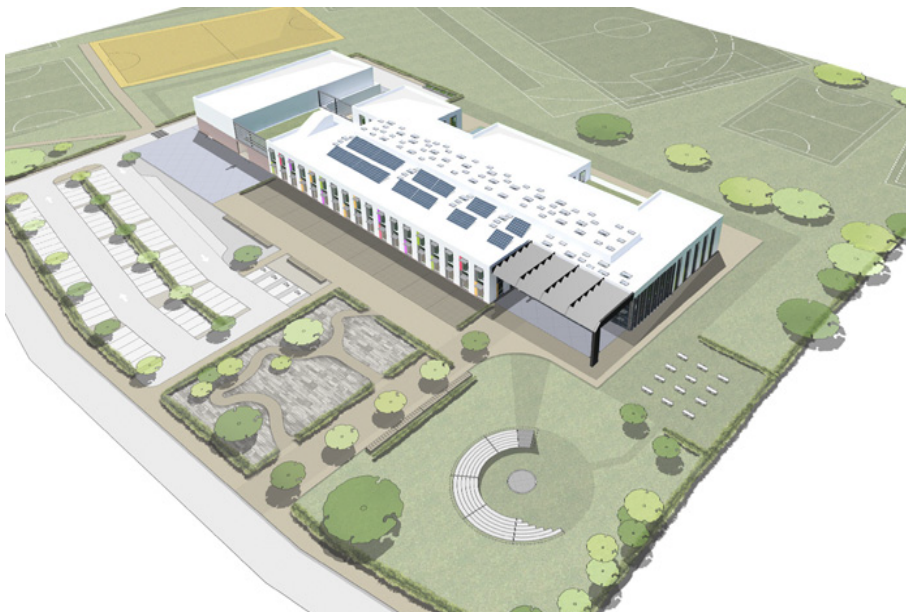


Secondary Rationalisation: Phase 1 Islwyn West

Consultation Report



**Directorate of Education & Lifelong Learning
February 2014**



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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Council launched the formal Consultation process on the proposals for Islwyn West on Monday 9 December with the launch of the Consultation Document. The Consultation Document was distributed in hard copy via the secondary schools Pontllanfraith, Oakdale and Blackwood. Electronic versions were also distributed to all other schools in Caerphilly. The document was also made available on the Council's website and publicly advertised via Newline and the local press. Copies were also distributed to all consultees listed as Appendix 1. A booklet of Additional Information was also made available during January 2014.

1.2 Public drop-in sessions were held as follows:

Pontllanfraith Comprehensive	Wednesday 22 January 2014 3.30 - 6.30p.m.
Oakdale Comprehensive	Thursday 23 January 2014 3.30 – 6.30p.m.
Blackwood Comprehensive	Thursday 30 January 2014 3.30 – 6.30p.m.

Staff meetings were held as follows:

Oakdale Comprehensive	Thursday 5 December 2013
Pontllanfraith Comprehensive	Thursday 12 December 2013

1.3 Workshops were also organised for the pupils of Pontllanfraith, Oakdale and Blackwood Comprehensive Schools.

1.4 The public consultation finished on Friday 31 January 2014.

1.5 This Consultation Report summarises the issues received during the Consultation and the Council's response to the issues. A major consultee in the process is Estyn. Their response is provided as Appendix 2. The report also analyses the outcome of the Consultation process.

1.6 The proposal subject to Consultation is:

- Closure of Oakdale and Pontllanfraith Comprehensive Schools
- Oakdale Plateau 3 as the preferred site for a new school in the Islwyn West region
- The proposed Oakdale Plateau 3 school to be designed with a maximum capacity of 900 pupils, plus provision for Additional Learning Needs of circa 50 pupils.

It is also proposed to revise catchment areas in order to ensure these are two broadly similar sized schools in the region in the future, i.e. Blackwood Comprehensive and the new school at Oakdale Plateau 3.

2. ISSUES RAISED

2.1 Implications of Catchment Area Changes

There were some concerns and queries relating to the proposed catchment area changes.

In terms of these changes it is proposed that from September 2015, Libanus and Markham Primary Schools will become feeder schools for Blackwood Comprehensive instead of Pontllanfraith.

In terms of eligibility to attend the new school, pupils from Libanus and Markham Primary Schools who enter Pontllanfraith Comprehensive up until and including the September 2014 intake will remain as Pontllanfraith pupils and will transfer to the new school. The relevant school for this group of pupils will be deemed to be Pontllanfraith Comprehensive. From September 2015 pupils from Libanus and Markham Primary Schools will attend Blackwood Comprehensive.

