

**AGENDA ITEM 9****RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL****CABINET****25<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2015****IMPROVING PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN CYMMER, PORTH****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to outline proposals that seek to create an 'all through' Primary School for Cymmer investing £2m in improving the existing school buildings and facilities and to seek Members approval to begin the relevant, and required statutory consultation.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members note the information contained within this report and give formal approval to commence consultation on the following proposal; -

To create a new 3-11 primary school for Cymmer, Porth investing £2m in improving the existing school buildings and facilities. This proposal will require the closure of Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools, with the pupils transferring to a new Primary School provision that will be opened utilising the existing buildings of both current schools.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. Rhondda Cynon Taf has 106 schools for pupils in the primary age range. Currently, there are 92 all age primary schools, 1 nursery school, 8 infant schools (ages 3 or 4-7) and 5 junior schools (ages 8-11).
- 3.2. Over the past 12 years, where appropriate, the Council has sought to minimise transitions between schools amalgamating separate infant and junior schools through a phased approach, and also closing small schools, incorporating them in to larger more educationally and financially viable primary schools. The schools amalgamated or closed most recently include primary, infant, junior and some nursery schools in Abercynon, Comin (Aberdare Park), Cwmbach, Cwmclydach, Maerdy, Penrhiwfer, Ynysboeth, Ynyshir, Aberllechau and Rhiwgarn. Pentre Primary School is also to close in August 2015.

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.

#### **4 THE CREATION OF AN ‘ALL THROUGH’ PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR CYMMER INVESTING £2M IN IMPROVING THE EXISTING SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES**

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

4.2 Cymmer Infants’ School is a Community School located at Graigwen Road, Cymmer, Porth, to the rear of the Cymmer Junior School site and the school site consists of a traditional Victorian style building, constructed in 1914.

4.3 Cymmer Junior School is a Community School located at High Street, Cymmer, Porth, immediately in front of Cymmer Infants’ School (the two sites are separated only by a narrow roadway) and the school site consists of a traditional Victorian building, constructed in 1881, with a more recent two storey extension to the rear.

4.4 In summary, the proposal seeks to invest £2 million in improving the site and buildings of the two current schools, to create a new ‘all through’ Community Primary School for this area. The funding to enable this will come from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.

#### **5. TIMESCALE, CONSULTATION AND THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING**

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

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

- Consultation period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 to 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015 (start of ½ term)
- Report back to Cabinet on consultation - November 2015

- Statutory Notices published (if approved by Cabinet) for a 28 day period – December 2015
  - Report back to Cabinet on outcome of statutory notice period and details of objections received, with an appropriate recommendation – January 2016
- 5.3 The School Organisation Code now makes provision for local authorities to determine their own statutory proposals; under the former arrangements, if just one objection was received following publication of the statutory notice, the proposals had to be forwarded to the Welsh Ministers, who would make the final decision as to whether the proposal could be implemented or not. This only now occurs when specific circumstances exist, e.g. if the proposal involves the removal of 6<sup>th</sup> form provision from a school, which clearly does not apply in this case.
- 5.4 The proposal will be for Cymmer Infants' and Junior Schools to close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016, with pupils transferring to a new Primary School for Cymmer on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016. The new Primary School will utilise the sites and buildings of the former two schools.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The Council considers that there are considerable benefits to be gained from creating larger, 'all through' schools, minimising the transition between schools. The experience of educational authorities and schools across the UK is that such schools offer a more consistent and secure model upon which schools can plan, manage and deliver the very best educational experience for pupils over time.
- 6.2 It is recommended, therefore, that Members give approval to officers to commence the consultation processes necessary to achieve the proposal outlined in this report.

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**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED  
AMALGAMATION OF CYMMER INFANTS' AND  
CYMMER JUNIOR SCHOOL, TO CREATE A NEW  
COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL, FROM 1<sup>ST</sup>  
SEPTEMBER 2016.**

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## Introduction

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Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council wishes to seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders on the proposal to amalgamate Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools. The amalgamation will be achieved by closing the two existing schools and opening a new Primary School to replace them. The existing school buildings of Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools would be used to accommodate the new Primary and will be remodelled, refurbished and improved to benefit all of the pupils who will attend. It is proposed that the two schools would close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016 with the pupils transferring to the new Primary school on 1 September 2016.

The designated LA class for pupils with special educational needs currently based at Cymmer Junior School will also transfer to the new Primary School if these proposals are approved.

### Who will we consult with?

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

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

### What will the consultation process entail?

The consultation will start on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 and will be completed at 5pm on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015. The feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a report presented to the Council's Cabinet in November 2015. This consultation

report will be available for all persons to view on the Council internet site and copies can be obtained on request from the addresses detailed on Page 5 of this document.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the report and will decide, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, make changes to the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If the Cabinet decides 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 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016.

