

Determination Report

1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members about the decision required in relation to the publication of a statutory notice for:

- The closure of Ysgol Rhewl on the 31st August 2017,

1.2 It is recommended that this proposal is approved for implementation. This proposal will ensure the effective provision of primary places within the Ruthin area. By 2019 it is projected that there will be 39 pupils attending Ysgol Rhewl, resulting in 43 surplus places.

2.0 Background to the proposal

2.1 Denbighshire County Council's Cabinet approved the Modernising Education Policy Framework in January 2009 to provide a platform upon which to review existing school provision.

2.2 The council is committed to providing a first class education for all children and young people in the county. As part of this commitment, the Council has agreed that 'modernising education provision' is a priority because we recognise the importance of having school buildings, learning environments and resources that meet the needs of 21st century Wales.

2.3 The objectives of the review were:

- To ensure the sustainability of high quality education provision
- Improve the quality of school buildings and facilities;
- Provide the right number of places, of the right type in the right location;

3.0 Ruthin Review – Informal Consultation

3.1 In November 2012, Denbighshire's Cabinet approved the commencement of a review of primary school provision in the Ruthin area. The review encompassed eleven primary schools in the area:-

- Ysgol Borthyn
- Ysgol Bro Famau (Llanarmon yn Ial and Llanferres)
- Ysgol Clocaenog
- Ysgol Cyffylliog
- Ysgol Gellifor
- Ysgol Llanbedr
- Ysgol Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd
- Ysgol Pen Barras
- Ysgol Pentrecelyn
- Ysgol Rhewl

- Ysgol Bryn Clwyd was also considered at the request of the Federated Governing Body of Ysgol Bryn Clwyd and Ysgol Gellifor.

3.2 The informal consultation document highlighted a number of issues that needed to be addressed to achieve long term sustainability. These included:

- a. Sustainability of Schools and High Quality Provision
- b. Surplus Places
- c. Condition and Suitability of School Buildings (incl. use of Mobile Accommodation)
- d. Recruitment of Head Teachers
- e. Demand for Welsh Medium Education

3.3 Following careful consideration of the issues raised during the Informal Consultation stage, the following six proposals were approved by the Cabinet. These were:

- Creation of new area school to serve the communities of Clocaenog and Cyffylliog.
- Closure of Ysgol Llanbedr with transfer of pupils to Ysgol Borthyn, Ruthin subject to parental preference.
- Ruthin town area detailed feasibility.
- Proposed federation of Ysgol Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd and Ysgol Pentrecelyn.
- Support for the Federation of Ysgol Bryn Clwyd and Ysgol Gellifor.
- Retention of Ysgol Bro Famau.

4.0 Formal Consultation

4.1 In January 2015, Denbighshire County Councils Cabinet approved recommendations to start a formal consultation on the proposal to Ysgol Rhewl from the 31st of August 2015.

4.2 A period of formal consultation started on the 10th of February 2015 and came to an end on the 23rd of March 2015. A formal consultation document (Appendix A) was published which provided details of the proposal.

4.3 During the formal consultation, parents, staff, governors, children and young people were consulted along with other statutory consultees. The findings of the formal consultation were collated in the Formal Consultation Report (Appendix B) and presented to Cabinet on the 2nd of June 2015.

4.4 At this meeting, Denbighshire County Councils Cabinet approved a recommendation to publish a statutory notice to close Ysgol Rhewl.

5.0 Statutory Notice

5.1 A Statutory Notice was published on the 16th of June 2015. A copy is attached in Appendix C. The notice period came to an end on the 13th of July 2015.

5.2 In total 60 objections were received during the consultation period. The points raised and the responses provided are included in the Objections Report (Appendix 2).

