

Community Impact Assessment

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

Section 2.1 of the School Organisation Code – 2018 refers to elements of school reorganisation that require the publication of proposals. These include:

- The closing of a maintained school.

This proposal is to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School. The proposal will be achieved by all current pupils of Rhigos Primary School transferring to Hirwaun Primary School, and the catchment area of Hirwaun Primary School extending to include the existing catchment area of Rhigos Primary School. It is proposed that Rhigos Primary School will close with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School no later than September 2024.

The proposal is to be consulted on between 2nd October 2023 and 17th November 2023. A detailed Consultation Document has been circulated to all prescribed stakeholders. This Community Impact Assessment is an appendix of the main document.

The Proposal

The proposal is to close Rhigos Primary School, with all pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School. It is proposed that pupils who are in the Rhigos Primary School catchment area will instead go to Hirwaun Primary School, where there is a brand new 21st Century building and new facilities fit for the Curriculum for Wales. Hirwaun Primary School's catchment area would extend to include the current catchment area of Rhigos Primary School and would therefore cater for pupils aged 3 and 11 years of age requiring English medium education in the communities of Hirwaun and Rhigos.

Community Impact

It should be noted at this point in the consultation process Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) considers the overall community impact of the proposals is determined to be positive. This has been reassessed following the conclusion of the consultation period and the Community Impact Assessment updated accordingly.

The proposal will result in the pupils of Rhigos Primary School having the benefit of the fully accessible, brand new primary school in Hirwaun, which would provide an improved learning environment with first class facilities. The inclusion of community facilities within the new school building at Hirwaun Primary School, along with the sporting facilities available on the Hirwaun

Primary School site, ensure delivery of significantly improved opportunities for community engagement compared to the current arrangements at Rhigos Primary School. Nevertheless, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) acknowledges that it is likely that the closure of Rhigos Primary School will have an impact on the community of Rhigos and that some will feel this loss.

Schools are viewed as important buildings within a community regardless of the level of community interaction and the activities and events that take place there, and as such this impact on the local community is recognised as a part of this consultation process. To mitigate this loss, if the proposal progresses, RCTCBC will actively explore with residents' alternative community uses that could be developed for the vacant school site. This would then be the subject of a further report to Cabinet. A separate consultation exercise will be undertaken to seek the views of the local community should developing this site become a viable option.

Rhigos Primary School is located approximately 2.8 miles from Hirwaun Primary School. While the pupil number projections are estimated to remain relatively consistent over the next five years for Hirwaun Primary School, it is forecast that in five years' time the pupil numbers at Rhigos Primary School will continue to decrease, resulting in 43% surplus places. Rhigos Primary School currently has three mixed year-group classes, however, if they were to transfer to Hirwaun Primary School the pupils could benefit from being in larger classes with children their own age. RCTCBC considers that providing education for the pupils currently attending Rhigos Primary School in a larger, new, purpose built 21st Century English medium primary school at Hirwaun, amongst other benefits, would offer:

- Greater flexibility and opportunity for pupils within a modern, more enhanced educational environment in which they can learn and grow.
- Potential for financial savings in terms of services which accrue within a larger school which can be reinvested for the benefit of all pupils.
- More professional and progression opportunities for the teaching and support staff which are provided by a larger school.
- Less demand on staff as responsibilities for developing the Areas of Learning and Experience as part of the Curriculum for Wales, and additional learning needs (ALN) statutory obligations will be shared.
- More opportunities for extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils being taught, in the main, with their year group. All classes in Rhigos Primary School are currently mixed year groups, with some classes accommodating pupils over 3-year groups.
- Greater opportunities for learners to socialise and interact with larger numbers of their own year group peers.

The new school in Hirwaun has been designed to be a fully accessible school, increasing opportunities for the whole community to access the new facilities, to strengthen relationships and fully integrate the school into the community. A dedicated area has been designed within the school itself so that the local community will be allowed to safely utilise the facilities at the school, both during

and after the school day. These facilities would also be available to the Rhigos community if the proposal is successful.

The new school at Hirwaun was built in accordance with Building Bulletin 99, which requires new primary schools to include provision for team sports, including a playing field area suitable for team games for pupils and a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) for sports such as basketball and netball. New schools are also required to include soft play areas, commonly made up of grassed space for pupils to sit and socialise, alongside hard surfaced playgrounds and sheltered space to complement the soft play areas around the school site. The new school also includes a forest schools' area which acts as a space for outdoor learning and provide a valuable teaching and learning resource to deliver the Curriculum for Wales. The existing buildings at Rhigos Primary School require significant repairs, and the age and construction of the building prevent the school from receiving any significant upgrades which would allow it to be deemed a 21st Century Schools' provision.

