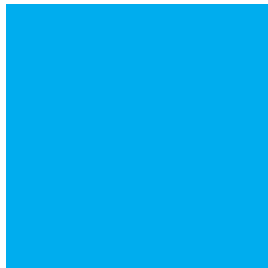
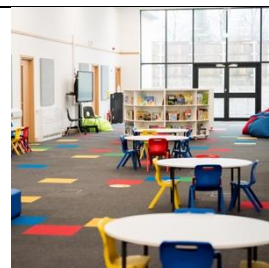
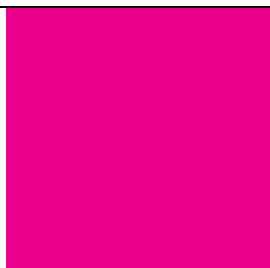


21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS



CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO CLOSE THE SIXTH FORM AT MOUNTAIN ASH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL WITH PUPILS TRANSFERRING TO ABERDARE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

The Consultation Document and Appendices are also available on the 'Get Involved' page on Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's website.

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg/This document is available in Welsh.

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Introduction

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) wishes to seek the views of stakeholders on the proposal to close the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and amend the catchment area for post-16 provision to place Mountain Ash Comprehensive School in the catchment area of Aberdare Community School.

It is proposed that the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School closes by no later than September 2026. To enable the closure of the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School by this date, no new year 12 sixth form pupils would be admitted in September 2025.

The proposal is made in accordance with the Welsh Government's (WG's) School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018). Section 2.3 of the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018) refers to elements of school organisation that require the publication of proposals, including:

- Regulated alterations to community, foundation, voluntary schools and community special schools:
 - The introduction of, or ending of, sixth form provision at a school.

Consultees

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

- The Governing Bodies of:
 - Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
 - Aberdare Community School.
 - St John Baptist Church in Wales High
 - Abercynon Primary School
 - Caegarw Primary School
 - Darrenlas Primary School
 - Glenboi Primary School
 - Miskin Primary School
 - Pengeulan Primary School
 - Penrhiwceibr Primary School
 - Perthcelyn Community Primary School
 - Ynysboeth Primary School
 - Abernant primary School
 - Aberdare Park Primary School
 - Blaengwawr Primary School
 - Capcoch Primary School
 - Caradog Primary School
 - Cwmaman Primary School
 - Cwmbach Primary School
 - Cwmdar Primary School
 - Hirwaun Primary School
 - Llwydcoed Primary School

- Oaklands Primary School
- Penywaun Primary School
- Parents/carers, prospective parents/carers (where possible), and staff members of:
 - Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
 - Aberdare Community School.
 - St John Baptist Church in Wales High
 - Abercynon Primary School
 - Caegarw Primary School
 - Darrenlas Primary School
 - Glenboi Primary School
 - Miskin Primary School
 - Pengeulan Primary School
 - Penrhiwceibr Primary School
 - Perthcelyn Community Primary School
 - Ynysboeth Primary School
 - Abernant primary School
 - Aberdare Park Primary School
 - Blaengwawr Primary School
 - Capcoch Primary School
 - Caradog Primary School
 - Cwmaman Primary School
 - Cwmbach Primary School
 - Cwmdar Primary School
 - Hirwaun Primary School
 - Llwydcoed Primary School
 - Oaklands Primary School
 - Penywaun Primary School
- Pupils of:
 - Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
 - Aberdare Community School.
- Neighbouring Councils.
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan Authorities.
- Welsh Ministers.
- Members of the Senedd for the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf constituencies and regional Members of the Senedd for the area.
- Members of Parliament for the Rhondda, Cynon, and Taf constituencies.
- Estyn.
- Teaching and staff trade unions.
- Central South Consortium Joint Education Service.
- Police and Crime Commissioner for the area.
- Menter Iaith.
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.
- Children and Young People's Partnership.
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board.
- Welsh Language Commissioner.
- Coleg y Cymoedd.

Consultation Process

The consultation will start on 2nd December 2024 and will be completed at 17:00 on 17th January 2025. Feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a Consultation Report presented to RCTCBC's Cabinet during February 2025. This Consultation Report will be available for all persons to view on RCTCBC's website, and copies will be available on request from the address detailed on page 5 of this Consultation Document.

RCTCBC's Cabinet will consider the Consultation Report and decide, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, amend the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If RCTCBC's Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of the proposal.

If RCTCBC's Cabinet decides to proceed with the proposal, a Statutory Notice will be 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 can do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections **must** be made in writing or by email, and sent to RCTCBC within 28 days of the date on which the Statutory Notice was published.

RCTCBC's Cabinet will consider the outcome of the Statutory Notice at the next available Cabinet meeting and determine the proposal.

If there are objections, RCTCBC's Director of Education and Inclusion Services will publish an Objection Report providing a summary of the objections and the response to them within seven days of the determination of the proposal. This Objection Report will also be available for all persons to view on RCTCBC's website, and copies will be available on request from the address detailed on page 31 of this Consultation Document. Under Section 50 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, proposals that affect sixth form education require approval by the Welsh Ministers. As such, RCTCBC must notify Welsh Ministers within 35 days of the end of the Statutory Notice period and forward to them copies of any objections along with an Objection Report (where necessary). Welsh Ministers will then decide whether to proceed with the proposal, amend the proposal or not proceed with the proposal.

If the Welsh Ministers approve the proposal, it will be implemented in accordance with the date stated in the Statutory Notice or any subsequently modified date. If the Welsh Ministers decide not to proceed, that will be the end of the proposal.

What to Consider

The remainder of this Consultation Document sets out the rationale for the proposal. We would like you to consider the information and tell us whether you support the proposal.

Making Your Views Known

Face to face meetings will be arranged with School Councils, Governing Bodies and staff and the wider community as set out in the table that follows:

Making Your Views Known			
School(s) Affected	Group	Time/Date	Venue
School Council			
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	School Council	8 th January 2025 13:30	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
Aberdare Community School	School Council	8 th January 2025 13:30	Aberdare Community School
Governing Body and Staff			
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	Governing Body and Staff	11 th December 2024 15:45	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
Aberdare Community School	Governing Body and Staff	11 th December 2024 15:45	Aberdare Community School
Public Drop-in Session			
Parents/carers and members of the local community		8 th January 2025 15:30 to 17:30	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
		8 th January 2025 15:30 to 17:30	Aberdare Community School

A Consultation Response Form is attached on page 32 of this Consultation Document. The Consultation Response Form will also be available at the meetings detailed in the previous table and on RCTCBC's website on the 'Get Involved' page.

The Consultation Response Form enables consultees to indicate if they wish to be notified of the publication of the Consultation Report, once presented to RCTCBC's Cabinet.

Consultees are also welcome to put their views, comments, and any questions in writing to:

Director of Education and Inclusion Services 21 st Century Schools Valleys Innovation Centre Navigation Park Abercynon CF45 4SN	OR	schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk
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All correspondence should be received no later than 17:00 on Friday 17th January 2025.