6.0 Determining School Organisation Proposals

6.1 When approving or determining proposals, relevant bodies:

- **must** consider whether there are any other related proposals;
- **must** ensure that the statutory consultation has been conducted in accordance with this Code (the requirement to consult does not apply to proposals to discontinue a school which is a small school);
- **must** ensure that the proposal has been published in accordance with this Code and the notice contains all the required information; **must** consider the consultation document and consultation report;
- **must** consider the objections and the objection report and any responses to the notice supporting the proposals;

7.0 The School

7.1 Ysgol Rhewl

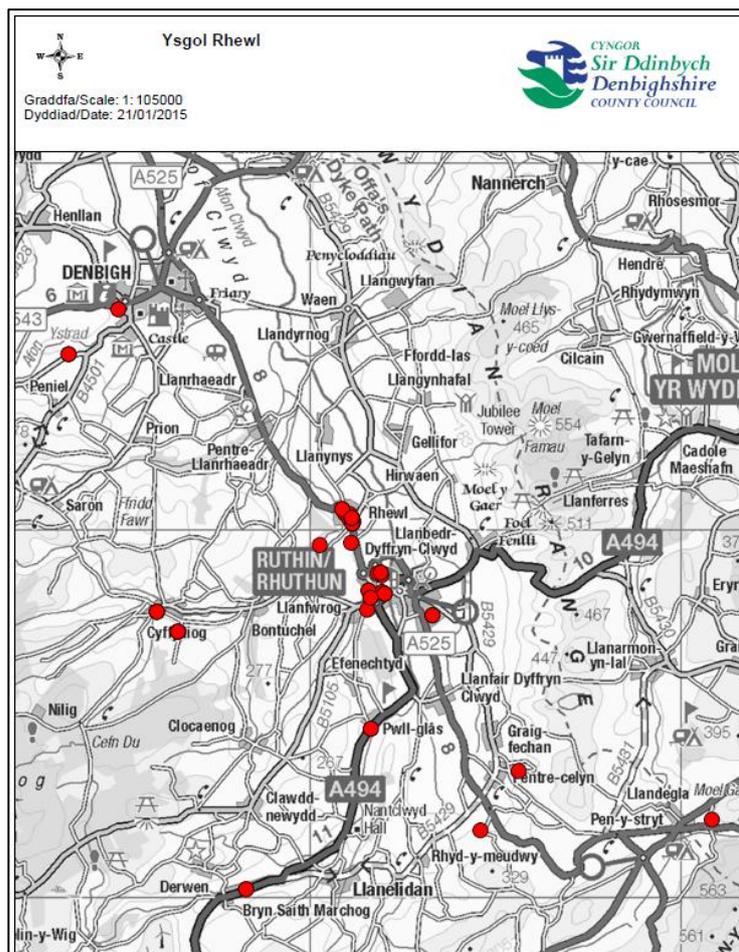
Ysgol Rhewl is located centrally within the village of Rhewl with the western boundary of the site bordering the A525. The school serves an age range of 3-11. The school is identified as a Category 2- Dual Stream primary school. This is where two types of language provision (English and Welsh) exist side by side and parents/pupils opt for either the mainly Welsh medium or mainly English medium provision.

As of the September 2014 school census (PLASC) there were 53 full time pupils and 3 part time (nursery) pupils attending Ysgol Rhewl.

The council's forecast of future pupil rolls suggests a decrease in future pupil numbers will occur at the school as illustrated below:

Projected Full Time pupil numbers – January PLASC				
2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
50	46	42	41	39

The map on page 4 shows the catchment area for Ysgol Rhewl based upon pupils at the school in January 2015.



8.0 Determining Factors

Quality and standards in education

8.1 Objectors have questioned the need to close Ysgol Rhewl as it has good standards. However it is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the present standards of education provision in the area. Estyn agrees that the expected benefits include the following:

- reducing surplus places;
- pupils have access to 21st century buildings and facilities;
- the age range of pupils taught together will be reduced;
- a broader compliment of teaching staff offering expertise in a number of curriculum areas; and
- provides access and maintains parental preference for language medium.

