

Appendix A: Community Impact Assessment

This Community Impact Assessment is prepared in accordance with the Welsh Government's (WG's) School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018). It is to be read alongside the Consultation Document, the Welsh Language Impact Assessment and the Equality Impact Assessment as the information contained within all documents is related and the themes within them are cross-cutting.

| SECTION 1 – PROPOSAL DETAILS | |
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| Lead Officer: | Lisa Howell |
| Service Director: | Andrea Richards |
| Service Area: | Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services, 21 st Century Schools Team |
| Date: | 29 th November 2024 |
| Proposal: | To close the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School (MACS) and amend the catchment area for post-16 provision to place MACS in the catchment area of Aberdare Community School (ACS). |
| Overview of the proposal: | <p>The proposal is to close the sixth form at MACS and amend the catchment area for post-16 provision to place MACS in the catchment area of ACS. It is proposed that the sixth form at MACS closes by no later than September 2026. To enable the closure of the sixth form at MACS by this date, no new year 12 sixth form pupils would be admitted in September 2025.</p> <p>The proposal is made in accordance with the WG's <u>School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018)</u>. Section 2.3 of the WG's <u>School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018)</u> refers to elements of school organisation that require the publication of proposals, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulated alterations to community, foundation, voluntary schools and community special schools:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The introduction of, or ending of, sixth form provision at a school. |
| Catchment changes: | If the proposal goes ahead, the catchment area of ACS would expand to include the catchment area of MACS for post-16 provision only . |
| Outline where delivery of this proposal is affected by legislation or other drivers such as code of practice: | <p>Powers for Councils to develop school organisation proposals are governed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The <u>School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013</u>.• The WG's <u>School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018)</u>. |

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| | Councils must, when exercising functions under Part 3 of the <u>School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013</u> , act in accordance with any relevant requirements contained in the WG’s <u>School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018)</u> and must have regard to any relevant guidelines contained in it. |
| Consultation dates: | The consultation for the proposal will start on 2 nd December 2024 and will be completed at 17:00 on 17 th January 2025. The Consultation Document has been circulated to all prescribed stakeholders. This Community Impact Assessment is an Appendix of the Consultation Document. |
| Community engagement: | Members of the community wishing to find out more about the proposal can attend a public drop-in session where they can discuss the proposal with Officers from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council’s (RCTCBC’s) Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services. This engagement event will be held at both MACS and ACS on 8 th January 2025 between 15:00 to 18:00. |

SECTION 2 – DATA

Trend data:

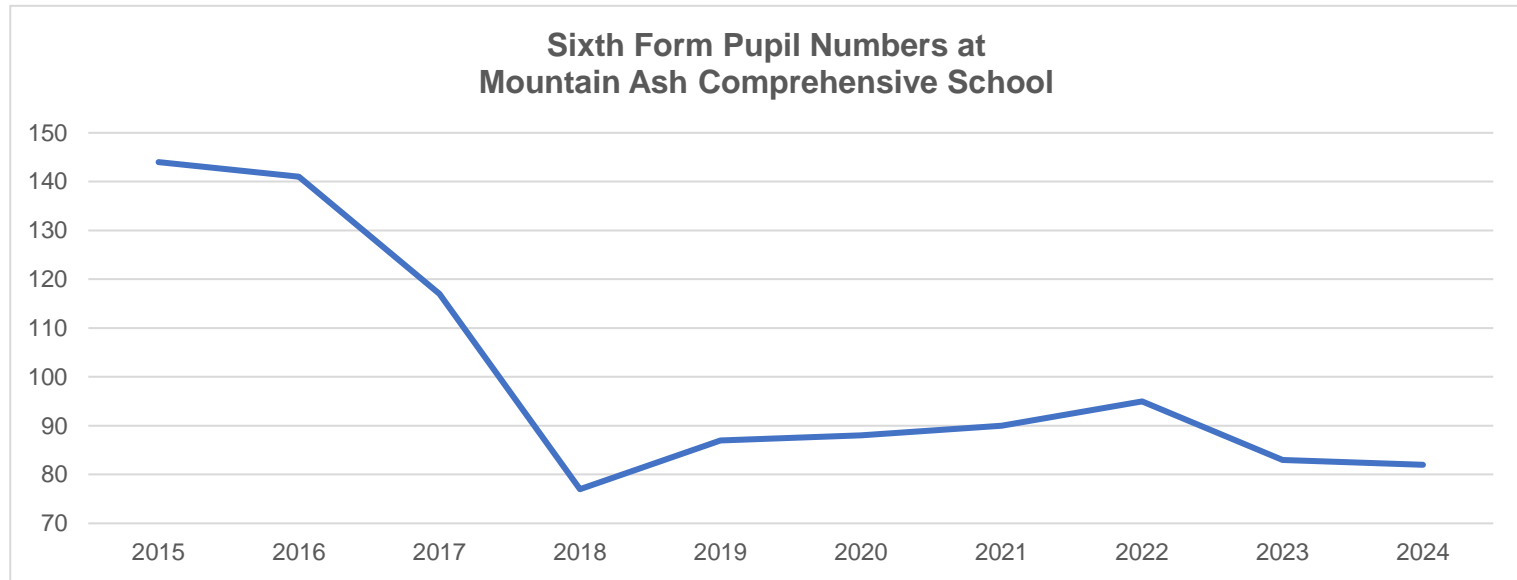
Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data for 2024 indicates that there were 899 statutory school age pupils and 82 sixth form pupils attending MACS in January 2024. The table below outlines the pupil numbers at MACS over the last five academic years. The number of sixth form pupils for each academic year is shown separately.

| Actual pupil numbers at MACS over the last five academic years (PLASC data) | | | | | |
|---|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Pupils | Academic Year | | | | |
| | 2019/2020 | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 | 2023/2024 |
| Statutory school age pupils | 885 | 929 | 928 | 900 | 899 |
| Sixth form pupils | 88 | 90 | 95 | 83 | 82 |
| Total | 973 | 1,019 | 1,023 | 983 | 981 |

The data demonstrates that between the academic years 2019/2020 and 2023/2024:

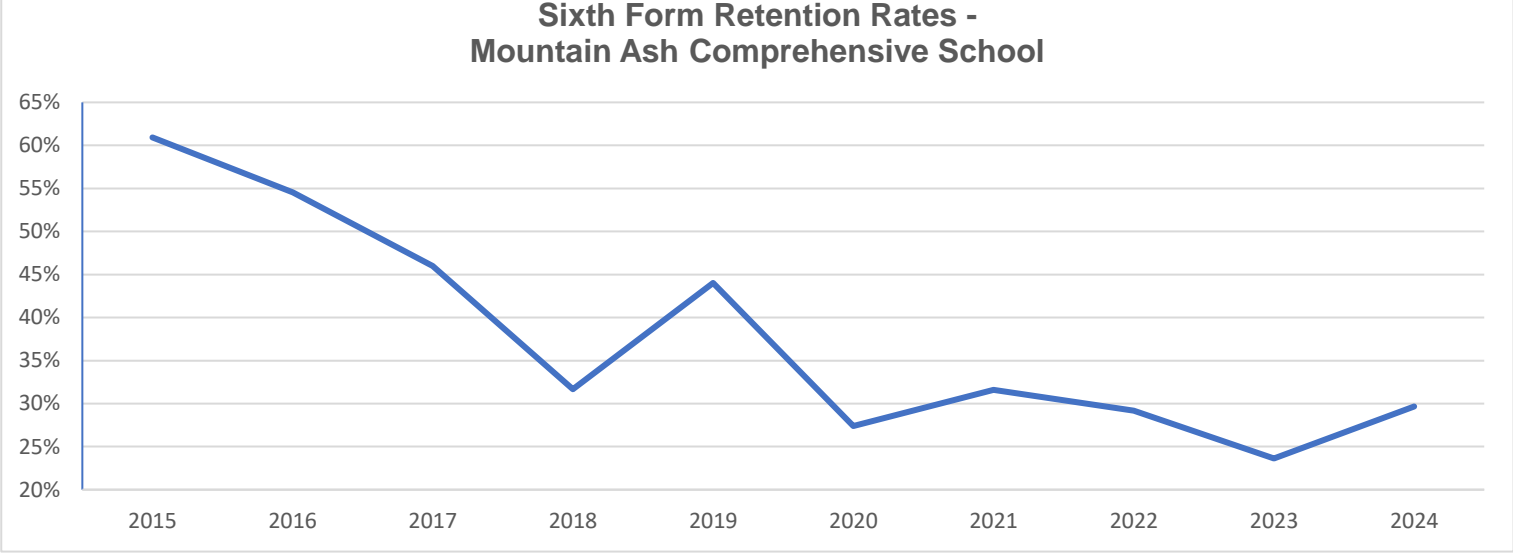
- The number of statutory school age pupils attending MACS has remained broadly consistent, increasing by 1.6% (14) from 885 to 899.
- The number of sixth form pupils attending MACS has decreased by 6.8% (6) from 88 to 82.
- The total number of pupils attending MACS has remained broadly consistent, increasing by 0.8% (8) from 973 to 981.