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

Views of Children and Young People

RCTCBC acknowledges that the voice of children and young people is important, and they must be involved as active participants in the development, delivery, management, and improvement of their educational experience.

Children and young people have a right to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be heard and considered in accordance with their age and maturity. As such, RCTCBC's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services 21st Century Schools Team will ensure that suitable arrangements are made to involve children and young people as active participants throughout this statutory school organisation consultation process, and if a decision is made to progress the proposal, throughout the implementation process.

RCTCBC will consult with the children and young people who attend:

- Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
- Aberdare Community School.

Meetings will be held with the School Councils of both schools to discuss the proposal. These consultation sessions will have the support of school-based specialist staff to support pupils and assist with the engagement process. Feedback from these meetings will be collated and summarised and included in the Consultation Report to be presented to RCTCBC's Cabinet for consideration once the consultation period has ended.

Community, Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessments

As set out in the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018), it is a requirement to publish Community, Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessments. These have been produced and are appended to this Consultation Document:

- Appendix A – Community Impact Assessment.
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment.
- Appendix C – Welsh Language Impact Assessment.

They are also available on the RCTCBC website.

Section One – Background to the Proposal

Where We Are Now... Mountain Ash Comprehensive School

Mountain Ash Comprehensive School is an 11 to 19 English medium secondary school located on New Road, Mountain Ash, with capacity for 1,394 pupils (year 7 to 13).

Mountain Ash Comprehensive School buildings were constructed between 1967 and 1990. The site comprises four separate buildings; a three-storey main building housing the teaching block and three single-storey external stores. According to the property condition survey carried out for RCTCBC in June 2024, Mountain Ash Comprehensive School is graded B for condition and B for suitability, where A is the highest and D is the lowest performing building. The school is sound and operationally safe.

The backlog maintenance figure for Mountain Ash Comprehensive School is approximately £1.4 million. This figure represents the total cost of all maintenance work identified as being required. RCTCBC has invested substantially in the school site in recent years, with around £3 million of investment providing new windows, replacement roofs, new heating systems and electrical upgrades including new energy efficient lighting schemes. The security perimeter fencing has also been fully upgraded.

The site and school building partly comply with the Equality Act 2010 and are graded B for accessibility, meaning there are some issues that require further improvement.



External view of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.

Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data indicates that there were 899 statutory school age pupils and 82 sixth form pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School in January 2024. Table 1 outlines the pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School over the last five academic years. The number of sixth form pupils for each academic year is shown separately.

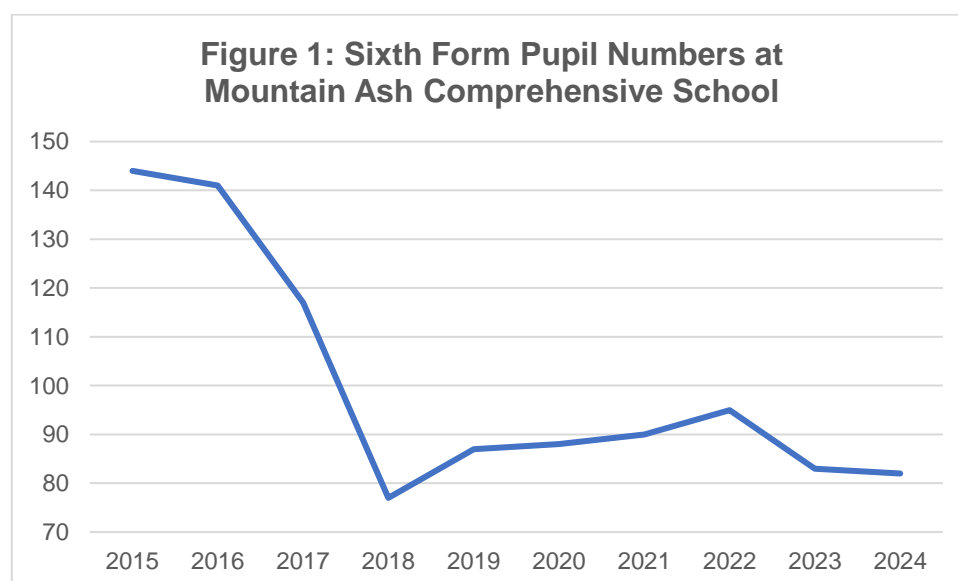
Table 1: Actual pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School over the last five academic years (PLASC data)

Pupils	Academic Year				
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Statutory school age pupils (Year 7-11)	885	929	928	900	899
Sixth form pupils	88	90	95	83	82
Total	973	1019	1023	983	981

The data demonstrates that between the academic years 2019/20 and 2023/24:

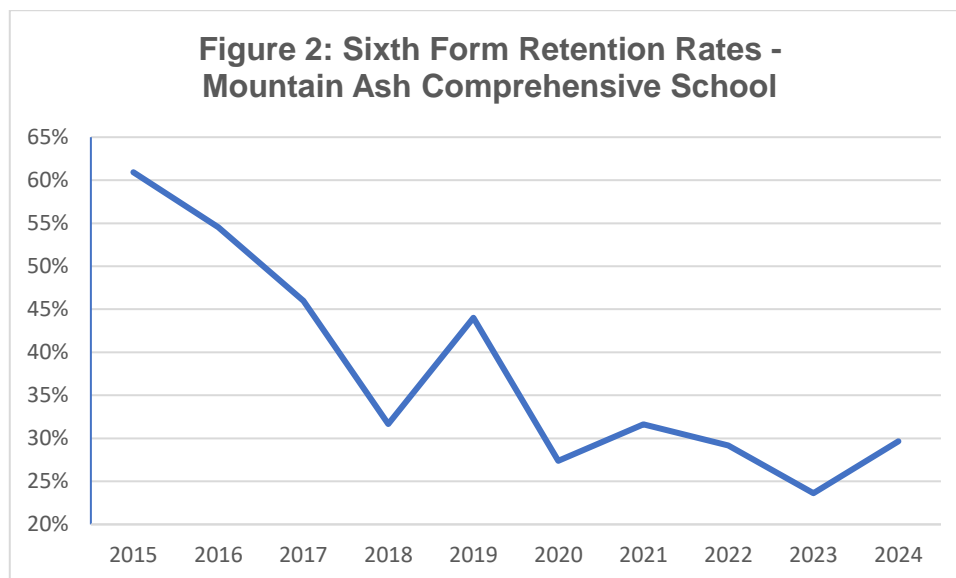
- The number of statutory school age pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has remained broadly consistent, increasing by 1.6% (14) from 885 to 899.
- The number of sixth form pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has decreased by 6.8% (6) from 88 to 82.
- The total number of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

Figure 1 shows the sixth form pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School 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 2014/15 to 82 in 2023/24.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School 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 2014/15 to 29.7% in 2023/24.

During the 2023/2024 academic year, 899 statutory school age pupils attended Mountain Ash Comprehensive School. Table 2 below outlines the number of statutory school age pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School by their catchment secondary school.