A number of pupils from Libanus and Markham Primary Schools who start at Pontllanfraith Comprehensive up until and including the September 2014 intake, will have younger brothers and sisters. Therefore it is proposed that one of the admission criteria for the new school will be that of sibling links. The Council is considering for what length of time the sibling link criteria shall be maintained.

Pupils living in the catchment area of the new school but who attend a primary school that is in not a feeder primary for the new secondary school (including Libanus or Markham Primary Schools from September 2015) will be eligible to attend the new school.

The Bryn and Penllwyn Primary Schools are currently feeder schools for Pontllanfraith Comprehensive and will be for the new school. There are a relatively small number of pupils attending these schools who live within walking distance of Blackwood Comprehensive. These will be able to apply for Blackwood Comprehensive as an out-of-catchment area application subject to availability of places. As the capacity of Blackwood Comprehensive will need to be increased to allow for Libanus and Markham pupils from September 2015, it is envisaged there will be places for a small number of out-of-catchment area pupils.

2.2 School Transport

There were several queries regarding school transport.

Free school transport will be provided to the new school in accordance with the Council's normal policy as described below.

There is a statutory duty placed upon the Local Authority to provide pupils with free transport to their nearest suitable school if they reside beyond "walking distance" to that school. Caerphilly County Borough Council, however, provides transport to those pupils who attend their "relevant" school and reside beyond "walking distance" to that school. The "relevant" school is the catchment school or the nearest school.

The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure defines "walking distance" as three miles for pupils receiving Secondary Education, although subject to future review, at present Caerphilly County Borough Council currently defines this distance as two miles for pupils receiving Secondary Education – the distance being measured by the nearest available walking route. The residence is the address of the parent(s) or legal guardian of the pupil.

2.3 Sixth Form Provision

There was a specific query as to whether sixth form provision was to be included at the new school.

Under the proposals, sixth form provision for Blackwood Comprehensive and the new school will continue to be provided by Cross Keys College. The Council considers this to be the most appropriate means of delivering Post-16 education. Provision by Cross Keys College is also in line with Welsh Government policy.

3. PLANNING THE NEW SCHOOL

- 3.1 There was concern that the move to a new school may be disruptive to pupils starting the GCSE year or Option year as at September 2016. There was also concern that any disruption could bring slippage in the opening date of the new school.

Assuming the proposal proceeds, there will be detailed curriculum planning well in advance of the new school opening in September 2016. This planning will integrate the pupils of the two schools and help ensure minimum disruption to pupils GCSE and Options years. If there were any delay in opening the new school then the two existing facilities would continue to be used and pupils transferred to the new school when it was complete but at a time that minimises disruption.

- 3.2 There were also some concerns about the transfer of teaching staff to the new school. In terms of continuity of teaching staff it is envisaged that the teaching staff for both existing schools Oakdale and Pontllanfraith Comprehensives will be integrated into the new school. Other than natural wastage (e.g. through normal retirement or career progression) all teaching staff will be utilised in the new school.

- 3.3 It was questioned whether there was a detailed design for the new school. At the moment there is not a detailed design for the new school. However, initial analysis shows that there is sufficient space to provide adequate sporting facilities. The capacity of the school is to be 900 plus an additional learning needs unit of 50.

The pupil projections suggest that in the first 2 to 3 years of operation there will be in excess of 900 pupils. This is as a result of a bulge of pupils that will dissipate once the full effect of the catchment area changes are realised. Therefore the design of the school needs to be flexible and agile to allow for this bulge of pupils. However, the capacity of the school will be 900 and the authority will manage admission arrangements accordingly.

- 3.4 The Council's plans to manage school transport and related traffic were also queried. When the design of the school starts in earnest key considerations will be preparing a Travel Plan that looks at transport arrangements for pupils, including safe routes to schools. A traffic impact assessment will also need to be carried out. This will help ensure that there is sufficient planning of car parking requirements and drop-off facilities to ensure minimum disruption to the local community.

- 3.5 A neighbouring authority raised concerns regarding the impact of their own pupil numbers. However the proposed new school will actually be further away from the boundary of the authority than the nearest of the existing schools Oakdale Comprehensive. Furthermore, analysis of pupil projections show the capacity for the proposed new school of 900 is insufficient to permit out of catchment area pupils.

- 3.6 The pupil workshops demonstrated positivity by pupils towards the proposal. Further details of the workshops are available if requested.

4. INVESTMENT IN BLACKWOOD COMPREHENSIVE

- 4.1 Parents at Blackwood Comprehensive and the wider county did raise concern about the need for investment in the school to avoid it becoming the “poor relation” of the region.