The graph below shows sixth form pupil numbers at MACS over the past ten years.



The graph illustrates that during this time, the number of sixth form pupils has fallen sharply by 43% (62) from 144 in 2014/2015 to 82 in 2023/2024.

The graph below shows the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form at MACS over the past ten years.



The graph shows that during this time, the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form has more than halved from 60.9% in 2014/2015 to 29.7% in 2023/2024.

Projection data:

The table that follows outlines the projected statutory school age and sixth form pupil numbers at MACS over the next five academic years. They are calculated in accordance with the guidance issued by the WG and are based on live birth data for the area.

| Projected pupil numbers at MACS over the next five academic years | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Pupils | Capacity | Academic Year | | | | | | Total Capacity 2028/2029 | Surplus in |
| | | Actual | Projections | | | | | | |
| | | 2023/2024 (PLASC) | 2024/ 2025 | 2025/ 2026 | 2026/ 2027 | 2027/ 2028 | 2028/ 2029 | Number | % |
| Statutory school age pupils | 1,394 | 899 | 868 | 878 | 880 | 892 | 857 | | |
| Sixth form Pupils | | 82 | 90 | 84 | 80 | 78 | 82 | | |
| Total | 1,394 | 981 | 958 | 962 | 960 | 970 | 939 | 455 | 32.6% |

The data demonstrates that by the 2028/2029 academic year, there is projected to be surplus capacity of 32.6% (455 places) at MACS.

NB: The pupil projection numbers above were calculated prior to the start of the current academic year. Actual pupil numbers for 2024/2025 are now known, and as of October 2024, there were only 72 sixth form pupils at MACS, significantly (20%) lower than the projected figure of 90. Of these 30 pupils are in year 12 and 42 are in year 13.

Proportion of pupils from the catchment area that attend the school:

According to PLASC data, in January 2024:

- 86.5% of statutory school aged pupils attending MACS lived in the catchment area.
- 90.2% of post-16 pupils attending MACS lived in the catchment area.

Proportion of pupils from outside the catchment area that attend the school:

According to PLASC data, in January 2024:

- 13.5% of statutory school aged pupils attending MACS lived outside of the catchment area.
- 9.8% of post-16 pupils attending MACS lived outside of the catchment area.

SECTION 3 – OTHER FACILITIES OR SERVICES THAT THE SCHOOL ACCOMMODATES

Information about other facilities or services that the school accommodates e.g.

- MACS offers a range of extra-curricular activities, including performing arts, netball, football, rugby, and subject-specific revision sessions.
- RCTCBC's Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) run an after-school programme at MACS including activities such as Craft Club.

