

Appendix G

Estyn response to the proposal by Denbighshire County Council for a new area school to replace Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog

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

This consultation proposal is from Denbighshire County Council.

The proposal is that Denbighshire County Council would create a New Area School to serve both the Clocaenog and Cyffylliog Communities. The proposal has two phases:

Phase one

- The first phase of this project would see the existing Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog close on 31st August 2014.
- On the 1st of September 2014 the Area School would open with Key Stage 1 (4-7 years old) based in Cyffylliog and Key Stage 2 (7 – 11 years old) based in Clocaenog.

Phase two

- The second phase would see the Area School consolidated on a new site in the Clocaenog area. This would be subject to land availability and suitability.

Summary/ Conclusion

Are the proposals likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area?

It is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the present standards of education provision in the area.

In October 2012, Estyn identified the educational standards at Ysgol Clocaenog to be good.

In March 2011, Estyn identified the educational performance at Ysgol Cyffylliog to be adequate and the school was placed in Estyn monitoring. Subsequently the school received a monitoring visit by Estyn in May 2012. Estyn found that the school had not made enough progress in the key areas of action that were identified in the Section 28 inspection and was identified as needing 'significant improvement'.

What effect do the proposals have on other schools and educational institutions in the area?

The proposal is likely to have limited impact on other schools in the area.

Denbighshire County Council anticipates that, following completion of the First Phase, the majority of pupils attending the Clocaenog and Cyffylliog sites of the Area School would transfer to the New Area School in the Clocaenog area.

The proposal identifies other available primary schools for those parents or guardians who choose to send their children elsewhere. These schools have 78 combined surplus places.

There is expected to be limited impact on secondary provision in the area. Both schools currently feed Ysgol Brynhyfryd, which the proposal states could expect to see an increase in pupils for the Welsh Medium stream due to the new primary school being a Welsh-Medium Primary School where at least 70% of the teaching is through the medium of Welsh.

Description and benefits

What are the expected benefits of the proposals and disadvantages when compared with the status quo as outlined in the report?

In phase one, the expected benefits include the following:

- the age range of pupils taught together will be reduced;
- teaching capacity will increase; and
- the development of better leadership and management structures, to provide increased opportunities for staff development and progression.

In phase two, the expected benefits include the following:

- an improved learning environment for all pupils;
- the potential for significant economies of scale;
- sufficient capacity to absorb fluctuations in pupil numbers;
- reducing the difficulties in appointing a permanent Head Teacher; and
- ensuring the long term sustainability of the school and its ability to deliver the changing curriculum.

The disadvantages of maintaining the status quo appear to be:

- not addressing the issue of a projected deficit of places at Ysgol Clocaenog and the surplus of places at Ysgol Cyffylliog;
- the long term sustainability of arrangements to deliver the changing curriculum;
- a lack of flexibility within the schools to respond to fluctuating pupil numbers;
- the current configuration of the two schools may make it difficult to attract potential Head teacher candidates to apply for the role; and
- a lack of catering facilities / indoor hall space at Ysgol Clocaenog would not be rectified.

In general, the proposer has identified both the benefits and challenges appropriately.

- **How well has the proposer managed any risks associated with the proposals?**

The proposer considers adequately the implications of phase one of the proposal for admissions, travel, staffing and finance. The estimated increase in travel and running costs for the two schools are detailed enough to allow the proposer to consider any potential risks. However, the proposer does not appear to have rated the risk of each of these factors.

The staffing arrangements will ultimately be dependent upon the decisions taken by the temporary Governing Body and the new Head teacher; however pupils are likely to be taught by the same teachers.

In phase two, considerations of the site, transport and the costs of the new school building contain a number of variables. The proposer argues that these variables make it difficult to predict the financial costs associated with the New Area School. The construction of the new school building would be subject to securing sufficient capital resources for the project. The proposer appropriately states that this part of the project requires more detailed work.

- **Has the proposer considered suitable alternatives and given good reasons as to why these have been discounted?**

The proposer has considered a range of alternative options which include maintaining the status quo, federating both schools, undertaking extension works at Ysgol Clocaenog, closing both schools and establishing an Area School on the existing sites, and closing both schools and establishing an Area School on existing sites prior to building a new Area School. They have appropriately considered the advantages and disadvantages of each option and appear to have stated suitable reasons for their preferred option.

- **What would be the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements and on accessibility of provision?**

The proposer appears to have given reasonable consideration to the impact of the proposal on pupils' travel arrangements and their ability to access the provision.

In phase one, the current proposals will create additional transport costs as pupils are transported from their homes / home school to their designated site for the period that the school stays on two sites. There may be longer travel times for some pupils.

Nursery provision would be provided on the Cyffylliog site. The proposer intends to provide home to school transport for nursery pupils, provided they are attending their nearest suitable school and living more than 2 miles from Cyffylliog.

In phase two, pupils would receive free home to school transport, if they live more than 2 miles from the new school. Existing pupils, currently attending their nearest suitable school would receive home to school transport for 5 years if the new location isn't their nearest suitable school.

- **Do the proposals effectively show how surplus places will be affected? If surplus places will be increased, does the proposer give adequate reasons for this?**

The Area School would provide an overall capacity across all the age ranges of 75 full time places and 10 part time places. Based on current projections for 2014 and assuming all pupils transfer to the Area school, this would appear to leave a surplus of 11 places. This represents a reduction on the current number of 26 surplus places. The New Area School will serve 77 pupils in the same 4 class model.

Educational aspects of the proposal

- **How well has the proposer considered the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management?**

The proposer states that the proposal has been developed in line with the Council's priority of 'modernising education provision'. An informal consultation on the future of primary education highlighted a number of issues that needed to be addressed to achieve long term sustainability. The proposal appears to be consistent in addressing these issues.