Table 2: Number of statutory school age pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School by catchment school

Catchment secondary school	Number of statutory school age pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	Number of post 16 pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	778	74
Aberdare Community School	104	7
None (Out of County pupils)	12	1
Pontypridd High School	4	
Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School	1	
Total	899	82

The data demonstrates that:

- 86.5% (778) of statutory school aged pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School live in the school's catchment area.

- 13.5% (121) of statutory school age pupils attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School live outside of the school's catchment area.
- The school with the highest percentage of statutory school aged pupils who are attending Mountain Ash Comprehensive School rather than their catchment school is Aberdare Community School with 11.6% (104).

Table 3 below outlines the projected statutory school age and sixth form pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School 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.

Table 3: Projected pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School over the next five academic years									
Pupils	Capacity	Academic Year						Total Surplus Capacity in 2028/29	
		Actual	Projections						
		2023/24 (PLASC)	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29		
		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 2028/29 academic year, there is projected to be surplus capacity of 32.6% (455 places) at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.

It is also pertinent to mention however that the pupil projection numbers in Table 3 were calculated prior to the start of the current academic year. Actual pupil numbers for 2024/25 are now known, and as of October 2024, there were only 72 sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, significantly (20%) lower than the projected figure of 90. Of these 30 pupils are in year 12 and 42 are in year 13.

Information received from the school confirms that for the 2023/24 academic year, Mountain Ash Comprehensive School delivered 11 sixth form subject options for year 12 pupils and 10 for year 13 pupils. This is the lowest number of subject options offered out of the three schools involved in the consortia arrangements.

Where We Are Now... Aberdare Community School

Aberdare Community School is an 11 to 19 English medium secondary school located on Ynys Road, Aberdare, with a pupil capacity of 1,574. Aberdare Community School was part of a wider leisure and education investment locally, which saw the nearby Sobell Leisure Centre receive significant investment for school and community use.

As Aberdare Community School is a new school, constructed in 2014, it is graded A for condition and A for suitability. The building has been built to meet the required standards and regulations, delivering a 21st century teaching and learning environment.

The school site and building are fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

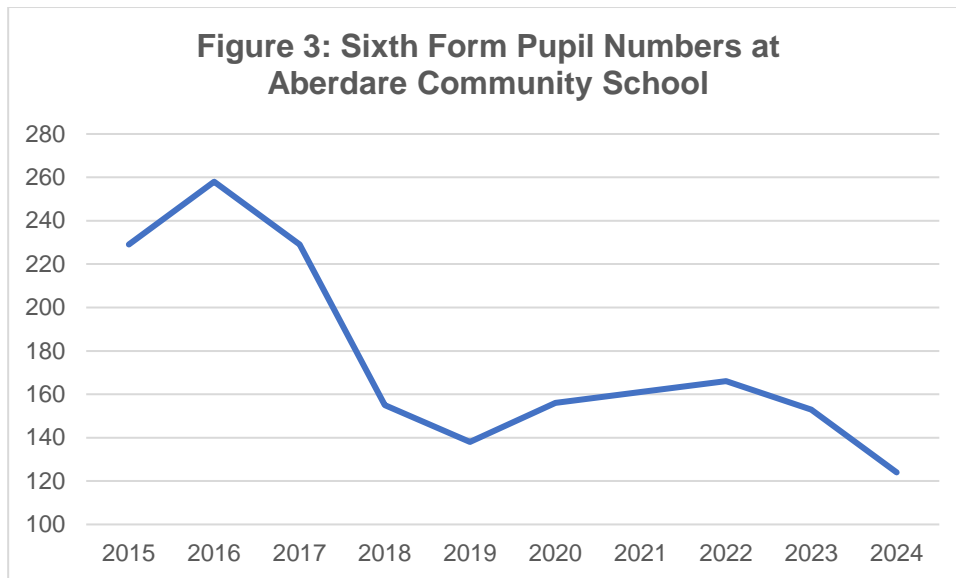
PLASC data indicates that there were 1,161 statutory school age pupils and 124 sixth form pupils attending Aberdare Community School in January 2024. Table 4 outlines the pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School over the last five academic years. The number of sixth form pupils for each academic year is shown separately.

Table 4: Actual pupil numbers at Aberdare Community School over the last five academic years (PLASC data)					
Pupils	Academic Year				
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Statutory school age pupils (Year 7-11)	1,139	1,148	1,152	1,155	1,161
Sixth form pupils	156	161	166	153	124
Total	1,295	1,309	1,318	1,308	1,285

The data demonstrates that between the academic years 2019/20 and 2023/24:

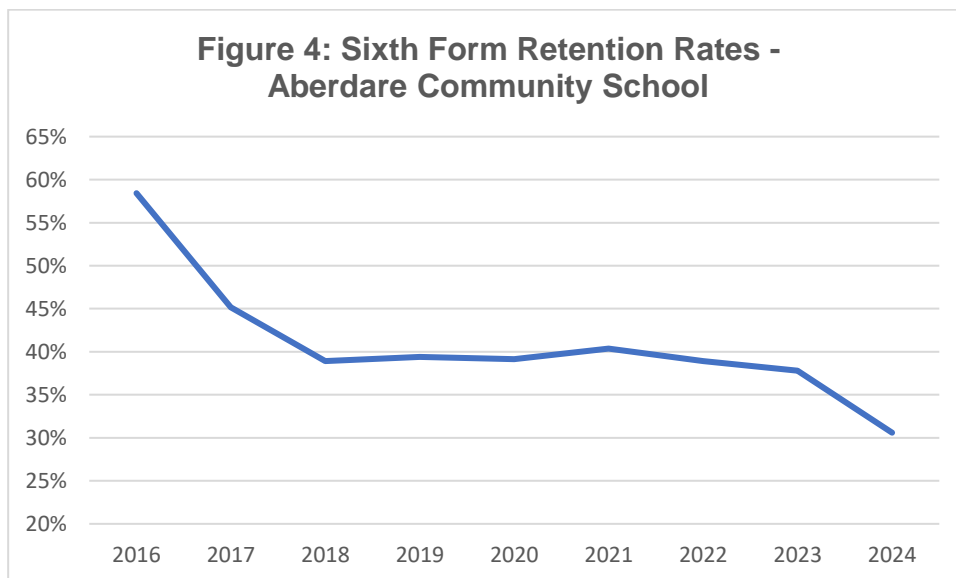
- The number of statutory school age pupils attending Aberdare Community School has remained broadly consistent, increasing by 1.9% (22) from 1,139 to 1,161.
- The number of sixth form pupils attending Aberdare Community School has decreased significantly by 20.5% (32) from 156 to 124.
- The total number of pupils attending Aberdare Community School has remained consistent, decreasing by 0.8% (10) from 1,295 to 1,285.

Figure 3 shows the number of sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School over the last ten years.



The graph illustrates that during this time, the number of sixth form pupils has fallen sharply by 46% (105) from 229 in 2014/15 to 124 in 2023/24.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form at Aberdare Community School since the school opened.



The graph shows that during this time, the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form has fallen significantly from 58.4% in 2015/16 to 30.6% in 2023/24.