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| <p>youth club, play group, school groups, community library etc.:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mountain Ash RFC use the sports pitches at the weekends for mini and junior teams. |
| <p>If accommodation, facilities or services are provided by a school, where they would be provided in the event of a closure:</p> | <p>If the proposal goes ahead, the MACS site would remain open to provide education for statutory school aged pupils (Years 7 to 11). As such, there would be no change to the services offered from the school.</p> |
| <p>SECTION 4 – OTHER FACILITIES IN THE IMMEDIATE, LOCAL AND WIDER COMMUNITY</p> | |
| <p>Whether other facilities available in the immediate local or wider community will or could be enhanced in the event of a school closure e.g. improvements to village halls, playgrounds, provision of holiday play schemes etc.:</p> | <p>If the proposal goes ahead, the school would not close. MACS would remain open to provide education for statutory school aged pupils (Years 7 to 11). As such, there would be no change to the services offered from the school.</p> |
| <p>SECTION 5 – ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL(S)</p> | |
| <p>Information about the facilities provided at any alternative school:</p> | <p>Currently, there are three English medium secondary schools in the Cynon Valley. These are MACS, ACS and St John Baptist Church in Wales High School (SJB). Strong collaborative arrangements have been established between all three schools, who operate as the 'Cynon Valley Consortium' (CVC), to ensure the effective delivery of a broad and balanced post-16 curriculum offer. The full range of post-16 courses delivered across the three schools is available to all pupils, with transport being provided for pupils to travel between school sites as necessary.</p> <p>If the proposal proceeds, the catchment area would be amended to place MACS in the catchment area of ACS for post-16 provision only. Pupils who would have previously attended sixth form at MACS would ordinarily attend ACS instead.</p> |

ACS

ACS is an 11 to 19 English medium secondary school located on Ynys Road, Aberdare. Pupils benefit from a 21st century learning environment, whose facilities include:

- 'Break out areas' for learning, independent from the classrooms and within carefully designed corridor spaces.
- Wi-Fi connectivity and the use of modern technology through iPad-equipped rooms enabling tablet-driven learning in internet cafes.
- A recording studio, an open area with a giant projector, a gym and a dance area.
- Access to first-class sporting facilities on the same site (Sobell Leisure Centre and Ron Jones Stadium).
- A dedicated area that the local community can safely use both during and after the school day.

Sixth form pupils are offered a wide range of leadership and extra-curricular opportunities, including sporting, cultural and STEM activities. These include Debate Club, an Engineering scheme, performing in school productions and concerts and taking part in sports events. In partnership with Leisure Services based at the adjacent Sobell Leisure Centre, ACS is currently piloting a project to allow pupils to gain their Lifeguard qualification (NPLQ), First Aid at Work qualification and complete Defibrillation training. Pupils are encouraged to fundraise for charity and participate in peer mentoring opportunities such as the Reading Buddy Scheme with younger pupils. RCT's YEPS (Youth Engagement and Participation Service) also run an after-school programme at the school.

A dedicated area has been designed within ACS so that the local community and third parties can safely use the facilities at the school, both during and after the school day. Should the proposal proceed, the local community and sixth form pupils from MACS could benefit from this.

SJB

Pupils could also apply to attend sixth form at SJB. SJB is a voluntary aided Anglican 11 to 18 English medium secondary school located on Glan Road, Aberdare.

Pupils are offered a wide range of leadership and extra-curricular opportunities, including sporting, cultural and physical activities. These include performing on stage, taking part in sports events, voluntary service, retreats, foreign exchanges and trips. There is a strong emphasis on staying fit and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

