

Response to concerns relating to the impact on the Welsh Language offer

1.0 Introduction

1.1 From the outset of the consultation, the authority have made it clear that the proposal to close Ysgol Rhewl is due to surplus places, proximity of school to the new schools on Glasdir and condition of the current building of Ysgol Rhewl - Section 2 of the Formal Consultation Document 2015 stated:

2. Summary of the Proposal

2.1 It is being proposed that Ysgol Rhewl would close on the 31st of August 2017 with existing pupils transferring to either Ysgol Pen Barras or Rhos Street School to coincide with the opening of the new school buildings. The new school buildings will be located on the Glasdir site to the North of Ruthin.

2.2 The long term sustainability of Ysgol Rhewl has been considered as part of the wider town area as part of the Ruthin Area Review. The main drivers for proposals for the Ruthin town area have been the suitability and condition of school sites and surplus places within the town. It is considered that these drivers impact on the long term sustainability of Ysgol Rhewl.

2.3 In considering a range of options for the Glasdir site there was a need to assess the impact of the new facilities upon Ysgol Rhewl due to the proximity of the school, approximately 1.1 miles, from the Glasdir site. In view of pupil numbers and the long term need to invest in the building it is believed that closing the school and transferring pupils to either Ysgol Pen Barras or Rhos Street School would be the most sustainable option for the wider Ruthin town area.

2.0 Context of the Current Language offer in the area

2.1 Within the Ruthin area there is English medium, Welsh medium and dual stream provision.

- The nearest alternative Welsh medium provision is at Ysgol Pen Barras, Ysgol Carreg Emlyn and Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch. The curriculum offer, language and the outcomes in these settings meet the same criteria.
- The nearest alternative English medium provision is at Rhos Street School, Ysgol Borthyn and Ysgol Gellifor. The curriculum offer, language and the outcomes in these settings meet the same criteria.
- Both Welsh and English medium provision is available in the nearest alternative dual stream setting at Ysgol Llanfair DC. It is expected that the curriculum offer in each stream meets the criteria for both Welsh medium and English medium provision.

3.0 Response to comments

The response to the comments raised at the Performance Scrutiny meeting on the 11th of June 2015 regarding the Welsh language or language of provision follow in 3.1 to 3.10.

3.1 The Current Welsh Language offer could not be replicated if children moved to either of the new schools.

Response:

Section 1.4 of the School Organisation Code 2013 states that:

“In all cases, 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.”

The school organisation code clearly states that when proposing closure, it is the duty of the authority to ensure that the current language opportunities would be provided for pupils in alternative provision. Currently pupils receiving education at Ysgol Rhewl are identified as either Welsh medium or English medium. If the opportunities for progression are provided then the impact on the Welsh language would be neutral.

If the proposal is implemented, parents will be able to choose three types of settings that would be available within the area – English medium, Welsh medium and dual stream. Details of alternative provision was explained in section 9 of the formal consultation document. Parents will be able to choose alternative provision subject to the admission process. Pupils will be able to transfer to alternative provision and maintain their current language medium.

The authority has identified areas where tailored support will be available:

- Opportunities for pupils in the English stream of a dual stream setting to access an enhanced level of incidental Welsh will be sustained by working with each child’s destination school. Pupils who are assessed as more able and talented in Welsh will be supported in accordance to the destination school’s more able and talented policy.
- The language development provision at Ysgol Bro Elwern will be available to support any pupil currently assessed as Welsh 2nd language who wants to access Welsh medium provision (Welsh 1st language).

As a result, implementing the proposal will have a neutral effect on the language offer in the area.

3.2 The loss of bilingual provision in Rhewl was at odds with the Council’s own Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP);

Response:

This statement is incorrect. The Welsh in Education Strategic plan is focussed around the provision of school places and not school buildings. It has been demonstrated that there is sufficient places at alternative provision to support the outcomes of the plan. Closing Ysgol Rhewl changes the learning environment for pupils but does not affect the availability of provision across the area.

