

Estyn response to the proposal by Flintshire County Council to close Ysgol Llanfynydd, an English medium community primary school as of 31st August 2016

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.

Introduction/Proposal

- This is a consultation proposal by Flintshire County Council.
- The proposal is that Flintshire County Council close Ysgol Llanfynydd from 31st August 2016 with pupils transferring to other schools in the local area, subject to parental preference

Background

- Ysgol Llanfynydd in a small English-medium primary school situated in the village of Llanfynydd, Flintshire.
- The school currently has 34 pupils on role, a decrease from 42 pupils in January 2015. Predictions indicate that over the next four years, pupil numbers are not set to rise. Capacity at the school is 80 pupils.
- The current individual school budget per pupil is £4,838. This is the highest of all primary schools in Flintshire.
- The Local Authority currently has 17.5% unfilled primary places, which is significantly above the national target of less than 10%. In January 2015, they published a 'Revised School Modernisation Strategy'. To assist with reducing surplus school places, proposals within this strategy include closing any primary school with less than 105 full time places.

Summary/ Conclusion

It is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the present standards of education provision in the area. Overall, pupil outcomes in all four alternative schools are currently good, with all schools judged as having the necessary capacity to improve further. Pupil attendance in all of these schools is good.

The four local schools currently have 58 unfilled places between them with the potential for this to be increased to 63. This would be sufficient to accommodate all pupils currently attending Ysgol Llanfynydd. Based on approved planning applications for new housing developments within the catchments are of the four schools, the proposers predict that an additional 15 primary places will be needed. These figures when added to the pupils at Ysgol Llanfynydd, still demonstrate capacity within the existing four schools to manage this increased demand for school places.

The proposers have considered two alternative options:

- Maintaining the status quo

- Federating or amalgamating the school with another school

The proposer outlines the expected benefits and disadvantages of the two options appropriately. The proposal has also appropriately considered the advantages and disadvantages of each option against the key drivers of educational improvement, suitable buildings, unfilled places, diminishing resources and resilient school leadership.

The proposers have also recognised the potential impact of closure on the local community and have completed a community impact assessment. This has identified a number of possible areas where closure could have a negative impact on a small number of local families and the village community as a whole. For example, on long term provision for community groups

Based on this process, the proposal appropriately outlines the reasons for discounting alternative options and the reasons for their preferred option. The Local Authority believes that longer-term benefits for pupils outweigh any disadvantages

The proposer has suitably identified the relevant risks relating to the proposal and has outlined clearly how these risks will be managed. However, the proposer has not clearly identified how they will manage the risk of parents not being able to choose their preferred alternative school

The proposer has given suitable consideration to the impact of the proposal on pupils' travel arrangements and their ability to access the provision. The proposer has clearly identified that for 15 of the current 34 pupils attending Ysgol Llanfynydd, this is not their nearest school. They have predicted that 17 pupils who would have attended Ysgol Llanfynydd in September 2016 would be entitled to free transport to an alternative school. This would incur an annual cost of £16,150. The proposal has identified that for most pupils living in the Llanfynydd area, distance to school would increase but not in excess of Welsh Government guidelines. Routes to and from schools in the area have been considered as hazardous due to its rural location and limited safe walking routes through the village.

The proposer has completed a detailed separate equality and Welsh language impact assessment to consider the potential impact in respect of all areas of equality and Welsh language and the potential ways in which the impact can be limited and a positive impact can be promoted.

This assessment summarises that there are no obvious negative impacts on Welsh Language provision. Subject to parental preference, there is the option for pupils from Ysgol Llanfynydd to access Welsh medium education at other Flintshire schools should the proposal to close the school go ahead.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposal contains useful details about the four alternative schools concerned, including

- Judgements from most recent Estyn reports
- Current Welsh Government categorisation including Standards groups and capacity to improve
- Current level of support from the local authority
- Attendance levels over time
- Class organisation

Three of the four alternative schools are currently in Welsh Government's 'Standards Group 3' with one school in 'Standards Group 1'. All four schools are currently judged as 'yellow' effective schools that know the areas in which they need to improve schools. Their capacity to improve is categorised as good.

The proposer provides detailed information on each of the alternative school's capacity to provide a broad and balanced curriculum at both the Foundation Phase and key stage 2. It outlines judgements made in the most recent Estyn inspection reports and progress that each school has made in addressing their recommendations. The proposal judges that each school has the capacity to at least maintain current standards in terms of curriculum delivery.

The document also gives a detailed analysis of each school's most recent property building survey. These show that each school is in a similar satisfactory condition fit to effectively deliver the primary curriculum.

The proposer has undertaken a detailed equality impact assessment that carefully considers the impact of the proposal on vulnerable groups including those with special educational needs and with mobility issues. Where available, comments from the most recent Estyn reports from each of the alternative providers, judges their provision for pupils with additional learners needs as good.

The proposer suitably recognises the potential additional challenge of change for many pupils and accurately considers how transition would be managed successfully these more vulnerable groups of learners.