During the 2023/24 academic year, 1,161 statutory school age pupils attended Aberdare Community School. Table 5 outlines the number of statutory school age pupils attending Aberdare Community School by their catchment secondary school.

Table 5: Number of statutory school age pupils attending Aberdare Community School by catchment school

Catchment secondary school	Number of statutory school age pupils attending Aberdare Community School	Number of post 16 pupils attending Aberdare Community School
Aberdare Community School	1,110	118
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	33	2
None (Out of County pupils)	15	4
Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School	1	
Ferndale Community School	1	
Treorchy Comprehensive School	1	
Total	1,161	124

The data demonstrates that:

- 95.6% (1,110) of statutory school aged pupils attending Aberdare Community School live in the school's catchment area.
- 4.4% (51) of statutory school age pupils attending Aberdare Community School live outside of the school's catchment area.
- The school with the highest percentage of statutory school aged pupils who are attending Aberdare Community School rather than their catchment school is Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with 2.8% (33).

Table 6 outlines the projected statutory school age and sixth form pupil numbers at Aberdare Community School 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.

Table 6: Projected pupil numbers at Aberdare Community School over the next five academic years

Academic years									
Pupils	Capacity	Academic Year						Total Surplus capacity in 2028/29	
		Actual	Projections						
		2023/24 (PLASC)	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	Number	%
Statutory school age pupils	1,574	1,161	1,147	1,138	1,113	1,114	1,111		
Sixth form pupils		124	124	135	141	135	133		
Total	1,574	1,285	1,271	1,273	1,254	1,249	1,244	330	21.0%

- The data demonstrates that by the academic year 2028/29, there is projected to be surplus capacity of 21.0% at Aberdare Community School.

It is also pertinent to mention that the pupil projection numbers in Table 6 were calculated prior to the start of the current academic year. Actual pupil numbers for 2024/25 are now known, and as of October 2024, there were 119 sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School, slightly lower than projected. Of these 63 are in year 12 and 56 are in year 13.

For the 2023/24 academic year, Aberdare Community School offered 15 subject options for year 12 pupils and 16 options for year 13 pupils. This is a considerably larger offer than that offered at Mountain Ash Community School as detailed above.

Where We Are Now ... English Medium Post-16 Provision in the Cynon Valley

The expectations for the current 16-19 Curriculum in Wales are set out in legislation, through the Learning and Skills Act (2000), the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 and associated guidance. Within each local authority, a curriculum offer should contain a minimum of 30 eligible courses approved by Qualifications Wales at level 3, comprising of different elements but with a minimum of five general courses and five vocational courses from the following five learning domains: mathematics, science and technology; business, administration and law; services for people; arts, media, culture and languages; and humanities, social sciences and preparation for life and work.

In response to this, and to address the financial pressures of small sixth form pupil numbers, strong collaborative arrangements have been established between the English medium secondary schools in the Cynon Valley to ensure the effective delivery of a broad and balanced post-16 curriculum offer. The Cynon Valley Post-16 Consortium comprises Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, Aberdare Community School and St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School.

The full range of post-16 courses delivered across the three schools is available to all pupils, with pupils travelling between school sites, as necessary. Whilst Mountain Ash Comprehensive School provides a small number of subject choices as part of the collaborative offer, it relies heavily on the other schools for access to many post-16 subject choices as the school(s) with the largest demand generally run the course.

At the start of the 2023/24 academic year, 84 sixth form pupils attended Mountain Ash Comprehensive School. Of these:

- 29 (35%) had single registration status, meaning they received all their post-16 education at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
- 55 (65%) had dual registration status, meaning they received some of their post-16 education at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and some at another school. Specifically:
 - 24 pupils whose main school was Mountain Ash Comprehensive School received some of their post-16 education at Aberdare Community School.
 - 21 pupils whose main school was Mountain Ash Comprehensive School received some of their post-16 education at St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School.

- 10 pupils whose main school was Mountain Ash Comprehensive School received some of their post-16 education at both Aberdare Community School and St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School.

At the start of the 2023/24 academic year, 125 sixth form pupils attended Aberdare Community School. Of these:

- 88 (70%) had single registration status, meaning they received all their post-16 education at Aberdare Community School.
- 37 (30%) had dual registration status, meaning they received some of their post-16 education at Aberdare Community School and some at another school. Specifically:
 - 18 pupils whose main school was Aberdare Community School received some of their post-16 education at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
 - 15 pupils whose main school was Aberdare Community School received some of their post-16 education at St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School.
 - 4 pupils whose main school was Aberdare Community School received some of their post-16 education at both Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School.

It is evident that the majority (65%) of sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School already travel to other schools in the area to access some of their education, whilst the equivalent figure for Aberdare Community School is lower at 30%.

Basis for the Proposal

This consultation has been developed following discussions between RCTCBC and the Mountain Ash Comprehensive School. In addition, correspondence was received by RCTCBC's Director of Education and Inclusion Services from the Governing Body of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School expressing shared concerns regarding the viability and sustainability of the sixth form provision at the school, and a request for RCTCBC to undertake a review.

RCTCBC has a statutory duty, through its approach to the organisation and leadership arrangements of schools, to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to ensure that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of the community and makes best use of public funding.

RCTCBC's school modernisation programme has been successfully making excellent progress in modernising its school estate, meeting and rationalising demand for school places, delivering efficiencies, and ensuring the education portfolio is in the best possible position to deliver positive educational outcomes and to help RCTCBC deliver on its carbon reduction targets.

The data provided in this Consultation Document so far has shown that at both Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School, sixth form pupil numbers have fallen drastically over the last decade, with fewer year 11 pupils choosing to return to the schools for post-16 provision.

In 2014/15, there were 144 sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and 229 sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School; a total of 373 sixth form pupils across both schools. In 2023/24, there were 82 sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and 124 sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School; a total of 206 sixth form pupils across both schools. Over the last ten years, the combined number of sixth form pupils has therefore fallen by 45% (167).

It is also pertinent to mention that the pupil projection numbers in Table 3 and Table 6 were calculated prior to the start of the current academic year. Actual pupil numbers for 2024/25 are now known, and as of October 2024, there were 119 sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School, hence the projection was slightly above the actual number on roll. However, there were only 72 sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, significantly (20%) lower than the projected figure of 90.

Low sixth form pupil numbers such as these restrict the range of post-16 courses that schools can offer, and often result in small class sizes. Delivering post-16 provision in this way is not cost effective and results in schools diverting funding intended for the education of statutory age pupils (years 7 to 11) to meet the shortfall of providing post-16 provision. Small class sizes can also diminish the effectiveness of teaching and learning, as opportunities for pupils to interact with their peers are reduced. Further information on these financial and educational impacts is provided later in this document.

Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has worked very effectively with partner schools in the Cynon Valley Consortium to strengthen the breadth of the curriculum offer and the choice available to learners, and this is to be commended. However, maintaining the current arrangement would present significant budgetary challenges for both Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School in the longer term. Establishing one larger sixth form at Aberdare Community School would provide an extended range of offer and opportunities, improve the quality of the educational experience, and strengthen financial viability and sustainability moving forward in an environment of rapid change and increasing pressure to improve learning standards and opportunities.