The current site at Rhigos Primary School is not fully compliant with the Equalities Act 2010. The new school at Hirwaun, however, is fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010. More information on this is included within the Equality Impact Assessment.

Catchment Changes

The proposal seeks to enhance the accommodation and facilities available to pupils from within the current catchment area of Rhigos Primary School. As such, it is proposed that the catchment area of Hirwaun Primary School be extended to include the current catchment of Rhigos Primary School.

At present, 57 pupils attend Rhigos Primary School, 7 (12%) of which live out of the catchment area. Of those 7 pupils, 5 are in the catchment area for Hirwaun Primary School and 2 in the catchment for Aberdare Park Primary. There are currently 262 pupils at Hirwaun Primary School, including 28 (11%) pupils living outside of the Hirwaun catchment area. *Figures based on actual data as of September 25th, 2023.*

It is anticipated that extending the catchment area of a new 21st Century School's learning environment to Rhigos may also encourage parents / carers who currently choose to send their children to schools outside of the current Rhigos Primary School catchment area to send their children to the new catchment school. The capacity of the new building at Hirwaun Primary School means that all pupils from the Rhigos area who would like a place at the new school will be accommodated.

Transport and Travel Implications

There is a statutory duty placed upon all Local Authorities 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 school or special school / class as appropriate. The law relating to safe 'walking distance' is defined as two miles for pupils of compulsory school age receiving primary education and three miles for pupils of compulsory school age receiving secondary education.

RCTCBC has exercised the discretionary powers afforded to it under the provisions of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (the 2008 Measure) to make a more generous provision to pupils. The relevant information in relation to Rhigos Primary School and Hirwaun Primary School is set out below:

- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for pupils receiving compulsory primary education at their nearest suitable school has been set at 1½ miles, instead of 2 miles as required by the 2008 Measure.
- Free transport to their nearest suitable school, where places are available, is provided to pupils who meet the 1½ mile eligibility criterion from the start of Foundation Phase (the start of the school term after their third birthday), rather than from the start of compulsory education (the start of the school term after their fifth birthday) as required by the 2008 Measure.
- The term suitable school applies to the catchment area English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school / class as appropriate.

Rhigos Primary School is situated 2.8 miles from Hirwaun Primary School and there is no safe walking route for pupils from one school to the other. As such, all pupils who fall under the current catchment area of Rhigos Primary School would qualify for free home to school transport, therefore negating the need for numerous car journeys to the school.

Inevitably some pupils who currently attend Rhigos Primary School will live further away from the new site and so their journey to school will take a little longer, however others may, in fact, live closer to it. Overall, although there is an acceptance that there will be an impact on pupil travel arrangements, the impact is considered to be minimal given the relatively short distance travelled.

If the proposal were to go ahead, RCTCBC will close an energy inefficient building with pupils moving to an existing energy efficient building, so implementing this proposal will have an overall positive impact upon the carbon footprint.

There is a dedicated home to school transport drop-off and pick-up area at Hirwaun Primary School, as well as a community car park which provides additional parking off site for parents / carers during busy periods.

For those pupils that currently live in Rhigos and walk, scooter or cycle to school, there is an acknowledgment that this will no longer be possible. Those pupils that will be travelling by bus or car under the new arrangements will still have the opportunity to experience the outdoors and gain plenty of fresh air given the plentiful opportunities on the Hirwaun Primary School site. External canopies, the outdoor classroom, the spacious yard, the MUGA, the sports

field, gardens etc all present multiple opportunities to support and nurture health and well-being for pupils and staff.

In terms of public transport provision, there is also a public transport service bus which connects the communities of Rhigos and Hirwaun which runs hourly. The bus stops are in very close proximity to both schools.

Current 'Out of School Hours' Usage

Both schools currently offer a Breakfast Club for pupils and this provision would remain for pupils of Rhigos Primary School at Hirwaun Primary, should the proposal go ahead.

The provision of breakfast club is the responsibility of the individual schools and whilst this provision is considered to be important, it should be noted that pre-school activities are not a statutory requirement. Therefore, there will be no home to school transport provision available purely to access this provision, transport will be provided at the start and end of the normal school day, as is currently the case for all schools across RCTCBC.

Hirwaun Primary School is a community school with a private childcare provision located on the school site. Rachael's Playhouse, the childcare provider, offers Flying Start, private childcare, childcare offer, and a wraparound service for children up to the age of 5. They are registered with Care Inspectorate Wales for 30 places, and they currently have a few places remaining.