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| | <p>It should be noted that schools manage their own admissions for sixth form provision and determine the entry criteria. Alternatively, as is the case at present, pupils could choose to attend post-16 provision at Coleg y Cymoedd, who have three campuses in RCT and one in the neighbouring county borough of Caerphilly.</p> |
| <p>Information about the distance and travelling time involved in attending an alternative school(s) of the same language category:</p> | <p>ACS is located approximately 3.3 miles away from MACS, with a travelling time of around 8 minutes by road.</p> <p>SJB is located approximately 4.3 miles away from MACS, with a travelling time of around 12 minutes by road.</p> <p>Should the proposal proceed, it is anticipated that all post-16 pupils in the MACS catchment area would qualify for free home to school transport to attend ACS, as their catchment school. Free home to school transport would not be available for any of these pupils who chose to attend SJB.</p> |
| <p>How parents/carers and pupils' engagement with the alternative school(s) and any facilities it may offer could be supported e.g. how pupils (particularly any less advantaged pupils) will be helped to participate in after school activities.</p> | <p>Understandably, some pupils may initially be daunted at the prospect of moving to a new school on a new site for post-16 provision. However, should the proposal proceed, there would be targeted support for all affected pupils from MACS and ACS. Meaningful and positive transition is an integral part of ensuring that pupils settle into their new school setting with little disruption to their wellbeing and education. This is facilitated by providing effective pastoral and academic support and structured opportunities for pupils and their parents/carers to become familiar with the new school environment and staff.</p> <p>For example, ACS would hold an open evening to provide an opportunity for current Year 11 MACS pupils and their parents/carers to visit the school and meet the staff team. The Head of Sixth Form at ACS would also establish strong links with the Year 11 cohort at MACS, maintain regular contact with them, provide them with all the relevant information and ensure they are given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. Advice and support would be provided by RCTCBC to staff from MACS and ACS to ensure that they were well equipped to support the transition process and make it as smooth and seamless as possible.</p> <p>Details of extra-curricular activities run at ACS are provided above. Should the proposal proceed, pupils transferring from MACS would be encouraged to participate in these. However, it should be noted that extra-curricular activities are not a statutory requirement, and as is the case across RCT, home to school transport would be provided at the start and end of the normal school day only. No additional home to school transport would be provided to enable pupils to access extra-curricular activities.</p> |
| <p>SECTION 6 – TRANSPORT/ACTIVE TRAVEL</p> | |

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| <p>Impact on health and wellbeing e.g. if pupils would be less able to walk or cycle to school:</p> | <p>If the proposal goes ahead, all post-16 pupils living in the catchment area of MACS would need to travel further to attend sixth form at ACS. Inevitably, this would mean that pupils would be less able to walk or cycle to school, and as mentioned above, it is highly likely that all pupils would be entitled to free home to school transport to attend ACS.</p> <p>ACS is a new school, built in 2014 as part of a wider leisure and education investment in the local area, which saw the adjacent Sobell Leisure Centre receive significant investment for school and community use. The Ron Jones Stadium, an athletics track, is also co-located on the same site.</p> <p>RCTCBC recognises that regular exercise promotes physical and mental wellbeing. The co-location of ACS alongside these first-class sporting facilities offers excellent opportunities for pupils, whether this be as part of their studies or as extra-curricular activities. Should the proposal go ahead, sixth form pupils who would previously have attended MACS would be able to benefit from these opportunities which should have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.</p> |
| <p>Information about any wider implications the changes would have on public transport provisions:</p> | <p>Following a recent public consultation exercise, RCTCBC's <u>Cabinet</u> has determined that from September 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCTCBC will adopt the statutory distance criteria set out in the <u>Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008</u> in relation to secondary age pupils (year 7 to 11), and provide free home to school transport for all secondary pupils residing 3 miles or further from their nearest suitable school. • RCTCBC will continue to provide transport for post-16 pupils who reside 3 miles or further from their nearest suitable school or college. <p>Further information in relation to RCTCBC's Home to School Transport provision is available on the RCTCBC website.</p> <p>Should the proposal proceed, it is highly likely that all sixth form pupils living in the catchment area of MACS would be entitled to free home to school transport to attend post-16 provision at ACS, hence there would be no impact on the public transport system.</p> |
| <p>SECTION 7 – IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING</p> | |
| <p>Information on the impact on health and wellbeing:</p> | <p>Pupils</p> <p>As acknowledged above, some pupils may initially feel unsettled at the prospect of moving to a new school on a new site to access post-16 provision. However, should the proposal proceed, appropriate support would be provided to ensure that the transition was managed as smoothly and effectively as possible, and overall, RCTCBC considers that the proposal would have a positive impact on pupils' health and wellbeing.</p> |

The proposal would allow a more enhanced post-16 curriculum to be delivered at ACS, including a comprehensive range of vocational and A level courses. This improved curriculum offer is likely to encourage more year 11 pupils to return to sixth form, whilst the greater choice will enable them to select the most appropriate learning pathway to best meet their needs.