### **What do you have to consider?**

The remainder of the consultation document sets out the rationale for the proposed change to primary education provision in Cymmer, Porth. 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 amalgamate Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools. The existing school buildings of Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools would be used to accommodate the new Primary and will be remodelled, refurbished and improved to benefit all of the pupils who will attend.

### **How do you make your views known?**

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



School Affected	Group	Time/Date	Venue
<b>Cymmer Infants' and Junior Schools</b>	Joint Governors and Staff Meeting	Xx Sept/Oct 2015, 4 – 6pm	<b>Cymmer Infants' School</b>
<b>Cymmer Infants' School</b>	School Council	(as above staff, gov's) 2 – 2.30pm	<b>Cymmer Infants' School</b>
<b>Cymmer Junior School</b>	School Council	(as above staff, gov's), 2.40pm – 3.10pm	<b>Cymmer Junior School</b>
<b>Both Schools and members of the local community</b>	Parents and public drop in session and exhibition	Xx Oct 2015, 4 – 6pm	<b>Cymmer Junior School</b>

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](http://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](mailto:schoolplanning@rctednet.net)

All correspondence should be received **no later than 5pm Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015.**

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

All schools affected by this proposal are English medium schools and therefore all the consultation documents are 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 – 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 £273K of capital investment in this school since 2009, including new, remodelled accessible pupil toilets, disabled toilet, replacement windows and doors, improvement to foundation area classrooms including a new classroom extension and rebuilding of the retaining walls. However the backlog maintenance figure is still £319K and this does not include costs of improvements to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 C 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	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
Total statutory aged pupils	69	62	71	61	98
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	28	39	33	31	41

\* Numbers increased in January 2015 as a consequence of the closure of Rhiwgarn Infants', with the transfer of its pupils to Cymmer Infants'.

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	2015 (Actual)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% surplus places in 2020	
Statutory aged pupils	125	98	95	100	101	95	89	28.8%	
Pre-nursery and Nursery pupils	41	41	47	41	40	38	37	-	

Cymmer Infants' School was inspected by Estyn in October 2014 and the school's current performance was deemed good, with its prospects for improvement also good.

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

- R1** Improve outcomes for more able pupils
- R2** Improve attendance further
- R3** Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills across the curriculum
- R4** Ensure that teachers' written comments record what pupils need to do to improve work
- R5** Provide opportunities for all members of the senior management team to observe and evaluate each other's work.

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 classed as a 'Yellow' school within the National School Improvement and Categorisation Matrix (Green, Yellow, Amber, Red). This is because performance of the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator has been consistently above the All Wales and LA average for the last 3 years. The school requires minimal support to raise overall standards and has good capacity to improve"*

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 in receipt of free school meals (all pupils) is 33.1%.

***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*	2014	2014 Benchmark Quartile*
<b>Foundation Phase Indicator</b>	85.71%	<b>1</b>	83.33%	<b>1</b>	94.4%	<b>1</b>
<b>Personal and social development wellbeing and cultural diversity</b>	90.48%	<b>2</b>	91.67%	<b>2</b>	100%	<b>1</b>

<b>Language literacy and communication skills English</b>	85.71%	<b>1</b>	83.33%	<b>1</b>	94.4%	<b>1</b>
<b>Mathematical development</b>	85.71%	<b>2</b>	87.50%	<b>2</b>	94.4%	<b>1</b>

\* - 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 %	2013 Benchmark Quartile	2014 %	2014 Benchmark Quartile
<b>% attendance</b>	91.33	<b>3</b>	92.23	<b>3</b>	92.36	<b>3</b>	93.9	<b>2</b>

### **Information on the Schools – Cymmer Junior School**

Cymmer Junior School (Cymmer Junior) is a Community School located at High Street, Cymmer, Porth, immediately in front of Cymmer Infants' School (the two sites are separated only by a roadway) and the school site consists of a traditional Victorian building, constructed in 1881, with a more recent two storey extension to the rear. The Council has invested £52K of capital investment in this school since 2009, including refurbishment to provide new doors, windows and flat roof replacement works. However the backlog maintenance figure is still £491K and this does not include costs of improvements to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School criteria. Based on the results of the Welsh Government commissioned building survey of all schools Cymmer Junior is graded a B for suitability and a C for sufficiency, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building respectively.

The pupil numbers in Cymmer Junior 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.

<b>Cymmer Junior School</b>					
No on roll in January	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Total statutory aged pupils*	146	130	121	120	119

\* Excludes the LA SEN class

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

Cymmer Junior School							
Capacity of the School	2015 (Actual)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% surplus places in 2020
217	119	119	117	108	111	108	51.3%

Cymmer Junior School was inspected by Estyn in May 2013. The school's current performance was deemed to be adequate, and its prospects for improvement good.

