

Estyn response to the proposal by Caerphilly County Borough Council to relocate Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon to a new purpose built Welsh-medium provision school to be situated on the vacant site of the former Cwmcarn High School

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.

Introduction

This is a consultation proposal from Caerphilly County Borough Council.

The proposal is to relocate Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon to a new purpose built Welsh-medium provision school to be situated on the vacant site of the former Cwmcarn High School. The new provision to include childcare facilities, a nursery and a specialist resource base (SRB).

Summary/ Conclusion

It is Estyn's view that the proposal is likely to at least maintain the current standards of education and provision in the area. However, the proposer has not provided enough clarity regarding mitigation against the risk of the proposal generating a significant number of surplus places at the new school site.

Description and benefits

The proposer has provided an appropriate rationale for the proposal. It is to replace the current school which is on a site with buildings in a poor condition. It is also to meet the rising demand for Welsh medium education in the local authority. In addition, the proposer intends to provide a Welsh language resource for those children who require specialist provision outside of a mainstream school.

The proposer has reasonably considered the potential benefits of having a new build school. These include the provision of modern classrooms, IT facilities and external play areas.

The proposal aims to provide accommodation for approximately 420 pupils plus 60 nursery places and 16 SRB places. However, the projected demand for places in 2025 on the current school site is only 212 pupils excluding the nursery. This leaves a significant number of surplus places in the school. The proposer has sought to mitigate against this by including revised projections for the new site which appear to show that by 2025, the school will have 420 pupils. It is not clear how the proposer has calculated this number and it appears to be over-ambitious. The proposer has

not mitigated against this risk of having a significant amount of surplus places in the school.

The proposer has suitably considered five different options and scored these against a variety of critical success factors. The option that scored the highest is the current preferred option for the local authority. The proposer appropriately determined that this proposal provided the best balance of costs, benefits and risks.

The proposer has determined that the new provision is less than one mile away from the current site. It anticipates that the likely effect of different travelling arrangements as a result of the proposal will be minimal. Some pupils may find themselves living closer to the new school site and others may be further away. It refers to Caerphilly's transport policy which provides transport to the 'relevant' school of more than a distance of 1.5 miles for primary pupils.

The proposal supports the targets in Caerphilly's WESP, specifically to develop sufficient Welsh medium places in the Islwyn East area. This proposal is linked to the Islwyn East area.

The proposer has provided suitable community impact and Welsh impact assessments as part of the proposal. The proposer considers that a number of the current activities that the school supports the community in undertaking will continue at the new venue. For groups unable to travel the additional distance, the proposer intends to provide facilities at the local library based in the community or look at supporting alternative venues where appropriate. The proposer also maintains that the proposal will strengthen and safeguard the promotion of the Welsh language, culture and heritage within the community.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposer has considered the school's most recent Estyn inspection report and compared this with other local schools in the area. It reasonably concludes that it does not expect the standards of provision and attainment will be adversely affected. It also suggests that the information outlined in the proposal will indicate how the school can continue to develop and build on their current excellent practice.

The school received all excellent judgements in its inspection report of March 2020. The proposer maintains that during the implementation of the proposal, the school will continue to receive ongoing advice and support from the local authority, school improvement service and any relevant stakeholders to help ensure that the school maintains effective leadership and provides high quality teaching and learning experiences for pupils. This seems to be a reasonable and assertion.

The proposer has provided an equality assessment document which appears to cover all the relevant areas including making the new premises an accessible facility which is able to cater for anyone with additional needs.

The proposer reasonably asserts that, as the proposal is to build a new school facility on an alternative location to that of the current school, there will be no disruption to pupils during the build phase. In addition, there will also be no transportation or access related issues as construction will be off the current site.