Alternative Options Considered

In accordance with the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018), alternative options were identified and consciously considered. The benefits and disadvantages of each of the discounted options are listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Analysis of Alternative Options		
Option	Benefit	Disadvantages
Retain the status quo – continue to offer sixth form provision at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No disruption to pupils, parents/carers and staff. • No increase to cost of home to school transport provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-16 provision would remain financially unviable, hence funding intended for statutory age pupils would continue to be diverted to subsidise the cost of delivering post-16 provision.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low pupil number and small class sizes provide limited opportunities for pupil interactions, diminishing the effectiveness of teaching and learning and diluting the sixth form experience. • The majority of pupils would continue to need to travel between school sites to access courses, reducing independent study time.
Federate Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School under one headteacher and one Governing Body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education provision would continue at each school site. • Opportunities for sharing staff expertise and good practice would increase. • Minimum disruption to pupils, parents/carers and staff. • No increase to cost of home to school transport provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-16 provision would remain financially unviable, hence funding intended for statutory age pupils would continue to be diverted to subsidise the cost of delivering post-16 provision. • Managing split sites would be challenging and could potentially incur some additional leadership costs. • Negligible financial savings would be realised. • Impact upon staff as not all roles undertaken at both sites would be required.
Remove sixth form provision from both Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The financial benefits of not delivering post-16 provision would be realised across both school sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils would need to travel further to access post 16 provision. • The cost of home to transport would increase. • Greater impact upon staff as some posts at both schools would no longer be required.

Benefits and Disadvantages, Risks and Mitigation Factors

Any proposal involving school reorganisation will inevitably cause some disruption and uncertainty, although experience shows this can be kept to a minimum through meaningful engagement throughout this statutory school organisation consultation process, and if a decision is made to progress the proposal, throughout the implementation process.

Table 8 sets out the benefits and disadvantages of the proposal, along with details of any potential risks and how these can be mitigated.

Table 8: Benefits, Disadvantages, Risks and Mitigation Factors

Benefits			
One larger sixth form would be established, enabling more cost-effective delivery of post-16 provision.			
A more enhanced post-16 curriculum offer would be delivered, including a comprehensive range of vocational and A level courses.			
All pupils at both schools would benefit from this proposal as resources currently used to subsidise post-16 education would be redirected for the benefit of 11 to 16 year old learners accessing statutory education.			
The improved curriculum offer would create greater choice for all young people to select the most appropriate learning pathways that best meet their vocational and/or academic needs, leading to improved outcomes.			
Removal of the sixth at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School would provide greater educational and financial stability, benefitting learners within years 7-11 and improving educational outcomes at both Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School.			
Bigger post-16 class sizes would be more financially viable and provide more opportunities for valuable pupil interactions. Small class sizes leads to limited student interactions, which diminishes the effectiveness of learning. Larger class sizes reduce inefficiencies and improve effectiveness, as learner opportunities and student interactions increase.			
A wider curriculum offer is likely to encourage more year 11 pupils to return to sixth form and result in greater engagement and increased progression to higher education, employment and training.			
There could be an increase in post-16 participation as it is anticipated that all sixth form pupils living in the Mountain Ash Comprehensive School catchment area would be entitled to free home to school transport to Aberdare Community School, which could act as an incentive.			
Less travelling between sites would provide pupils with more time to engage in independent learning and promote a more positive post-16 experience and a greater sense of belonging.			
More post-16 pupils would have the opportunity to benefit from the 21 st Century teaching environment at Aberdare Community School.			
There would be enhanced leadership opportunities for staff wishing to specialise within post-16 education, and more opportunities for staff to share skills and expertise across larger teams.			
Disadvantages			
Some pupils may initially be daunted at the prospect of moving to a new school on a new site to complete their post-16 studies. However, should the proposal proceed, there would be targeted support for all affected pupils from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School. This is supported by providing effective pastoral and academic support and structured opportunities for pupils to become familiar with the new school environment and staff.			
Pupils would need to travel further to attend school at the start and end of the school day.			
The cost to RCTCBC of providing home to school transport would increase as it is anticipated that all sixth form pupils living in the Mountain Ash Comprehensive School catchment area would be entitled to free home to school transport to Aberdare Community School.			
Risks	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating Action(s)
Staffing Structure – Some posts at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School would potentially be no longer required following	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RCTCBC has well established HR policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change.

implementation of the proposal.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCTCBC's HR Team would visit all staff at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and make them are aware of the processes that may follow and the operational and personal support available. • RCTCBC would recommend that any additional posts created at Aberdare Community School are ring-fenced for Mountain Ash Comprehensive School staff affected by the proposal.
Increased Traffic – Increased traffic movements on the roads as a result of the proposal.	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be capacity in the local network to cope with an increase in traffic movements. As part of the significant investment at Aberdare Community School there was a particular focus on enhancing the on-site and off-site traffic management arrangements, including improved staff parking and the creation of a dedicated home to school transport drop-off area. • Increased traffic movements should be kept to a minimum as it is anticipated that the majority of sixth form pupils in the Mountain Ash Comprehensive School catchment area would be entitled to free home to school transport to Aberdare Community School.
Community Impact – the removal of the sixth form has a negative impact on the local community.	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the proposal proceed, the existing Mountain Ash Comprehensive School site will continue to deliver secondary education for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. As such, any community impact is likely to be relatively small. • As set out in the WG's <u>School Organisation Code (2nd Edition)</u> (011/2018), it is a

			requirement to publish a Community Impact Assessment. This has been produced and is appended to this Consultation Document. It is also available on RCTCBC's website.
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Where We'd Like To Be...

Based on the information set out in this Consultation Document, RCTCBC is proposing to close the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with sixth form pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School. It is proposed that the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School closes by no later than September 2026. To enable the closure of the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School by this date, no new year 12 sixth form pupils would be admitted in September 2025. Those pupils currently in the sixth form would continue their studies at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School under the existing arrangements.

Implementing this proposal would allow RCTCBC to replace two small, inefficient sixth forms with one larger, more sustainable provision offering a broader curriculum offer. This would have a positive financial impact on both schools. The Cynon Valley Post-16 Consortium arrangements would continue between Aberdare Community School and St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School, to ensure that pupils have access to the widest possible course choice. However, it is anticipated that the need for pupils to travel between sites during the school day would be far reduced, given the wide range of courses that would be on offer at each school.

Table 9 includes the projected statutory school age and sixth form pupil numbers at Aberdare Community School, along with the projected sixth form pupil numbers at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, 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.

Table 9: Projected pupil numbers over the next five years – Aberdare Community School and Mountain Ash Comprehensive School (Sixth form only)									
Pupils	Capacity (ACS)	Academic Year						Surplus capacity in 2028/29	
		Actual	Projections						
		2023/24 (PLASC)	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	No.	%
	Statutory school age pupils (ACS)	1.574	1,161	1,147	1,138	1,113	1,114	1,111	
Sixth form pupils (ACS)	124		124	135	141	135	133		
Sixth form		82	90	84	80	78	82		

pupils (MACS)									
Total	1,574	1,367	1,361	1,357	1,334	1,327	1,326	248	15.8%

The data demonstrates that:

- There is sufficient capacity at Aberdare Community School to accommodate all prospective sixth form pupils of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School.
- The projected surplus capacity at Aberdare Community School would reduce from 21.0% (see Table 6) to 15.8% if the proposal is implemented.