Being taught in larger, more appropriate class sizes would provide more opportunities for valuable pupil interactions. Small class sizes lead to limited student interactions, which diminishes the effectiveness of learning. Larger class sizes reduce inefficiencies and improve effectiveness, as pupil opportunities and student interactions increase.

During the 2023/2024 academic year, 65% of sixth form pupils at MACS travelled to ACS and/or SJB to access some of their education. If the proposal proceeds, pupils would spend less time travelling between sites, providing them with more time to engage in independent learning, a more positive post-16 experience and a greater sense of belonging to a sixth form community.

As explained above, ACS is a new school, built in 2014 as part of a wider leisure and education investment in the local area. The co-location of ACS, with its 21st century learning environment, alongside first-class sporting facilities, offers excellent opportunities for pupils. Should the proposal go ahead, sixth form pupils who would previously have attended MACS would also benefit from this.

RCTCBC considers that the benefits set out above are likely to result in greater engagement, better outcomes and increased progression to higher education, employment and training. They will have a positive impact on pupils' health and wellbeing, and in turn, contribute to more young people fulfilling their potential.

Staff

RCTCBC acknowledges that this is a worrying time for some staff, as some posts may no longer be required should the proposal go ahead. If this is the case, RCTCBC's HR Team will offer as much support as possible, including an initial visit all staff in MACS to make them aware of the processes that may follow and the operational and personal support that is available. RCTCBC has well established HR policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change. If the proposal proceeds, RCTCBC would recommend to the Governing Body of ACS that any additional posts required as a result of increased post-16 pupil numbers, below senior leadership level, should be ringfenced to the existing staff employed at MACS in the first instance. This process means that staff at

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| | <p>MACS would be given the first opportunity to apply for additional posts in ACS, prior to any posts being advertised externally. If they are successful, they would then simply transfer to ACS when the proposal is implemented.</p> <p>In the longer term, RCTCBC considers that the proposal will have a positive impact on staff health and wellbeing. Resources available for statutory aged pupils (Year 7 to 11) will increase as funds will no longer need to be diverted to subsidise post-16 provision. All funding and staff focus can be directed at providing the best possible education for statutory aged pupils which should result in better outcomes and job satisfaction.</p> | | |
| SECTION 8 – COMMUNITY SAFETY | | | |
| Information on wider community safety issues: | If the proposal goes ahead, the MACS site would remain open to provide education for statutory school aged pupils (Years 7 to 11). As such, there would be no change in relation to wider community safety issues. | | |
| SECTION 9 – SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY IMPACT | | | |
| | <p>To confirm, RCTCBC considers the overall community impact of the proposal to be positive.</p> <p>MACS would remain open with increased funding available to provide education for Year 7-11 pupils. Post-16 pupils would benefit from accessing a broader curriculum offer at ACS, with all post-16 pupils likely to be eligible for free home to school transport.</p> <p>By widening the catchment area of ACS to include MACS for post-16 provision only, more pupils and parents/carers would benefit from the excellent 21st century learning environment and community facilities available at ACS, extending the reach of and increasing opportunities for community engagement.</p> | | |
| SECTION 10 – AUTHORISATIONS | | | |
| Lead Officer: | Lisa Howell | | |
| Position | 21 st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager | | |
| Date: | 29 th November 2024 | | |
| Recommendations: | Recommendations | | |
| | Recommendation | Cross Relevant Recommendation | |
| | Is implemented with no amendments. | X | |
| | Is implemented taking into account the mitigating actions outlined. | | |
| | Is rejected due to disproportionate negative impacts on the community. | | |

