

Estyn response to the proposal to close Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant, Picton from 31st of August 2016 with existing pupils transferring to other Welsh medium 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 Gymraeg Mornant, Picton from 31st of August 2016 with existing pupils transferring to other Welsh medium schools in the local area, subject to parental preference.

Summary/ Conclusion

It is likely that the current proposal will at least maintain education provision and outcomes for pupils in the area.

Description and benefits

The proposer has set out a clear and very detailed rationale for the proposal. The proposal is set appropriately in context of the council's revised school modernisation strategy, particularly in relation to its objectives in addressing the challenges faced by small schools and the comparatively high numbers of unfilled places within the council. The proposer provides a useful summary of the challenges and triggers that lead the council to making this proposal. It identifies the majority of the school's pupil places as surplus and the proposal appropriately places this information in the wider context of the council's challenges around sustaining high quality education during a period of significant austerity.

The proposer clearly outlines the principal benefits and disadvantages of the proposal. They reasonably state that the reduction in surplus places and the associated savings would result in a more efficient use of resources for teaching and

learning across the council. Appropriately, the proposal claims this will improve the quality of Welsh medium education in the area and protect pupils across Flintshire from reduced resources.

The proposal provides a suitably detailed analysis of how the change will affect surplus places. It provides useful and clear data to demonstrate that over half of the places at Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant are currently surplus and these are predicted to rise to over 70% in the next five years. This would only reduce to 40%, in the current year, if the school's full-time admissions capacity was reduced, thereby still triggering a review within its school modernisation strategy. It would appear that the two nearest Welsh-medium schools have enough surplus places and gradually increasing pupil projections to provide suitable alternative provision for pupils at Ysgol Gymrag Mornant.

The proposal fairly identifies three disadvantages and provides a comprehensive summary of the measures the council will need to make to minimise their impact on pupil travel times, staff redeployment or redundancies and the local community. Detailed consultation and impact assessment documents provide important information to support the proposal's risk management statements. Firstly, to reduce the proposal's negative impact on travel times, the proposer reasonably states that the council's school transport policy would provide free transport to all pupils required to travel further to school as all travel times fall within the Welsh Government Transport Measure. Secondly, the proposer correctly identifies that the council will need to support and work with the current members of staff at Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant, Picton, should they wish to seek redeployment or retirement opportunities. It raises the possibility of staff redeployment within the local primary network. The proposal reasonably refers the governing body of the school to its own organisational change and redundancy policy, which will apply to all staff directly implicated in the proposal.

Finally, the council acknowledges the impact the proposal may have on the local community. The supporting Community Impact Assessment document provides an open and honest analysis of the positive, neutral and negative potential and residual impact on families and the local community.

The proposer has carefully considered and clearly summarised the advantages and disadvantages of three alternatives to the proposal. Option 1 and 3 refer to retaining the status quo and closure, which the proposer properly considers in earlier sections of the document. The proposal suggests that the disadvantages of option 2, to federate two or more schools, outweigh the advantages and do not address the existing challenges of surplus places, pupils taught in mixed aged classes of more than two age ranges and the reduced cost effectiveness of financing and resourcing two or more schools.

The proposal has considered in detail the likely impact of each option on Welsh medium provision in the local authority. It is fair in pointing out, that the closure of the school may result in parents and pupils choosing an English medium school nearer to their home. This may reduce the numbers of pupils taught and assessed through the medium of Welsh. However, it reasonably suggests that parents and pupils who are committed to continuing to receive a Welsh-medium education may choose another Welsh-medium school accordingly.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposal thoroughly considers the potential impact on pupils with additional learning needs. This includes useful information about the level of need in the three schools implicated in the proposal and the recent inspection evaluations about the quality of their provision for additional learning needs. It appropriately recognises that a change in learning environment could be more challenging for pupils that are more vulnerable and provides clear assurances about how the council and schools will support them. Importantly, the proposer states that, for pupils with needs that require physical adaptations to be made to the learning environment, the council will 'work closely with parents/carers and other relevant professionals to secure a smooth transition'.

The proposer reasonably asserts that the proposal will at least maintain education provision and outcomes for pupils in the area. It makes good use of the outcomes of recent inspection reports for Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant and the nearest Welsh-medium schools to support its view that the proposal will benefit pupil outcomes, provision and leadership and management. The proposal makes effective use of performance data for each school. It appropriately acknowledges that year on year comparisons of performance data in a small school is statistically unreliable. However, it reasonably suggests that the current pupils at Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant would benefit from provision in alternative schools where pupils achieve standards generally higher than the local and national averages.

The proposer properly refers to Estyn's report on 'School size and educational effectiveness' to justify its argument that the constraint on resources, in a small school, provides challenges for curriculum delivery. Therefore, it is acceptable for the proposer to state that the changes will not negatively affect the quality of pupils' learning experiences. The proposal reasonably suggests that larger alternative schools are able to provide leadership teams that are able to provide effective staff development to deliver the curriculum well.

The proposal identifies a limited number of factors, which may negatively affect learners and provides the assurance that the council will plan appropriate transition arrangements to mitigate these. The proposal sets out in detail the implications for pupils' travel times and its commitment to providing free transport for pupils where appropriate.