Images of Aberdare Community School

Images of Aberdare Community School are included below.



External view of Aberdare Community School.



Internal view at Aberdare Community School.



Internal view at Aberdare Community School.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Provision

There are currently no Learning Support Classes (LSC's) at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, however establishing a new LSC is the focus of an ongoing statutory consultation. There are two ALN LSC's for autistic spectrum disorder at Aberdare Community School. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has 25 statutory school age pupils with ALN and no sixth form pupils with ALN, whilst Aberdare Community School has 73 statutory school age pupils with ALN and two sixth form pupils with ALN, seven of which have physical needs. Should the proposal proceed, support for pupils provided by RCTCBC's Access and Inclusion Service Team would continue and would not be affected.

Aberdare Community School was built in accordance with Building Bulletin 99 and is fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010, including having provisions such as hygiene rooms for those who require them. The ALN and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 requires Councils to keep arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area under review and consider whether they are sufficient. As such, the need for any additional ALN LSC's at Aberdare Community School will continue to be reviewed and, should there be a need for more in the future, there would be sufficient capacity at Aberdare Community School to accommodate this.

Aberdare Community School has been designed with flexible spaces to allow opportunities for teaching and learning in smaller groups, intervention spaces, and to provide one-to-one support where required.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

All Councils in Wales must produce a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The WESP is a long-term language planning tool which sets the direction for the strategic planning, delivery and growth in Welsh medium and Welsh language education. Through the WESP, and effective strategic planning and investment, RCTCBC aims to contribute significantly to achieving the vision of one million people in Wales being Welsh speakers by 2050 as set out in the WG's Cymraeg 2050. RCTCBC's WESP can be viewed and downloaded from RCTCBC's website via the following link:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/SchoolsandLearning/SchoolAdmissions/relateddocuments/WESPJune2022.pdf>

There are seven outcomes within RCTCBC's WESP which will help RCTCBC to achieve the targets set. These include:

- More pupils continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another.
- More pupils study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh.
- More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school.

RCTCBC aims to embed positive habits and attitudes towards the Welsh language through purposeful planning to promote the informal use the Welsh language amongst pupils inside and outside school. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School support this aim by participating in initiatives such as 'Criw Cymraeg,' and both Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School encourage pupils to use incidental Welsh wherever possible.

As set out in the WG's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018), it is a requirement to publish a Welsh Language Impact Assessment. This has been produced and is appended to this Consultation Document. It is also available on RCTCBC's website.

Admission Arrangements

Schools manage their own admissions for sixth form provision and determine the entry criteria. RCTCBC sets the catchment areas for the sixth form provision in order to determine which students will be eligible for home to school transport. As is the case at present, students have the choice of continuing to study in their catchment sixth form or studying at Coleg Y Cymoedd that offers a wide academic and vocational curriculum. This choice will remain should these proposals be implemented.

Section Two – The Likely Impact of the Proposal

Educational Case of the Proposal

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

As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 3 earlier in this document, PLASC data demonstrates that in 2014/15, there were 144 sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and 229 sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School; a total of 373 sixth form pupils across both schools. In 2023/24, there were just 82 sixth form pupils at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and 124 sixth form pupils at Aberdare Community School; a total of 206 sixth form pupils across both schools. Over the last ten years, the combined number of sixth form pupils has therefore fallen by 45% (167).

Rationalising the small sixth forms that now exist at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School would better meet the educational needs of pupils by strengthening management arrangements, improving the efficient use of resources in turn delivering a broader curriculum offer enhancing the quality of educational experience.

The small post-16 class sizes found in both schools are not cost effective, and can lead to limited pupil interactions, which can diminish the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In the 2023/24 academic year, nine courses were delivered at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and six courses were run at Aberdare Community School with less than five pupils per course.

Strong collaborative arrangements have been established between the schools in the Cynon Valley to ensure the effective delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum offer at post-16. The small pupil numbers in Mountain Ash Comprehensive School have meant that they rely heavily on the other schools for access to many post-16 subject choices, as the school(s) with the largest demand generally run the course. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School does, however, provide a small number of subject choices as part of the collaborative offer.

This quality of education experience for pupils is also impacting on the numbers of pupils continuing their post-16 education. Figure 2, earlier in this document, shows that over the last decade, the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has more than halved from 60.9% in 2014/15 to 29.7% in 2023/24, whilst Figure 4 shows that the percentage of year 11 pupils returning to sixth form at Aberdare Community School has also fallen significantly from 58.4% in 2015/16 to 30.6% in 2023/24.

Under current arrangements, some post 16-learners access their education across three school sites which impacts upon valuable study time. The extensive travel involved in accessing post-16 courses across multiple school sites could be a

potential barrier to learners progressing into post-16 education within the school setting, adversely impacting upon retention and progression into Further and Higher Education.

All pupils at both schools would benefit from this proposal as resources currently used to subsidise post-16 education would be redirected for the benefit of 11 to 16 year old learners accessing statutory education.

Likely Impact on Pupils of the Proposal

It is anticipated that the proposed changes would not have a long term, adverse impact on pupils and it should be noted at this point in the statutory school organisation consultation process that RCTCBC considers the overall impact of the proposal on pupils to be positive. Understandably, some pupils may initially be daunted at the prospect of moving to a new school on a new site. However, should the proposal proceed, there would be targeted support for all sixth form pupils from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School. This would be supported by providing effective pastoral and academic support and structured opportunities for pupils to become familiar with the new school environment and staff.

Advice and support would be provided by RCTCBC to staff from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Aberdare Community School to ensure that the transition process was as smooth and seamless as possible.

RCTCBC considers that providing post-16 education for pupils who previously attended Mountain Ash Comprehensive School in a 21st century learning environment would, amongst other benefits, offer sixth form pupils access to a school:

- Designed with 'break out areas' for learning, independent from the classrooms and within carefully designed corridor spaces.
- That is Wi-Fi connected and utilises modern technology through iPad-equipped rooms enabling tablet-driven learning in internet cafes.
- That has a recording studio, an open area with a giant projector, a gym and a dance area.

Small sixth forms are financially unviable and, where they exist, resources intended for statutory school age learners are redirected to subsidise the post-16 provision. This is unsustainable and impacts upon the educational offer for younger learners and presents the schools with significant budgetary challenges. As a result, this proposal will also improve the 11-16 provision at both schools as the resources available for the statutory aged pupils will be increased given the improvements to the financial viability of both provisions.

The WG and RCTCBC have adopted the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which is expressed in seven core aims that state that all children and young people have a right to:

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. Be 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. Not be disadvantaged by poverty.

RCTCBC considers that this proposal benefits children and young people in accordance with the seven core aims set out above.