There are after school clubs being run at both Rhigos and Hirwaun Primary School, and clubs currently running at Rhigos Primary School can continue at Hirwaun. Due to the new facilities at Hirwaun Primary School they have been able to develop and increase their extra curriculum offer and are now delivering wider opportunities throughout the academic year, such as rugby, netball, fitness club, gardening club etc.

The provision of after school clubs are the responsibility of the individual schools and whilst these provisions are considered to be important, it should be noted that post school activities are not a statutory requirement.

As is the case across RCT, there will be no home to school transport provision available purely to access these activities, transport will be provided at the start and end of the normal school day only.

Community and third-party use of the new school's facilities at Hirwaun Primary School are also actively encouraged and the school has been designed to be fully accessible. A dedicated area has been designed within the school itself so that the local community will be allowed to safely utilise the facilities at the school, both during and after the school day, and people in the community of Rhigos will be encouraged to make use of these facilities also.

Hirwaun Primary School currently engage in multiple different community activities, such as weekly foodbanks, weekly 'too good to waste' food distribution, and they have also delivered a number of family engagement sessions, including well-being sessions, money management and cost of living support, parenting support sessions and savings club information.

All of the current community facilities, activities, and opportunities offered at Hirwaun Primary School will be afforded to the pupils, parents and carers, and wider community of Rhigos benefitting all members of the community. RCTCBC are aware that there is a parent and toddler group running at Rhigos Primary School for a day a week. There is a dedicated community room available at Hirwaun Primary School so should the group leader want to establish a parent and toddler group at Hirwaun then this can easily be accommodated.

Impact on Health and Wellbeing

The new facilities at Hirwaun Primary School create a modern, colourful, 21st Century teaching and learning environment. The new school building is fit for purpose to deliver flexible teaching and learning areas to ensure successful delivery of the Curriculum for Wales. The new school site has new outdoor play spaces, an outdoor classroom, a forest schools' area and a MUGA, and all areas are fully accessible. These factors benefit the wellbeing of all pupils and will provide the opportunity for improvement to the wellbeing of pupils from Rhigos Primary School, who don't currently have access to many of these resources.

These positive benefits for the school community will also be realised in the local community of Rhigos, as these facilities will also be available for use by the wider school community including the new Rhigos catchment. The school will be supported to establish links with the now wider local community groups to ensure that the wider community will also benefit from this positive investment.

Concerns were raised during the consultation process regarding the possibility of children losing their cultural identity, their 'Cynefin', if Rhigos Primary School closes. If the proposal were to go ahead, there will be many opportunities for all pupils to learn about their local area and cultural identity as they navigate the Curriculum for Wales and develop their enquiry based learning.

Hirwaun is only 2 miles from the village of Rhigos, and so the expectation is that this will not be lost for any pupils.

If the proposal were to go ahead, there will be targeted support for all pupils from Hirwaun Primary School and Rhigos Primary School. 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 supported by providing effective pastoral and academic support and structured opportunities for learners to become familiar with the new school environment and staff.

Advice and support will be provided by RCTCBC to both schools involved to ensure that the transition process is as smooth and seamless as possible.

More information on how this proposal contributes to the seven well-being goals and the five ways of working as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 is included within the Equality Impact Assessment.

Community Safety

The impact of the proposals on community safety is believed to be positive. The new school site at Hirwaun Primary School has been designed to comply with ‘Secured by Design’ standards, which will ensure that the school boundary and buildings are fully secured and protected with CCTV. The site perimeter is secure, deterring antisocial behaviour and preventing unauthorised individuals from accessing the site out of school hours. This is in contrast to the current situation at Rhigos Primary School, which has low level fencing in some areas, resulting in a boundary line which is more vulnerable.

The community facilities at Hirwaun Primary School are designed so that they can be accessed without compromising the safety of the staff and pupils. The site also has a dedicated car park for staff, as well as a community car park off site which is available for parent / carers and members of the community to use.

The existing relationships with the local police force and the Police Community Support Officer at Hirwaun Primary School will continue and will also extend to include the pupils transferring from Rhigos Primary School.

Updates to Community Impact Assessment Following Consultation

Consultation Comments	Date Considered	Updates to Community Impact Assessment
Following the consultation closing on 17th November, the Community Impact Assessment has been updated to reflect the responses received. In total, 239 responses to the consultation were received via email / in writing, online survey and petition.	28/11/2023.	The following areas of the Community Impact Assessment have been updated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-Curricular Activities. • Breakfast Club. • Parent and Toddler Group. • Cynefin. • Transport and Travel. • Impact on Health and Wellbeing.