3.3 It had been acknowledged that in recent years, Ysgol Rhewl had not been delivering the education provision in line with its Category 2 designation. However, this had been addressed with two pupils expected to be assessed through the medium of Welsh this year.

Response:

The authority has stated consistently during the consultation process that closure is proposed as a result of surplus places, proximity of the new development at Glasdir and the condition of the building. It has not been proposed due to delivering / not delivering its Category 2 designation.

3.4 The decision to publish a statutory notice to close the school on 31 August 2017 should be put on hold to give Ysgol Rhewl sufficient time to deliver as expected against its Category 2 designation.

Response:

The authority has stated consistently during the consultation process that closure is proposed as a result of surplus places, proximity of the new development at Glasdir and the condition of the building. It has not been proposed due to delivering / not delivering its Category 2 designation.

3.5 The parents of pupils at Ysgol Rhewl felt their choice of school was being compromised. The only dual stream school available to them would be Ysgol Llanfair DC, but free transport would not be provided to this school.

Response:

The authority has proposed to retain a mix of rural and town schools, whilst acknowledging that retaining every school is not an option due to the number of surplus places within the area. This proposal will change the learning environment but sustain the curriculum offer in English, Welsh and dual stream settings. Free transport is provided to the nearest suitable school. When schools are closed, the Home to School policy permits the authority to provide discretionary transport for a specific period of time. This is used on a case by case basis.

3.6 Ysgol Rhewl had been rated as “good” by Estyn. The Welsh language provision at the school had moved forward and the plans for further development in this area were available for all to see.

Response:

The authority has stated consistently during the consultation process that closure is proposed as a result of surplus places, proximity of the new development at Glasdir and the condition of the building. Standards at Ysgol Rhewl are good and this has been consistently reported by the authority. By bringing forward this proposal, the authority is not commenting on the educational offer at Ysgol Rhewl.

3.7 The Governing Body felt that closing the school would equate to losing an opportunity to move the Welsh language forward in Denbighshire. This was particularly concerning remembering the conclusions of a recent Council commissioned study on the future of the language within the county.

Response:

The authority does not agree with this statement. The proposal changes the learning environment and retains the opportunity to access Welsh medium places within the area.

The report commissioned by the Council had several recommendations which will be considered by the Council and adopted if appropriate. The majority of the education recommendations were already incorporated within the Welsh in Education Strategic plan. The recommendations within the plan are being delivered.

3.8 Ysgol Rhewl had been working closely with Ysgol Brynhyfryd to meet their requirements for delivering bilingual education and supporting pupils to access secondary education in the language of their choice.

Response:

Pupils at all alternative schools in the Ruthin area can progress to Ysgol Brynhyfryd. The same opportunity for progression will remain.

3.9 Both the Chair of Governors and the lead signatory to the call-in request, Councillor Merfyn Parry, stated that they felt the decision to close Ysgol Rhewl was premature and the loss of a dual stream primary school would be detrimental to the local area, and to the county as a whole.

Response:

The Cabinet will consider this point alongside all objections submitted when determining the proposal. It is the view of the authority that proposal will ensure that school places will be of the right type, of the right quantity and will be in the right locations to maintain a sustainable primary provision in the Ruthin area.

3.10 There would be a need for the Council to take all necessary actions to mitigate against the risk of the loss of Welsh language skills and to ensure that pupils from Ysgol Rhewl and the area in general were not in any way disadvantaged due to the future non-availability of a Category 2 school.

Response:

The authority does not believe that this proposal will result in a loss of Welsh language skills. If this proposal is implemented, linguistic standards of pupils will be identified and appropriate support provided to minimise disruption for pupils.

All pupils who require additional support to transfer to alternative Welsh medium provision will be able to attend the language development provision based at Ysgol Bro Elwern.

Similarly, support will be provided within the destination English medium provision for pupils who wish to maintain a higher level of 2nd language Welsh provision.

Should parents opt for dual stream provision at Ysgol Llanfair DC. The pupils will be supported in the same way as above to transfer to the stream of their choice.
