

Estyn's response to the proposal to change the language medium of Dolau Primary from dual language to English medium and build a new 480 school age places plus 60 nursery places Welsh medium school near the Llanilid housing development site.

This report has been prepared by His 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.

Introduction

This is a proposal by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to improve and increase both English and Welsh medium primary education provision as part of the Llanilid housing development of around 1850 houses near Llanharan. The proposal is to change the language medium provision of a dual language primary school to English medium and to create a new Welsh medium primary school.

Summary / Conclusion

It is Estyn's opinion that the proposal is likely to maintain the current standards of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The proposer has provided a rationale for the proposal and explains how the proposal fits with the development of around 1850 new houses in the vicinity of the existing Dolau dual language primary school and its commitment to delivering its WESP targets.

The proposer acknowledges appropriately the potential advantages of the proposal. These include the need for sufficient school places in both English and Welsh medium primary schools. Both school buildings will be fit for purpose in delivering the Curriculum for Wales, the principles of foundation learning and provision for vulnerable pupils, including those with additional learning needs. Both school buildings will meet the requirements of the equalities act. Owing to their close proximity, of around 0.4 miles, there will be opportunities to share outside resources to support the learning. Building capacity for education in both languages will enable new inhabitants of the houses to select a place for education in the language of their choice within the existing Dolau Primary catchment area, without the need to travel to the next nearest Welsh medium school.

The local authority identifies a few disadvantages of the proposal. For example, the change in language provision at Dolau would mean those pupils being educated

through the medium of Welsh would need to transfer to the new school, which could be daunting for a few pupils. To overcome this, the proposer will provide targeted support for all pupils from Dolau Primary. This includes structured opportunities for pupils to become familiar with the school environment and staff. The proposer also identifies a potential increase in traffic around the schools, which will require managing or effective use of nearby public transport.

The proposer has considered a range of suitable alternatives and given good reasons as to why these have been discounted.

The local authority appears to have taken sufficient account of the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium provision within the local authority and the extent to which the proposal would support the targets in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). It acknowledges that Welsh medium education at Dolau Primary has not grown as well as demand for English medium places, as outlined in its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). In addition, it recognises that there are around 240 surplus places in Welsh medium schools, although these range from around 2.6 to 7.4 miles away from Dolau.

The local authority has provided a Welsh Language Impact Assessment as part of this proposal.

The local authority has provided a Community Impact Assessment as part of this proposal.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposal considers reasonably well the impact the proposals may have on the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils for both schools. However, it only does this in terms of the impact of a newer, better equipped building. The proposer recommends that the temporary governing body ringfences posts below senior leadership level to existing employees of Dolau Primary. This will enable staff to have the first opportunity to apply for additional posts, prior to external advertisement, enabling successful staff to transfer to the new schools. In addition, the proposal identifies opportunities for staff development in both English and Welsh medium settings, with staff having access to support from human resources during the time of change.

The proposer has considered appropriately the outcomes of the most recent inspection of Dolau Primary School in October 2023.

The proposal identifies the estimated overall cost of the proposal and different funding streams, such as the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme. However, it notes only that detailed costs to deliver both the new school plus some small-scale adaptations to increase the capacity at Dolau Primary School will be developed alongside the consultation process.

The proposal outlines suitably that appropriate provision for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) will be provided in any new Welsh Medium school. It gives assurance that if the proposal goes ahead that 'there will be targeted support for all pupils from Dolau Primary School'.