As set out in the WG's [School Organisation Code \(2nd Edition\) \(011/2018\)](#), it is a requirement to publish an Equality Impact Assessment and Community Impact Assessment. These have been produced and are appended to this Consultation Document. They are also available on RCTCBC's website. Further information relating to the impact of the proposal on pupils can be found in these impact assessments.

Likely Impact on Staff of the Proposal

Should the proposal proceed, it is RCTCBC's intention to recommend to the Governing Body of Aberdare Community School that any additional posts required as a result of increased post-16 pupil numbers, below senior leadership level, are ringfenced to the existing staff employed at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, in the first instance. This process means that staff at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School would be given the first opportunity to apply for additional posts in Aberdare Community School, prior to any posts being advertised externally. If they are successful, they would then simply transfer to Aberdare Community School when the proposal is implemented. RCTCBC has well established HR policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change. RCTCBC's HR Team would visit all staff in Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and make them aware of the processes that may follow and the operational and personal support that is available.

Estyn Information

Mountain Ash Comprehensive School was inspected by Estyn in November 2018. At that point in time, the judgements for the key inspection areas were as follows:

Inspection Area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning	Adequate and needs improvement
Teaching and Learning Experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, Support and Guidance	Good
Leadership and Management	Adequate and needs improvement

Estyn also set out recommendations for Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to implement in order to make improvements to the quality of education provision on offer. Estyn's recommendations were as follows:

Recommendations	
1.	Improve the progress that all pupils make in lessons, including in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.
2.	Improve pupils' resilience in learning, and their behaviour in lessons and around the school.
3.	Improve the quality of teaching.
4.	Improve the quality and impact of self-evaluation and improvement planning.
5.	Improve communication and engagement with parents/carers.
6.	Manage finances robustly to address the budget deficit.

As a result of the Estyn inspection in November 2018, it was the view of Estyn that the non-statutory category of Estyn review was required in relation to Mountain Ash Comprehensive School. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School drew up a Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) to demonstrate how it was going to address the recommendations set out by Estyn. Following termly monitoring by the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service (CSCJES) and RCTCBC, in March 2021, Mountain Ash Comprehensive School was judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations set out. As such, Estyn removed Mountain Ash Comprehensive School from the list of schools requiring the non-statutory category of Estyn review.

Aberdare Community School was inspected by Estyn in March 2018.

At that point in time, the judgements for the key inspection areas were as follows:

Inspection Area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Teaching and Learning Experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, Support and Guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and Management	Adequate and needs improvement

Estyn also set out recommendations for Aberdare Community School to implement in order to make improvements to the quality of education provision on offer. Estyn's recommendations were as follows:

Recommendations	
1.	Improve attendance and behaviour.
2.	Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment.
3.	Improve pupil standards and progress.
4.	Improve the rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning.

As a result of the Estyn inspection in March 2018, it was the view of Estyn that significant improvement was required in relation to Aberdare Community School. Aberdare Community School drew up PIAP to demonstrate how it was going to address the recommendations set out by Estyn. Following termly monitoring by the CSCJES and RCTCBC, in October 2021, Aberdare Community School was judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations set out. As such,

Estyn removed Aberdare Community School from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

It is RCTCBC's view that the proposal to close the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School by no later than September 2026, could have a major positive impact on all five Estyn inspection areas, as detailed below:

1. **Standards (Learning) (Teaching and Learning)** – Larger sixth forms have more potential for economies of scale and financial efficiencies which can accrue and be reinvested for the benefit of all pupils. Larger sixth forms also enable a broad and balanced post-16 education to pupils that better meets the needs of individual pupils and as such could improve pupil outcomes.
2. **Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning (Wellbeing, Care, Support and Guidance)** – Moving sixth form pupils from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to Aberdare Community School would create more social interaction opportunities have a positive impact on pupil wellbeing. There could also be greater flexibility for pupils due to an extended, more enhanced educational environment in which to learn and grow.
3. **Teaching and Learning Experiences (Teaching and Learning)** – Moving pupils from Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to create a larger sixth form at Aberdare Community School would increase opportunities for interaction, coordination and the sharing of expertise and experience. A 21st century learning environment would also provide greater flexibility and therefore greater choice and variety in pupils' learning experiences.
4. **Care, Support and Guidance (Wellbeing, Care, Support and Guidance)** – The 21st century learning environment at Aberdare Community School could provide opportunities for the sixth form pupils of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to further develop a wide range of extra-curricular activities to encourage healthy lifestyles. Aberdare Community School has a large, purposeful area specifically for sixth form pupils that supports individual learning and encourages enhancement of social skills. A fully accessible building and the provision of flexible spaces allows Aberdare Community School to extend its good practice and facilitate further interventions, including ways to nurture pupils as well as continued engagement with families and the local community.
5. **Leadership (and Management) (Leading and Improvement)** – It is important that leadership in schools is supported by fit for purpose resources that are appropriate for education in the 21st century. All pupils would benefit from suitable and stimulating areas in which to learn and the appropriate resources and equipment a 21st century learning environment offers. A school with a larger sixth form would provide more professional and progression opportunities for the teaching and support staff and greater scope for distributed models of leadership.

Financial Implications of the Proposal

Under the current arrangements, the delivery of post-16 education is inefficient and for many learners the subject offer could be improved. There is unnecessary duplication of some post-16 courses between sixth forms, yet the post-16 course choice is restricted and class sizes in some subject areas are too small. This leads to valuable education funds being directed at additional staff costs and infrastructure when they could be better directed at the quality of education experience.

Small sixth forms are financially unviable and, where they exist, resources intended for statutory school age learners are redirected to subsidise the post-16 provision. For the current academic year, the shortfall between the funding allocated to and the actual cost of delivering post-16 provision is more than £125,000 at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and over £76,000 at Aberdare Community School. This is unsustainable, impacts on the educational offer for younger learners and presents the schools with significant budgetary challenges.

At the end of the 2023/2024 financial year, the outturn budget set by the respective Governing Bodies at both schools meant that Mountain Ash Comprehensive School had a surplus balance of around £175,000 and Aberdare Community School had a surplus balance of just under £500,000. However, schools are facing increased financial pressure from pay awards for staff, which are significantly more than the budget uplift provided to Local Government, as well as increased energy costs and other inflationary financial challenges. As a result, it is estimated that the surplus balances of both schools will be far reduced by the end of the 2024/2025 financial year; with Mountain Ash projected to have a surplus of around £9,000, and Aberdare Community School projected to have a surplus of around £166,000.

At present, the total funding allocation per pupil is £5,709 at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and £5,676 at Aberdare Community School. Should the proposal proceed, the estimated allocation per pupil would reduce marginally to £5,635 at Aberdare Community School and increase in Mountain Ash Comprehensive School to £5,775.

Implementing the proposal would not have any capital funding implications, and revenue savings accrued from the closure would be reinvested into supporting the education of children and young people in RCT. Any revenue implications, including the schools' delegated budgets and any potential increases in home to school transport costs, would be identified as the proposal was developed and incorporated into RCTCBC's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements.