8.2 In its most recent report on Ysgol Rhewl, Estyn found current delivery was 'Good' with good prospects for improvements. The current delivery was also 'Good' at Ysgol Pen Barras and Rhos Street School with the prospect for improvement at Ysgol Pen Barras judged 'Good' and Rhos Street School judged 'Excellent'.

SEN Provision

- 8.3 Of the current pupil cohort there are 16.9% of the pupils at Ysgol Rhewl registered with additional learning needs. The Denbighshire average is 20.5%. Any support that pupils attending Ysgol Rhewl with additional learning needs receive, such as 1-2-1 support, would be replicated in their new learning environment.
- 8.4 Denbighshire County Council will take all practicable steps to minimise disruption for all pupils by working closely with the destination school of each pupil. This work will be managed by specialist ALN education officers and additional support will be provided, if required, to assist pupils with the transition.

Language of Provision

- 8.5 The decision by Cabinet on the 2nd of June 2015 to issue a Statutory Notice was called in for further scrutiny on the 11th of June 2015. It was resolved to instruct officers to undertake further work to assess and mitigate the effect of the loss of Welsh language provision on the community and to ensure that the loss of a dual stream school would not disadvantage the area's pupils in future.
- 8.6 Objectors to the proposal have questioned the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language and parental choice of language medium. Objectors have stated that the current offer cannot be replicated if children moved to either of the new schools. The school organisation code 2013 states:
 "existing pupils at a school where provision is being reduced or removed must be able to continue receiving education that provides at least equivalent standards and opportunities for progression in their current language medium".
 In their consultation response Estyn states that:
 "Even though the proposal would reduce the amount of dual stream offer it provides access and maintains parental preference for language medium".
- 8.7 In Estyn's opinion, the status quo provision at Ysgol Rhewl, is English medium with Welsh taught as a 2nd language. Ysgol Rhewl have responded to the challenge of the Welsh in Education Strategic Group to demonstrate that they are a dual stream school and two children will be assessed as Welsh first language in 2015. Currently, the Welsh stream at Ysgol Rhewl is very small. A copy of the response to issues raised regarding the impact on Welsh language can be found in appendix E.

Transport

- 8.8 Objectors have questioned the suitability of the road network for transporting pupils and have identified the congestion that this proposal will create in and around Glasdir. This concern was also raised in scrutiny and the committee resolved to instruct officers to undertake further work.
- 8.9 The Council have since conducted a new road safety assessment based on current traffic flows of the road between Glasdir and Rhewl and concluded that the road is a safe walking route against the nationally set criteria for such routes.

The safety of roads are periodically reviewed and should the proposal be implemented this will be reviewed to take into account the impact on the traffic flow of the new schools and any new development in the route. A copy of the response to issues relating to transport to the Glasdir site can be found in appendix D.

9.0 Need for places and the impact on the accessibility of schools

9.1 Within the Ruthin area there are Welsh Medium, English Medium and Dual Stream provision. The outcomes from each language category are as follows:

Category	Outcomes
Welsh Medium (1)	The normal expectation is that pupils, regardless of home language, will be able to transfer easily to Welsh medium Secondary provision and by the end of Key Stage 2 will have reached a standard in English equivalent to that reached by pupils in predominantly English medium schools.
English Medium (5)	The normal expectation is that pupils will transfer to English medium secondary provision and continue to learn predominantly through the medium of English, learning Welsh as a second language.
Dual Stream	For pupils in the Welsh stream, normal expectations are as for category 1. For pupils in the English medium stream, normal expectations are as for category 5.

9.2 Denbighshire County Council has adopted a balanced approach to developing proposals for the future primary provision to serve the Ruthin area for the future. Proposals ensure that the area will retain English, Welsh, and Faith provision in a mix of rural and town locations. The informal consultation involved all 11 schools and the diocesan authority.

