

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 14<sup>th</sup> May 2013

**Lead Member / Officer:** Councillor Eryl Williams, Lead Member for Education

**Report Author:** Head of Customers and Education Support

**Title:** Faith Based Provision

---

**1. What is the report about?**

The report seeks to inform Cabinet Members of the findings of the initial informal consultation and to seek approval to commence the next formal stage of public consultation.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

A decision will be required by Cabinet to approve proceeding to formal consultation and to issue the consultation document for the proposals for the closure of Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School and St Brigid's School and to open a new school.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

The recommendation is for Cabinet:-

(i) to note the findings of the consultation

(ii) to approve formal consultation for proposals for the closure of Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School and St Brigid's School as of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014

(iii) to approve formal consultation for the opening of a new school as of the 1<sup>st</sup> September in partnership with the Catholic Diocesan and Church in Wales Diocesan Authorities and St Brigid's Trust\* to open a new school as of the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014

\* Inclusion dependent upon response from the Trust

**4. Report details.**

- 4.1 The Council, in partnership with the Roman Catholic and Church in Wales Diocesan bodies and the Trustees of St Brigid's School has undertaken informal consultation on the future of faith based secondary provision. The Council was clear at the commencement of the consultation that they held concerns over the sustainability of the existing status quo for faith education in North Denbighshire and that change was essential to ensure that faith provision was maintained within the area.

Informal Consultation Findings

- 4.2 The informal consultation occurred between the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012 and the 29<sup>th</sup> January and included a range of meetings for stakeholders, a questionnaire to gain the views of parents and the receipt of numerous e-mails and letters from interested parties. The findings of the consultation (see Appendix 1 and 2\*\*) raised a number of concerns of what change may be. *\*\*Appendix 2 is available on the Denbighshire website and hard copies have been made available for viewing at main council offices.*
- 4.3 The questionnaire issued to all parents of pupils attending Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's drew 178 responses. The analysis revealed for both sets of parents the main influence on their choice of secondary education would be the quality of education. Differences of note included the distance from home and quality of buildings. These ranked a higher importance for parents of Blessed Edward Jones (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) as opposed to St Brigid's (5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>). For St Brigid's the size of school was seen as more important. This ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> for them as opposed to being ranked 6<sup>th</sup> for Blessed Edward Jones parents. In respect of whether a joint Anglican / Catholic faith based education would impact on the choice of school, 37.6% of respondents from St Brigid's said they would be less likely to attend whilst 45.4% of respondents from Blessed Edward Jones stated that this would have no impact and only 10.4% being less likely to attend.
- 4.4 In terms of the comments received from St Brigid's parents the main views on the case for change (as opposed to observations on the consultation process itself) were in respect of maintaining the existing Ethos of St Brigid's, the view that St Brigid's was a high achieving school and the all through provision (3-18) at the school. Outside of the views received from the questionnaire no letters or e-mails were received from parents of Blessed Edward Jones.
- 4.5 In considering the findings of the consultation, whilst there has been a strong element of opposition from parents of St Brigid's against moving towards closer working with Blessed Edward Jones, the authority and its diocesan partners remain of the view that maintaining the status quo is unsustainable long term and that the option of a new school at a new location remains the preferred long term option.

#### The Way Forward

- 4.6 To move forward the Council in partnership with the Diocesan partners and the St Brigid's Trust would seek to move towards proposals on a two phased approach (see Appendix 3 for the formal proposal document). The initial phase would see the existing Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School and St Brigid's School close on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014. The new joint faith school would open on the 1<sup>st</sup> September and would initially use the existing buildings in Denbigh and Rhyl. During this time period the Rhyl site (the former Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School) would operate as an 11-16 school whilst the Denbigh site (the former St Brigid's School) would operate initially as a 3-18 school.

- 4.7 The second phase of the proposals would see the existing provision consolidated on a new site in the Rhuddlan / Bodelwyddan area. As the change would involve the location of the school moving by over a mile and a change in the age range served by the school a further statutory notice would be required at a later date. The timescale for the publication of any further notice is dependent on the progression of this proposal but the required consultation is expected to have commenced by no later than the Summer of 2015. (This date will be dependent upon the implementation date for the first phase of the proposals). It is anticipated that the project to commence building a new school would commence during the 2016/17 financial year.
- 4.8 The age range of the Single-Site Faith School would be confirmed during the Second Phase of the proposal. Within this the main options would be whether the school should serve a 3-16 age range or an 11-16 age range. The size would also be determined during this Second Phase Consultation and it is envisaged that this would be in the region of 600 – 750 pupils on the new site. It is anticipated that the post 16 provision will be provided predominantly by the existing Rhyl and Prestatyn VI partnership. The further consultation would confirm how such provision would be delivered. It is envisaged that the majority of courses would be provided via the existing Partnership which delivers provision at the Coleg Llandrillo, Rhyl and Prestatyn High School facilities. The new school would host a small range of courses as part of the partnership to ensure that elements of post 16 can be delivered by the faith providers.
- 4.9 Should approval be granted then this formal stage of consultation would take place during June and July of 2013. The findings of the consultation period would then be reported to elected members and the diocesan authorities in the autumn of 2013. At this stage should all partners wish to proceed with the proposal Cabinet will be required to approve the publication of statutory proposals to close the two schools and open the new school and interested parties may make formal objections. Should the notice be published after the 1<sup>st</sup> October the proposal will be considered under the new School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Act 2013. Within this Act, should objections be received the final decision will reside with either the local authority or the Minister for Education dependent upon the nature of objections received.
- 4.10 The Council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, to be delivered in partnership with the Welsh Government, includes potential funding for faith secondary provision. Any funding award would be dependent on progressing school organisation proposals. It is also noted that the Council is in discussions with the Welsh Government for confirmation regarding the level of contribution that will be required for any capital project that may arise.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

The proposal supports the priority of "Improving performance in education and the quality of our school buildings" and has been highlighted as a workstream as follows:

“We will continue to review school provision across the County to ensure that we provide the right number of school places, of the right type, in the right location.”

**5. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

Should the proposals proceed and become implemented it is anticipated that there will be a need for support from HR and Legal to confirm the procedures to dissolve the existing governance structures for both schools and establish new joint arrangements between all promoters.

**6. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.**

The EqIA undertaken on the proposal suggested that there would be minimal impact in respect of the first phase of the proposal. The development of a joint faith provision could be seen to promote greater inclusion and provide an improved educational offer (Anglican Secondary education) which has not previously been available within Denbighshire.

**7. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

Full consultation has been undertaken with all stakeholders and the findings from the Informal Consultation period are attached as Appendix 1. The Diocesan Authorities and the Trustees of St Brigid's as potential co-promoters were all invited by the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013 to make comment on the draft Consultation document and to indicate whether they supported the proposal in advance of any decision to proceed by Cabinet. The views of these respective bodies will be tabled at the Cabinet meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

**8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

The cost of the formal consultation is not thought to be significant and should be contained within existing resources. The outcome may ultimately lead to significant capital investment by the council as part of the 21st Century Schools Programme which is included in the Corporate Plan. The consultation will inform the detailed business case which will be subject to the council's approval process for all capital expenditure.

**9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

There is a strong possibility that the proposal could result in adverse publicity for the Council and in adverse public comments.

To minimise this risk the Council will seek to ensure clear communication with all stakeholders.

**10. Power to make the Decision**

s29 School Standard and Framework Act 1998.  
School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Act 2013  
Modernising Education Policy Framework (approved by Cabinet January  
2009)