be increased, has the proposer given adequate reasons for this?

The proposal would help to reduce existing surplus places in the chosen school (Cymmer Infants' School) by relocating pupils. This school appears to have sufficient surplus capacity to be able to accommodate the projected pupil numbers from

Rhiwgarn. However, the proposer identifies that it is unlikely to eliminate surplus places entirely.

- Where relevant, taken sufficient account of the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium provision within the local authority?

The proposer has not made any reference to this.

Educational aspects of the proposal

How well has the proposer:

- Considered the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management?

The proposer has considered the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management, in both of the schools fairly well. The proposer has considered the outcomes of the most recent Estyn inspection reports and has provided the LA view and categorisation on the quality of leadership, and also outcomes at the schools. The proposer's summary of outcomes at both schools is concise and clear. Outcomes at Rhiwgarn Infants' School, which is in need of special measures, give cause for concern. The LA considers the school to be in Category D which means that it requires the highest level of support and guidance to improve. In 2013, performance in the indicators including the percentage of pupils at the end of Year 2 achieving at least outcome 5, and the Foundation Phase, all fell into the lowest quarter of similar schools based on entitlement to free school meals. In comparison, performance in Cymmer Infants' School, in the same indicators, is significantly higher and in either the top quarter or the top half of similar schools. The LA places this school in Category B because 'attainment continues on an upward trajectory, teaching is good and leadership is having a positive impact on standards and provision'. The projected impact of this proposal on provision, standards and leadership and management are detailed earlier in this report.

- Considered the likely impact of the proposals to ensure delivery of the full curriculum at the Foundation Phase?

The proposer has given appropriate consideration to ensuring the delivery of the full curriculum at the Foundation Phase as a result of pupils being taught within a reduced age range.

- Considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs?

The proposer has undertaken an equality assessment, but as that is not provided it is not possible to evaluate the impact of this proposal on this particular group of

vulnerable pupils. In addition, there is no reference to pupils with special educational needs which is a shortcoming in the proposal.

- Ensured that the disruption to learners is minimised?

The proposer has appropriately identified and considered ways to minimise the most likely disruptions to learners.