

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19TH MARCH 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

The purpose of this report is to outline proposals to close Rhiwgarn Infants' School, Trebanog and to seek Members approval to begin the relevant, and required statutory consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3. BACKGROUND

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

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

4. THE CLOSURE OF RHIWGARN INFANTS' SCHOOL, WITH THE TRANSFER OF EDUCATION PROVISION TO CYMMER INFANTS' SCHOOL

What is the basis for the proposal?

- 4.1 Please could Members refer to the Consultation Document in the Appendix to this Report.
- 4.2 Rhiwgarn Infants' School is the only school in Rhondda Cynon Taf where the educational provision is considered by Estyn to be in need of Special Measures to improve. Significant action has been taken in recent months to

improve the leadership and management of the School and to support the new acting Headteacher to improve the educational quality of the provision provided.

- 4.3 However, Rhiwgarn Infants' School is too small to be effective and offer a sufficiently high standard of provision. Central South Consortium categorise all schools in the region on the basis on a number of factors with the greatest weight being applied to educational outcomes, leadership and the quality of teaching. All schools are graded A to D, with A being the highest and D the lowest performing school, causing significant concern. Rhiwgarn Infants' School is graded a D school.
- 4.4 Therefore, as Director, I consider that the best course of action for the current pupils of Rhiwgarn Infants' and the future children of Trebanog is to close the School at the end of the calendar year and transfer the pupils to Cymmer Infants' School.
- 4.5 Longer term, as capital resources allow, we would seek to amalgamate Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools to create an all through primary school on a new site or modernise and increase the capacity of one of the existing two sites.

5 TIMESCALE, CONSULTATION AND THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING

- 5.1 The process for closing schools has changed due to the new Code.
- 5.2 The Code on School Organisation ("The Code") is made under Sections 38 and 39 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The Code came into force on 1 October 2013 and applies in respect of all school proposals published by way of a statutory notice after that date. Proposals to close a school have to follow the following process:
1. The Council's Cabinet considers the Code and authorises a consultation on the changes to the schools;
 2. At the start of the consultation period the Council **must** provide consultees with a consultation document and give them at least 42 days in which to respond, with at least 20 of these days being school days. If the Council considers it appropriate meetings are held with stakeholders during the consultation period;
 3. Consultation comments are collated and summarised by the Council. This summary together with the Council's officers own responses and Estyn's views of the proposal is published in a consultation report within 13 weeks of the end of the consultation period and presented to the Council's Cabinet for consideration;
 4. The Council's Cabinet decide whether to proceed with the changes within 6 months of the end of the consultation period. If the decision is to proceed, Step 5 is taken. If a new option emerges during the consultation which the Council's Cabinet wish to consider, then Steps 1-3 are repeated;
 5. Statutory notice is published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The notice **must** be published on a school day and with 15 school days (not including the day of publication) in the notice period;

6. The Council's Cabinet must issue its decision on the proposal within 16 weeks of the end of the objection period;
 7. If written or e-mailed objections are received, the Council **must** publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them within 7 days of the determination of the proposal (where the Council is determining its own proposals); or, in all other cases, within 28 days of the end of the objection period;
 8. If the proposals receive approval / the Council determine to implement them, they should be implemented in accordance with the date given in the statutory notice, or any subsequent modified date.
- 5.3 The consultation will start on the 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.
- 5.4 The Council's Cabinet will consider the report and will consider, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, make changes to the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If the Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of this proposal for the foreseeable future.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Rhiwgarn Infants' School is not providing the quality of education provision we require for the young children of Trebanog. The Council considers that the School is too small and there will be considerable benefits to be gained by the pupils of both Rhiwgarn and Cymmer Infants' Schools from being part of a larger school. The experience of educational authorities and schools across the UK is that larger primary schools offer a more consistent and secure model upon which schools can plan, manage and deliver the very best educational experience for pupils over time. This has been supported by an Estyn Report dated 2 December 2013 that evidences that larger schools outperform small schools.
- 6.2 It is recommended, therefore, that Members give approval to officers to commence the consultation processes necessary to achieve the proposal outlined in this report.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF
RHIWGARN INFANTS' SCHOOL WITH ALL THE PUPILS
TRANSFERING 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 build 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 Infants' School	Governors and Staff Meeting	Xth April 2014, 4 – 6pm	Rhiwgarn Infants' School
Cymmer Infants' School	Governors and Staff Meeting	Xth April 2014, 4 – 6pm	Cymmer Infants' School
Rhiwgarn Infants' School	School Council	Xth April 2014, 2 – 3pm	Rhiwgarn Infants' School

School Affected	Group	Time/Date	Venue
Both Schools and members of the local community	Parents and public drop in session and exhibition	Xth May 2014, 4 – 6pm	Cymmer Infants' School

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

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, Porthtygwaith, 0.8 of just one mile from Cymmer Junior 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
Total statutory aged Pupils	39	29	35	38
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	20	19	20	14

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	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018	
Statutory aged pupils	72	38	37	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.

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, adjacent to 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
Total statutory aged pupils	65	69	62	71
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	27	28	39	33

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	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018	
Statutory aged pupils	95	71	72	77	74	78	80	15.8%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	-	33	33	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	2015	2016	2017	2018	% surplus places in 2018
Statutory aged pupils	125	108	105	109	109	114	8.9%
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	-	50	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 £400K 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.

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. Rhiwgarn 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 Headteacher's to distribute key leadership tasks such as child protection, literacy, numeracy, special educational needs etc to a greater number of staff. Often in a small school, the Headteacher takes responsibility for the vast majority of these tasks;
 - Creates leadership opportunities for other staff, and for others to specialise in key areas, which will enhance educational provision and outcomes;
 - Allow teaching and support staff access to a wider range of responsibilities:
 - Improved career prospects;
 - Improved curriculum co-ordination;
 - 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' school 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 below.

	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 £400K, 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, 53 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 build a new school on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools;
- Close both schools and Cymmer Junior School and build 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 build 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.