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| Head of Service/Director: | Andrea Richards |
| Position: | Service Director – 21 st Century Schools and Transformation |
| Date: | 29.11.2024 |
| Please submit this Community Impact Assessment with and SLT/Cabinet Reports. | |
| SECTION 11 – ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING AND REVIEW | |
| Monitoring and Review: | Should the proposal proceed, the impact upon the community will be continuously monitored and reviewed as it progresses. Key impacts that will be monitored are outlined below: |
| SECTION 12 – UPDATES TO COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF CONSULTATION | |
| Date: | 27.01.2025 |
| Update: | <p>Following the consultation closing on 15th November 2024, this Community Impact Assessment has been updated to reflect the responses received.</p> <p>Additional information has been provided in the following areas:</p> <p>1. Impact on pupils.</p> <p>Comments received in relation to this theme included:</p> <p><i>“The year group this is affecting is the very same year group that was affected during Covid-19! They had no transition from primary [school] into secondary school. The rolling affect this has had on their education is huge. It [has] taken years [for them] to settle in and get back on track in terms of where they should be for their age...it is unfair, and it is not in the best interests of the children.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think taking children out of the environment they are used to and want to stay in at one of the most important and stressful times they have encountered is disgraceful.”</i></p> <p><i>The transition for current pupils is going to massively impact their learning...having to learn new names, form new relationships with new teachers, form new relationships with pupils [etc].”</i></p> <p><i>“Pupils have a right to be educated in their own school...closing the sixth form will have a detrimental impact on pupils.”</i></p> |

"I think the option should remain for [pupils] to continue their education in the school they have attended from year seven. It is a big change having to travel to Aberdare daily for sixth form or college and some children are just not ready for that at the end of year 11."

The well-being of all pupils has been considered and is paramount to RCTCBC. We acknowledge that some pupils may find the changes more difficult than others.

Life transitions are significant features in all young people's lives. All pupils receiving education will experience all periods of change and adaptation and many pupils are already accessing their education across more than one school site and have adjusted well to this. It could be argued that receiving education on one school site will bring greater stability to pupils and continuity in teaching and learning, and social relationships with staff and peers during their post-16 studies.

It is acknowledged that some pupils will need additional support emotionally to adapt to a new school environment and encouragement to make new friends and relationships and to be part of a new social network.

Should the proposal be implemented, RCTCBC will work with both schools to support the meaning delivery of effective transition. The transition arrangements that will be delivered, will ensure there will be lots of opportunities to help pupils navigate the change and happily settle into their new school as quickly as possible.

An Equality Impact Assessment for the proposal has been prepared in line with the requirements of the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018). In addition, RCTCBC considers that the proposal benefits the children and young people in accordance with the seven core aims set out within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. The catchment area for MACS is deprived, this could have a detrimental impact on pupils who are already disadvantaged.

Comments received in relation to this theme included:

"I think a lot of children will be discouraged to [go] on to [post-16] education if they have to change school. Poorer members of the community will be even less likely to continue their education. Children [who are] anxious or of a shy,

nervous disposition will be put off by attending another school. This is a definite step back...why do poorer communities need to suffer?"

"Many areas within Mountain Ash are considered deprived areas where individuals within these areas are considered less likely to access [further and] higher education, making access to sixth form more difficult will increase this likelihood."

It is acknowledged that some pupils will need additional support and enhanced transition into a new environment, however it also provides an opportunity for pupils to grow and meet new people and have new experiences which will help some pupils mature and become more independent pupils for the next step in their lives.

An Equality Impact Assessment for the proposal has been prepared in line with the requirements of the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018).

Section three of the Equality Impact Assessment sets out RCTCBC's Socio-economic Duty in relation to this proposal. The socio-economic disadvantages relevant for the area are listed using data from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). Each disadvantage is considered within the context of this proposal, and the given impact of this proposal upon each disadvantage is listed, detailed and evidenced.

Should the proposal proceed, it is highly likely that all sixth form pupils living in the catchment area of MACS will be entitled to free home to school transport to attend post-16 education at ACS, which should remove one of the barriers for those from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds accessing post-16 education.