Home to School Transport Provision

There is a statutory duty placed on all Councils in Wales to provide pupils with free transport to their nearest suitable school if they reside beyond safe 'walking distance' to that school. The term suitable school applies to the catchment area English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream primary school, secondary school or special school/class as appropriate. The law relating to safe 'walking distance' is defined as two miles for pupils of statutory school age receiving primary education and three miles for pupils of statutory school age (year 7 to 11) receiving secondary education.

Following a recent public consultation exercise, RCTCBC's Cabinet has determined that from September 2025:

- RCTCBC will maintain its current discretionary distance criteria for pupils receiving primary education and provide free home to school transport for all primary pupils residing **1.5 miles** or further from their nearest suitable school.

- RCTCBC will adopt the statutory distance criteria set out in the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 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.

Further information in relation to RCTCBC's Home to School Transport provision is available on the RCTCBC website.

Should the proposal proceed, it is highly likely that all sixth form pupils living in the catchment area of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School will be entitled to free home to school transport to attend post-16 provision at Aberdare Community School.

Land and Buildings Information

Should the proposal proceed, the existing Mountain Ash Comprehensive School site will continue to deliver secondary school education for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. As this is an initial statutory school organisation consultation process, no decisions have yet been made in respect of the future of some of the older buildings on the site. However, the viability and availability of the wider school site for other educational purposes would be explored, including but not limited to, identifying options to provide additional accommodation to alleviate escalating pressures with regard to special school pupil numbers.

Consultation Response Form

To comply with the legal duty under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and assist RCTCBC in reaching a decision on the proposal, it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions. Please note, any personal information given will not be shared and will only be used to provide you with feedback, should you request it. Any comments that could identify you will be anonymised in the Consultation Report produced. Completed Consultation Response Forms should be returned to:

Director of Education and Inclusion Services 21 st Century Schools Valleys Innovation Centre Navigation Park Abercynon CF45 4SN	OR	schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk
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The Proposal:

To close the sixth form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School for sixth form provision.

Do you agree with the proposal?	Yes		No		Not Sure	
	<i>Please tick</i>					

Please let us know the reasons for your choice.

Do you think the proposal could impact opportunities for people to use and promote the Welsh Language (positive or negative)?

Do you think the proposal in any way treats the Welsh Language less favourably than the English Language?

[illegible]

How could positive effects on the Welsh Language be increased, or negative effects be decreased?

[illegible]

Please state any alternative views or points which you would like to be considered (attach additional sheets if necessary).

[illegible]

Please indicate who you are (e.g. parent/carer of a pupil at named school(s), Governor at named school(s), etc).

Name (optional):

Please provide contact details if you wish to be notified of the publication of the Consultation Report.

Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than 17:00 on 17th January 2025.

RCTCBC is committed to keeping your personal information safe and secure and keeping you informed about how we use your information. To learn about how your privacy is protected and how and why we use your personal information to provide you with services, please visit our Consultation Privacy Notice:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/DataProtectionandFreedomofInformation/DataProtection/serviceprivacynotices/ChiefExecutives/ConsultationPrivacyNotice.aspx>

and

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/DataProtectionandFreedomofInformation/DataProtection/DataProtection.aspx>

Equality Monitoring Form

The Council is committed to the principle of equal opportunities and having a clear picture of the equality profile of our residents can help monitor the effectiveness of our equal opportunities policies and procedures. We conduct monitoring in order to identify gaps in access to our services, and make targeted changes where gaps are identified. Data is only used to improve services, and in reporting. You are entirely free to decide whether or not to complete this form and there are no consequences of failing to do so. We do not intend on capturing any personal identifiable information through this form. Please be mindful of this in the responses you provide within the free text areas. In the instance where you do provide us with information about yourself or others, the Council will ensure it will be processed in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and only used for monitoring and reporting purposes. Please see links below:

www.rctcbc.gov.uk/serviceprivacynotice

www.rctcbc.gov.uk/dataprotection

Age

1. How old are you?

- ☐ 16-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Sex

2. Are you:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

A question on Gender Identity will be asked later.

Gender Identity

3. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, please write in your gender: _____
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Sexual Orientation

4. Which of the follow best describes your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay man
- ☐ Gay woman/Lesbian
- ☐ Heterosexual/Straight
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If you prefer to use your own term, please provide this here:

National Identity

5. How would you describe your national identity?

- ☐ British
- ☐ Cornish
- ☐ English
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Northern Irish
- ☐ Scottish
- ☐ Welsh
- ☐ Other (please describe): _____
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Ethnicity

6. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Asian: British
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Chinese
- ☐ Asian: Cornish
- ☐ Asian: English
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Indian
- ☐ Asian: Irish
- ☐ Asian: Northern Irish
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
- ☐ Asian: Scottish
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Other East Asian
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Other South Asian
- ☐ Asian: Welsh
- ☐ Asian or Asian British: Other (please describe): _____

- ☐ Black: British
- ☐ Black or Black British: African
- ☐ Black or Black British: Caribbean
- ☐ Black: Cornish
- ☐ Black: English
- ☐ Black: Irish
- ☐ Black: Northern Irish
- ☐ Black: Scottish
- ☐ Black: Welsh
- ☐ Black, Black British or Black African: Other (please describe): _____

- ☐ English Gypsy
- ☐ Irish Gypsy
- ☐ Irish Traveller
- ☐ Scottish Gypsy
- ☐ Scottish Traveller
- ☐ Welsh Gypsy

- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: African & Caribbean
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: Black British and White
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: Black African & White
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: Black Caribbean & White
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: East Asian & White
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: South Asian & White
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple: Other (please describe): _____

- ☐ Roma
- ☐ Sinti

- ☐ White: British
- ☐ White: Cornish
- ☐ White: English
- ☐ White: Gypsy
- ☐ White: Irish
- ☐ White: Irish Traveller
- ☐ White: Northern Irish
- ☐ White: Scottish
- ☐ White: Welsh
- ☐ White: Other (please describe): _____

- ☐ Prefer not to say

If other Ethnic Group or if you would prefer to use your own definition, please specify: _____

Disability

7. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

'The definition of disability as defined under the Equality Act (2010) is '*a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial or long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out day-to-day activities*'.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Religion or belief

8. What is your religion or belief?

- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Christian (including Church of Wales, Catholic, Protestant and all other denominations)
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Non-religious (e.g. Atheist, Humanist etc.)
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If other Religion or Belief, or if you prefer to use your own definition, please provide this here: _____

Caring Responsibilities

9. Do you look after, or support family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: a long term physical or mental condition/disability or problems related to old age?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, 1-19 hours a week
- ☐ Yes, 20-49 hours a week
- ☐ Yes, 50 or more hours a week
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Pregnancy and maternity

10. Are you currently pregnant, or have you been pregnant within the last 12 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

11. Have you taken (or are you currently taking) maternity leave in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Veterans and Armed Forces

12. Have you ever, or are you currently, serving in the Armed Forces?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

- ☐ I do not wish to provide any of the information requested on this form.