The proposal contains useful detail about the two schools concerned, including the judgements from the most recent Estyn inspection reports.

The proposer sets out the education standards achieved in both schools over the past five years. However, it rightly identifies that performance data must be treated with care as small numbers of children in a year group can have a significant effect on a school's performance year on year.

The proposer does not consider the performance of each school compared to similar schools based on the proportion entitled to free school meals.

In its most recent report on Ysgol Clocaenog, Estyn found that in assessments at the end of the Foundation Phase in 2012, in comparison with schools that have similar levels in terms of entitlement to free school meals, the school was performing a little lower than family, local authority and all-Wales averages in language, literacy and communication and in personal and social development and wellbeing and cultural diversity. The percentages who achieved outcomes 5 and 6 in mathematics were higher than family, local authority and all-Wales averages.

In key stage 2 over the last three years, the school's performance in English, mathematics and science had been consistently higher than the averages for Wales and similar schools. The school's performance in Welsh, apart from in 2009, has been lower. Achievements at level 5 in all subjects have been lower than the average figures for the family and Wales in the last three years.

Estyn's most recent report on Ysgol Cyffylliog found that numbers in every year group were very small in key stage 1 and key stage 2, therefore end of key stage results have to be treated with care because one pupil's results can have a substantial impact on the school's performance.

Estyn found that over the last four years, the results of teacher assessments at the end of key stage 1 had improved, and since 2008 have been 100% in terms of the number attaining level 2 (the expected level) in every indicator. This places the school in the top 25% in comparison with schools with similar percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, and better than the results of the family of schools, the local authority and all-Wales.

Over the same period, the performance at key stage 2 has been inconsistent.

Results in Welsh and mathematics have placed the school in the bottom quarter of similar schools in three of the last four years. This is also the case for the core

subject indicator (CSI). Results in science and English have placed the school in the lowest quarter in two of the last four years but in the top quarter in both other years.

The percentage of pupils attaining the CSI has been lower than the percentage for schools in the same family, the percentage for the local authority and Wales in three of the last four years. Results in English have improved. For two years, they have been better than the average for schools in the same family, and the averages for the local authority and Wales. Results in Welsh over the same period are lower than the average for the family of schools and the averages for the local authority and Wales, although they did improve in 2010. Only in 2009 were results in mathematics higher than those of the family, the local authority and Wales. Results in science have improved over the last four years and have been higher than those of the family, the local authority and Wales for two years.

The proposer realistically considers that the new arrangements will provide additional teaching capacity for smaller groups of pupils who are in need of extra support; including greater capacity for more able and talented pupils. In addition, there will be opportunities for pupils to be taught within a reduced age range. The proposer does not include an evaluation of teaching; however Estyn, in its most recent reports, judged it to be good at Ysgol Clocaenog and adequate at Ysgol Cyffylliog.

The proposer reasonably expects that the new arrangements will lead to a raise in standards through teachers working together to plan and prepare high quality lessons, by undertaking peer observations of the best teachers and by sharing resources to enable more efficient and innovative ways of working.

The proposed new arrangements may reasonably be expected to see the development of better leadership and management structures, to provide increased opportunities for staff development and progression, and reduce the current difficulty in recruiting head teachers.

The proposer has considered appropriately the new leadership and management arrangements. However, it has not included an evaluation of the current quality of leadership and management at each school. In its most recent reports, Estyn judged leadership and management at Ysgol Clocaenog to be good and at Ysgol Cyffylliog to adequate. The new arrangements would call for one Governing Body, one Executive Head teacher and one group of staff. Prior to the opening of the Area School, on 1st September, a Temporary Governing Body would be established to take key decisions such as the appointment of the Head teacher.

- **How well has the proposer considered the likely impact of the proposals to ensure delivery of the full curriculum at the foundation phase and at each key stage?**

The proposal does not say how delivery of the full curriculum will be affected by the changes. However, the proposer states that both sites are in need of significant investment to enable them to provide a learning environment fit for purpose to meet the requirements of the 21st Century Schools Programme. Neither school has adequate indoor sports facilities for pupils. The development of a new school in phase two would provide indoor sports facilities which would enable the school to offer pupils a broad range of experiences in physical education.

In addition, phase one of the proposal would see the new school categorised as a Welsh-Medium Primary School where at least 70% of the teaching is through the medium of Welsh. The proposer states that 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.

The proposer has conducted a Welsh language impact assessment that reasonably concludes that the proposal will be positive in terms of its impact on the Welsh language.

How well has the proposer considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs?

The proposer makes a reasonable consideration of the needs of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) by stating it will help pupils with SEN who experience difficulties because of the change. However it does not give any detail of how it would do this.

The proposer recognises that phase two of the proposal, the move to a New Area School will result in greater change and particularly for pupils with SEN. It notes it will take all practicable steps to minimise disruption and to assist such pupils with the transition. One of the ways it intends to do this is by designing the facilities available at the New Area School in consultation with Denbighshire County Council's SEN Education Officers, and the staff and pupils concerned. This appears to be a helpful and supportive approach.

The proposer does not consider the impact of the proposal on any other groups of vulnerable learners.

Where proposals involve the transfer of learners to alternative provision, how well has the proposer provided evidence that the alternative would deliver outcomes and offer provision at least equivalent to that which is currently available to those learners (including learners with SEN)? How well has the proposer ensured that the disruption to learners is minimised?

The proposal states that Denbighshire County Council wishes to see all pupils transfer to the New Area School. For those who do not, the proposal identifies alternative arrangements. However, it does not give any detail about the outcomes or the quality to be expected of this provision, or how disruption for these pupils will be minimised.