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

- R1** Raise standards in science and ICT
- R2** Improve pupils' ability to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R3** Continue to improve rates of attendance
- R4** Establish target setting arrangements to enable pupils to consistently identify and recognise their progress
- R5** Develop the role of the governors as critical friends

A monitoring visit by Estyn in June 2014 judged the school to have made good progress in respect of the key issues for action identified in May 2013 and the school was subsequently removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn monitoring.

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 Junior is currently classed as a 'Yellow' school within the National School Improvement and Categorisation Matrix (Green, Yellow, Amber, Red). This is because the school has successfully been removed from Estyn monitoring and has shown that it has good prospects for improvement. The quality of whole-school leadership is good".*

The tables overleaf set out the performance of Cymmer Junior for the key measures of educational performance over the past three years and compare the school to similar schools across Wales based on free school meals. The three year average of the percentage of pupils with free school meals is 43.01%.

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

	2011 %	2011 Benchmark Quartile	2012 %	2012 Benchmark Quartile	2013 %	2013 Benchmark Quartile	2014 %	2014 Benchmark Quartile
<b>Core Subject Indicator</b>	70.73	<b>2</b>	70.27	<b>3</b>	72.73	<b>3</b>	76.67	<b>3</b>
<b>English</b>	70.73	<b>3</b>	70.27	<b>4</b>	72.73	<b>4</b>	80.0	<b>3</b>
<b>Maths</b>	78.05	<b>2</b>	75.68	<b>3</b>	75.76	<b>3</b>	83.3	<b>3</b>
<b>Science</b>	73.17	<b>3</b>	72.97	<b>4</b>	78.79	<b>3</b>	80.0	<b>3</b>

**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 %	2013 Benchmark Quartile	2014 %	2014 Benchmark Quartile
<b>% attendance</b>	90.41	<b>4</b>	90.76	<b>4</b>	92.02	<b>3</b>	93.21	<b>3</b>

**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.

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.

Cymmer Infants' and Junior Schools have been assessed against the aforementioned criteria:

- The schools are 'paired' with each other, i.e. the children usually progress from the one to the other;
- The schools are located on sites that are immediately adjacent to each other;
- Both have surplus places in excess of 25%; the Junior School has 45% of its capacity surplus, this is forecast to rise to 51% within 5 years;
- Between the two schools there is a maintenance backlog of £810K, which equates to £3,723 per pupil;
- Both schools have mixed aged classes;
- Pupil attendance at has consistently been in the third and fourth quartiles when compared to similar schools in Wales, although the Infants' School is now showing some improvement.

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

### **What is the educational case for closing Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools and creating a Primary School?**

School organisational change should point to the educational benefits that any change will offer, particularly in relation to overall improvements in standards, but also in terms of the social and emotional development of children, which would usually impact beneficially on their overall achievement and outcomes.

It is the Council's view that creating a Primary school for the communities of Cymmer and Trebanog will improve educational outcomes and provision for the following reasons;

- A single school vision and ethos, with a single governing body and management team providing leadership across the full primary age range, using consistent policies and practices;
- Improved transition from Yr 2 to Yr 3 and overall progression;
- Greater consistency of teaching and learning for pupils across the key stages including:
  - Seamless curriculum planning and co-ordination;
  - Shared schemes of work, assessment and tracking of pupil progress;
  - Greater continuity in terms of expectations, behaviour, partnerships with parents and
  - Day to day organisation;
- Less change for parents and pupils;
- Greater continuity of support for vulnerable groups of pupils;
- Opportunities for staff to move between key stages and further develop expertise;
- Potential for financial savings in terms of staffing structures and purchase of services, which accrue to the single school; and
- The future capital investment benefits that would arise from the modernisation of one institution rather than two.

There are opportunities for the teaching and support staff. An 'all-through' Primary school for Cymmer could offer:

- A larger school with a bigger role;
- A more flexible organisation;
- Improved career prospects;
- Improved curriculum co-ordination;
- The opportunity to teach across a wider age range;
- An increased range of expertise;
- Improved opportunities for staff interaction /co-ordination



It is proposed that the new Primary school will occupy the buildings currently used by the Infants and Juniors; however, consideration will be given to restricting access to the small roadway that separates the sites at present, this will in effect create one large site with two school buildings on it. Merging the sites in this way will improve road safety by allowing for a dedicated staff/visitor parking area to be created and it will also improve the security of the whole site. Both school buildings will be refurbished and remodeled to create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment, together with improved outdoor learning and play spaces for pupils

The Infants' school building was extended in January 2015 to create additional capacity following the closure of Rhiwgarn Infants School in December 2014, with the pupils of that school transferring to Cymmer. Further improvement works will be undertaken to both buildings, including refurbishment of pupil toilets, teaching areas and the outside space to benefit all pupils who will attend the new Primary school in the future.

