

Estyn's response on a proposal to close Trallwng Infants' School with pupils transferring to Coedpenmaen Primary School

Introduction

This report has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals. Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer.

The proposal is to close Trallwng Infant School with pupils transferring to Coedpenmaen Primary School. The proposed change to take effect by no later than September 2025.

Summary/ Conclusion

Estyn considers that if enacted the proposal is likely maintain the standard of education provision for pupils who attend Coedpenmaen Primary, however the impact of the proposal on the learning of pupils who would have attended Trallwng Infant School is less clear.

Description and benefits

The local authority has set out a clear rationale for its proposal. This identifies fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo and how they will manage any risk.

Trallwng Infants' School is an English medium school with capacity for 105 pupils between 3 and 7 years of age. Coedpenmaen Primary School is a 3-11 English medium primary school with a capacity for 269 statutory school age pupils. The schools are approximately 0.2 miles apart. Pupils from Trallwng Infants' School transition to Coedpenmaen Primary School at Year 3.

The proposal highlights the decline in pupil numbers at Trallwng Infant School over the last five years and the resulting high proportion of surplus places. It estimates the probable proportion of surplus places at the school in 2028/29 to be 54%.

The local authority provides a clear description of the proposal and a projected timetable for statutory procedures, and for its implementation. The local authority has provided a Welsh language Impact Assessment and a Community Impact Assessment as part of its proposal.

While the local authority forecasts a slight decline in pupil numbers attending Coedpenmaen over the next four years, the current and projected surplus capacity at Coedpenmaen Primary School, based on 2023/24 PLASC data, indicates a lack of places to accommodate the pupils proposed to transfer from Trallwng Infant School in September 2025. In contrast, the proposal identifies that the local authority's projection of pupil numbers, based on live data, indicates that in 2025/26 Coedpenmaen Primary School will have capacity to admit all pupils transferring from Trallwng Infants' School.

Given the forecasts, and the proportion of pupils who attend Coedpenmaen Primary from out of catchment, the proposal argues reasonably that the local authority will be able to prioritise those pupils who currently attend Trallwng Infants' School and reside within the proposed catchment for Coedpenmaen Primary should the proposal proceed. However, the proposal does not make clear how admission arrangements may impact on the 40% of pupils currently attending Trallwng Infant School from outside of its catchment or provide an unequivocal assurance that all affected pupils will be able to transfer to Coedpenmaen Primary School if they so choose.

The local authority sets out three possible alternatives to its proposal, one of which is to maintain the status quo. It provides suitable reasons for rejecting this option and the option to federate both schools, largely on the grounds that neither option would address the need to rationalise demand for school places or deliver efficiencies that can be reinvested for the benefit of pupils. However, the local authority does not detail the potential financial savings that may be made from the proposal, nor does it demonstrate how these will be reinvested, other than to note that, should the proposal proceed, Coedpenmaen Primary School, will receive an increase in its funding as a result of the additional pupils on roll. The local authority has discounted a third option to close both schools and build a new primary school on a new site because of a lack of allocated funding and the unavailability of a suitable site in the locality.

The proposer has considered the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements. It notes rightly that, given the short distance between both schools, the impact on travel times is likely to be negligible. There is currently a safe walking route for the pupils of Trallwng Infant School to walk to Coedpenmaen Primary School. Given the proximity of the two schools, no pupils in the catchment area of Trallwng Infants' School would be entitled to free home to school transport.

The proposal takes account, in part, of the potential negative impact on staff currently working in Trallwng Infant School. It makes explicit the local authority's intention to request the governing body of Coedpenmaen School ringfence applications for any additional posts, below senior leadership level, for existing staff at Trallwng Infant School, in the first instance. In addition, it identifies that the local authority has well established policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change. However, the proposal does not detail clearly the scope and financial implication of the proposed change for staff currently employed in either school.

The proposal recognises the need to consider and, where possible, to mitigate the impact of the proposed closure of Trallwng Infant School on the wider community. At this stage, no decisions have been made regarding the future of the site and building. The proposal indicates that, should the site become redundant, one option may be to consult with the local community to ascertain whether there is a sustainable community need locally that can be successfully met and delivered from the site. This process will be managed in accordance with the local authority's policy on surplus land and buildings.

The local authority takes appropriate account of the impact of the proposal on Welsh medium provision within the local authority and the extent to which the proposal supports the targets in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The proposal notes that there is sufficient capacity in a nearby Welsh medium primary school to admit pupils from Trallwng Infant School who wish to attend Welsh medium primary education rather than to continue English medium education at Coedpenmaen Primary School.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposal refers specifically to the most recent inspection reports for both schools. It recognises that the inspection report for Trallwng Infant School was notably better than for Coedpenmaen Primary School when both schools last received a core inspection in the summer term of 2022. Coedpenmaen Primary School was placed into the statutory category of special measures with significant areas that required improvement, such as the effectiveness of leadership, stronger collaboration between staff, and improvements in teaching and the curriculum. While Estyn's visit in April 2024 identified that the school had made sufficient progress to be removed from Special Measures, it identifies the need to ensure that improvements in teaching are sustained in all classes.

The local authority gives limited consideration in its proposal to the impact of the changes on the quality and standards in education. For example, it summarises the perceived benefits for pupils and for staff, including a more seamless transition for pupils between Year 2 and Year 3 and greater opportunity for staff to develop professionally and to distribute responsibilities within a larger team. However, its

consideration of the impact on standards of learning focuses on 'economies of scale' and not on the likely impact of the proposal on pupils' standards and progress. Similarly, it does not address well the impact on leadership and management well. These are important oversights.

The proposal considers, in part, the impact on vulnerable groups, in particular those pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Neither school currently has an ALN learning support class. Numbers of pupils with identified ALN in both schools are low and the proposal fairly contends that support for pupils with ALN provided by the local authority's Access and Inclusion Service Team will continue and not be affected should the proposal proceed.

The local authority rightly identifies that the proposed changes would result in some disruption and adjustment for pupils, staff and the wider community. The proposal identifies suitable mitigations to limit the potential negative impact arising from the proposal or its implementation.