9.3 The proposal is likely to impact on both Ysgol Pen Barras and Rhos Street School and other schools in the area with surplus capacity. In Estyn's opinion the proposal has effectively shown how surplus places will be affected across the area.

9.4 Closing Ysgol Rhewl changes the location of provision but does not affect the availability of places within the area. Sufficient places remain across the area to deliver Welsh 1st language:

- Ysgol Pen Barras – 280 FT places – 1.1 Miles (Glasdir site)
- Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch – 80 FT places – 2.9 miles
- Ysgol Llanfair DC – 140 FT places – 4.3 miles (New site)
- Ysgol Carreg Emlyn – 91 FT places – 6 miles (New site)

9.5 There is expected to be limited impact on secondary provision in the area. The school currently feeds Ysgol Brynhyfryd and the alternative schools are also feeder schools to Ysgol Brynhyfryd.

9.6 It has been demonstrated that some pupils will travel further to their school as a result of this proposal. Free home (Home School) to school transport will be provided for pupils in accordance to Denbighshire County Council Transport Policy and journey times will remain below 45 minutes which is in accordance to Welsh Government expectations.

9.7 In view of the concerns expressed it has been recommended that applications for discretionary transport to the nearest category 2 school, will be considered on a case by case basis, from existing pupils of Ysgol Rhewl for the remainder of their Primary education.

10.0 Resourcing of education

10.1 Currently Ysgol Rhewl receives a budget of £5,977 per pupil. This is higher than the Denbighshire average of £3,931 per pupil.

10.2 Once implemented a non-pupil led saving of £150k would be realised and would be reinvested within the Council's corporate plan to deliver its priorities including investment in school buildings.

10.3 An estimated pupil led saving of £161k would remain in the school budget quantum to support the delivery of education for pupils from Ysgol Rhewl in their chosen school.

11.0 Other general factors

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted and has identified that the proposal would not result in any significant equalities issues.

11.2 In the most recent Estyn reports, the catchment of both schools is identified as neither prosperous nor economically disadvantaged.

11.3 The school is in the freehold ownership of Denbighshire County Council.

12.0 Specific factors in the consideration of school closures

12.1 Objectors stated that this proposal will have a detrimental effect on the community. The school building in Rhewl is currently used for some community activities. Officers from Denbighshire County Council will work with the local community to help retain the community activities that previously used school facilities.

12.2 In preparing this proposal, consideration was given to other alternatives:

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| Option 1 | Maintain the status quo; |
| Option 2 | Undertake remedial repairs; |
| Option 3 | Do Intermediate - Undertake refurbishment and extension works at Ysgol Rhewl; |
| Option 4 | Do Maximum – Provide new build for Ysgol Rhewl; |

Option 5 Close Ysgol Rhewl;

- 12.3 The advantages and disadvantages of each option which were considered by the Council were detailed in the consultation report.
- 12.4 When the new school campus is built on the Glasdir site, Ysgol Rhewl would be nearer to both Ysgol Pen Barras and Rhos Street School than parts of Ruthin town. Clearly the re-positioning of these schools in relation to Ysgol Rhewl would impact on the viability of Ysgol Rhewl and it would be difficult to justify significant expenditure on facilities in Rhewl when these new facilities are in very close proximity to the village. This is one of the key reasons why a new build wasn't pursued for Ysgol Rhewl. The alternative of retaining the building would not address the deficit in facilities the school currently have, and the maintenance backlog would remain.
- 12.5 Additional information regarding the option to federate Ysgol Rhewl was also provided as a supplement to the formal consultation report. It was initially explored following the informal consultation stage of the Ruthin review. The option to federate would not address issues around surplus places and condition of buildings which were considered as key drivers of the review. In considering the options within the main consultation document there is a focus on the options which could deliver long term improvements to these key drivers. Therefore the option to federate Ysgol Rhewl had been discounted as a sustainable long term option for the school at that stage.