There is sufficient space at both current school buildings to comfortably accommodate all pupils resident within the existing catchment area of the Infants and Junior Schools (including the former catchment area of Rhiwgarn Infants, which has been incorporated in to that of Cymmer) who will require a school place both now and in the future. A new Primary School for Cymmer 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 Primary School will be more financially viable than the Infants' and Junior 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, the new Primary School will have greater than 220 pupils of statutory school age which will equate to 7 teachers for 7 age groups. Therefore, the majority of pupils will be taught in their own age group, which makes it considerably easier for the class teacher to provide an appropriate curriculum and support for all pupils. This should result in higher standards of teaching and learning and better educational outcomes. There will be also greater flexibility with regard to the usage of the teaching accommodation; older Infant children could, for example be taught in the current Junior building, which will assist their transition from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2.

### **What will this Proposal mean for the school pupils?**

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

- 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, providing that pupil numbers remain stable at their current levels, the large majority of the staff

currently employed in Cymmer Infants and Cymmer Junior Schools will simply 'slot' in to similar posts in the new Primary School, 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.
- Build on the achievement gained at both schools by bringing together a larger team of staff to share expertise and experience.

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

The catchment area of the new Primary School will not change, i.e. it will continue to be the same as the current catchment area of Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools. The Council's policy regarding free school transport, which is under review at the present time, will continue to apply.

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. As this is a new school provision, a temporary governing body will be established if a decision to proceed with amalgamation is agreed. The main role of this temporary governing body will be to establish a staffing structure for the new Primary School, appoint its senior management team and make decisions with regard to the method of 'slotting in' of all other staff to the posts that are available in the new Primary School. The Council has well established Human Resource policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change.

The Headteacher of Cymmer Infants' School retired from her post in August 2015 and the governing bodies of both schools have jointly agreed that the Headteacher of Cymmer

Junior School will lead the Infants (as well as the Junior) School, in an acting capacity, from September 2015. If the proposal is agreed, the temporary governing body will determine how the post of Headteacher of the new Primary School is to be appointed.

A new permanent governing body will be appointed for the new Primary School when it opens in September 2016; the temporary governing body will remain in place until all governor appointments are made. The existing governing bodies of Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools will also remain in office for the 2015/16 academic year, with their terms of office ending on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016 when the both schools close.

### **What will be the likely impact of the Proposal on the communities of Cymmer and Trebanog?**

The Cymmer ward is a Communities First Area and is part of the new Porth Communities First region that has 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.

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 and are also available on the Council website.

### **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 the new Primary School's Governing Body, a summary of the known budgetary impacts is set out overleaf.

	<b>Cymmer Junior (Current)</b>	<b>Cymmer Infants' (Current)</b>	<b>Cymmer Primary (Future)</b>	<b>Revenue Savings</b>
	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Annual Revenue Budget based on 2015/16 budget	483	590	917	156

Building improvements will be made to both current school buildings and sites to address the maintenance backlog and improve the accommodation and facilities at the new Primary School. It is estimated that the total cost of this work will be in the region of £2 million, and will be funded from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, 50% of which will be funded by the Welsh Government.

### **What are the disadvantages of this proposal?**

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. The new Primary School after the amalgamation will still only be the size of an average Rhondda Cynon Taf primary school, with approx 220 statutory age pupils in attendance and there are many much larger, very successful primary schools in the County Borough.

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

The Council considers that the educational advantages of the proposal outweigh the short-term impact of the changes for pupils and parents.

### **What alternative options have been considered other than the amalgamation of Cymmer Infants' and Cymmer Junior Schools?**

The current position is that we have two relatively small 'paired' schools, located just metres away from each other on adjacent sites with over 100 surplus places between the two schools, the majority of which are in the Junior School at present.

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

- Close both schools and create a new Primary school on the site of the existing Infants' and Junior Schools, which is within in the catchment area of the combined schools – the current proposal;
- Close both schools and create a new Primary school in a new building on a suitable site in the catchment area of the combined schools;

- Federate the two schools, maintaining the two school buildings but with one governing body and Headteacher.

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

In respect of the option to federate the governing bodies, this would create a two -site school under one Headteacher and one governing body. Two separate legal entities would continue employing two sets of staff. This option would not enable the educational benefits that accrue from deploying the teachers across both schools and improving the standards of teaching and learning that arise from creating a single school. As the two schools are separate legal entities, the funding criteria of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme would not allow us to improve the learning environment for all pupils by being able to rationalise the building stock and upgrade the combined site to a high standard.

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

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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](mailto:schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk)*

### The Proposal

The proposal is to close Cymmer Infants and Cymmer Junior Schools and transfer all the pupils to a new Primary School for Cymmer. It is proposed that the current two schools would close on 31 August 2016 with the pupils transferring to the new Primary School on 1 September 2016.

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

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

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

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

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4. Name (optional)

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire**

*Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2015.*