

Estyn response to the proposal to close Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain, with pupils transferring to other schools in the local area subject to parental preference.

This report has been prepared by Her 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 and other additional information such as data from Welsh Government and the views of the Regional Consortia which deliver school improvement services to the schools within the proposal.

Introduction

The proposal is by Flintshire County Council.

The proposal is to close Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain from 31st of August 2016 with existing pupils transferring to other schools in the local area, subject to parental preference.

Summary

The proposal is part of Flintshire County Council's School Modernisation Strategy, which aims to ensure that there are a sufficient number of school places, of the right type, in the right locations.

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

Description and benefits

The local authority has given a clear rationale for the proposed expected benefits when compared with the status quo in relation to finance, surplus places and the continuity and progression in pupils' learning.

The proposal clearly defines the expected benefits of the proposal which link well to the stated purpose and rationale. The local authority has provided sufficient evidence to show that the plan is likely to at least maintain the standard of education in the Flint Mountain, Flint and Northop area.

The proposal notes appropriately the advantages of the proposal, which include the efficient and effective use of resources; a reduction of unfilled pupil places within the primary school network; at least maintaining the current standards and the quality of education in the area; and the reduction in travel to school for the majority of pupils should they choose their local school.

The proposer has identified appropriately the disadvantages to the current proposal, which focus on the impact of the closure of Ysgol Maes Edwin on the staff currently employed at the school, the end of English medium primary provision in the village of Flint Mountain and the increase in travel time for a few pupils who live in this village.

The local authority has provided clear evidence to show that it has considered other alternatives to this current proposal. These include maintaining the status quo and federating Ysgol Maes Edwin with another local school. They have demonstrated clearly the advantages and disadvantages of each option and the reasons for their preferred option.

The proposer has suitably considered the impact of the proposal on pupil travel arrangements. It intends to support home to school travel in line with the council's transport policy. It further recognises that the proposal will potentially result in reduced travel for most pupils currently attending Ysgol Maes Edwin. However, the proposer recognises that the travel time would increase for a few pupils living in Flint Mountain, but this would not be in excess of the pupil travel guidelines.

The proposer has appropriately shown how the proposal will affect surplus places by providing pupil numbers and surplus places in 2015 for schools in the area.

The proposal appears to have taken appropriate account of the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language and the accessibility of Welsh medium provision in accordance with parental choice.

The proposer has considered reasonably well the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management at Ysgol Maes Edwin, Ysgol Gwynedd, Cornist Community Primary School and Ysgol Owen Jones. The proposer has considered the outcomes of the most recent Estyn inspection reports and each school's categorisation in relation to the National School Categorisation system on the quality of leadership and pupil outcomes. The proposer's summary of outcomes for all four schools is clear and compares appropriately with local, national and family of schools averages. However, the proposer has not commented on comparisons with similar schools based on entitlement to free school meals.

With the exception of Ysgol Owen Jones, Estyn inspected the other three schools between January 2014 and February 2015. The judgements for the current performance and prospects for improvement were judged as good for these three schools. Estyn inspected Ysgol Owen Jones in May 2010 and judged six out of the

seven key questions as grade 2, with one being judged as grade 1. The local authority has also evaluated each school's performance in relation to the National School Categorisation System. Under the system, schools will be in one of four standards groups (1 to 4), with schools in standards group 1 demonstrating very good overall performance and those in standards group 4 demonstrating the greatest need for improved performance. Ysgol Maes Edwin is currently in standards group 4, Ysgol Gwynedd in standards group 2 and both Cornist Community Primary School and Ysgol Owen Jones in standards group 1.

The proposer has appropriately considered the likely impact of the proposals on standards, wellbeing and curriculum delivery. The proposer reasonably asserts that the proposal would not impact unfavourably on the current standards and provision at Ysgol Gwynedd, Cornist Community Primary School and Ysgol Owen Jones.

The proposer has undertaken an appropriate equality impact assessment, which considers the impact of the proposal on vulnerable groups including those with a disability or special educational needs.