As part of implementing the proposal, the Council will be considering a feasibility study with the investment that is required at Blackwood Comprehensive both to ensure there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the pupils and for Libanus and Markham Primary Schools, as well as improve the buildings at the school. Investment in Blackwood will form part of the funding envelope for the overall proposal. The sum of £20million has been secured as part of the 21st Century Schools Programme.

5. ESTYN’S RESPONSE

- 5.1 Estyn’s response to the consultation is shown as Appendix 2.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Although some concerns have been received about the proposal, in the main there is overwhelming positivity about the proposal to build a new school at Oakdale Plateau 3. Therefore it is recommended that the Council now publish the relevant Statutory Notice.

Consultees:

- Parents, Guardians and carers of all pupils of schools directly affected by the proposal
- Headteacher, staff and governors of schools directly affected by the proposal
- Pupils/Pupil Councils of schools directly affected by the proposal
- Staff and governors of schools directly affected by the proposal
- Headteachers of all schools in CCBC area
- All CCBC Members
- All CCBC Town and Community Council
- All CCBC Welsh Government Members, including regional AM's
- All Members of Parliament representing CCBC area
- All CCBC Libraries
- Directors of Education of all bordering LAs – Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Powys, RCT, Torfaen
- Principals of Ystrad Mynach College, Coleg Morgannwg & Coleg Gwent
- Children and Young Peoples Partnership
- Youth Forum
- Childrens Participation Officer
- Development Officer for Older People
- GAVO
- Caerphilly Governors Association
- Careers Wales
- Teaching Associations
- Support Staff Associations
- Education Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)
- Welsh Language Board
- Urdd Gobaith Cymru
- Welsh Government – Schools Management Division
- Welsh Government – Post 16 Division
- ESTYN
- RHAG
- Catholic Diocesan Board of Education
- Regular community users of schools directly affected by the proposal
- The Equality & Human Rights Commission
- Age Cymru
- CCB Access Group
- Disability Can Do
- Action on Hearing Loss Cymru
- British Deaf Association (BDA)
- Royal National Institute of Blind people (RNIB) Cymru
- Changing Faces
- Valleys Regional Equality Council (VALREC)
- Gwent Education Multi-Ethnic Service (GEMS)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Groups (LGBT)
- Stonewall Cymru
- Rainbow Group
- Bi Cymru Wales
- Menter Iaith Caerffili
- 21st Century Schools Stakeholder Group
- Education for Life Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor Wynne David, Chair of Education Scrutiny Committee/Cross Party Working Group
- Regional Education Consortium
- Regional Transport Consortium
- Police and Crime Commissioner.

Estyn's response to the Consultation:

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Estyn response to the proposal to close Oakdale and Pontllanfraith Secondary schools and replace them with a new 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 consultation proposal is from Caerphilly County Council. The proposal is that Caerphilly County Council through Phase 1 of their Secondary Rationalisation project:

- establish a new school for 11 - 16 year olds on Oakdale Plateau 3 ; and
- close Oakdale Comprehensive School and Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School while retaining Blackwood Comprehensive School.

Summary/ Conclusion

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

Estyn is of the view that the proposal is likely to maintain the present quality of outcomes, provision and leadership.

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

The proposal does not sufficiently address the possible impact it would have on other schools in the area. .

Description and benefits

How well has the proposer:

- **Given a clear rationale for the proposal?**

The proposer has set out an appropriate rationale which is mainly focused on reducing surplus places and reducing maintenance costs in order to support the aim that all other provision may be enhanced.

- **Set out clearly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo?**

The expected benefits of the current proposal, as outlined in the report, include the following:

- provide the conditions that will enable a broader and more diverse curriculum to be developed to better meet the needs of the school's young people and in ways that will be viable and sustainable over the longer term;
- create larger subject departments that will promote the sharing of skills and expertise across more viable teams;
- provide teaching and support staff with more opportunity to develop professionally;
- allow teaching and support staff access to a wider range of responsibilities;
- broaden the range of extra-curricular and out-of-school activities and develop them in ways that are sustainable over the longer term;
- the future capital investment benefits that would arise from the modernisation of one school rather than two;
- create a school of a sustainable size for its catchment areas by removing surplus capacity, providing greater educational and financial stability;
- release significant resources that will be reinvested in improving the buildings and in improving standards of teaching and learning, which otherwise would not have been available;
- improve the range and quality of facilities and learning resources available to the benefit of all learners;
- be better placed, as a larger institution, to negotiate with business and training providers when planning the development of vocational courses for young people in the 14-16 range; and
- learners would be educated in a high quality, modern building which would be able to support the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum.

The proposer has identified disadvantages of the current proposal as follows:

- bringing together two schools into one will inevitably cause some disruption and uncertainty for a period of time, although experience shows that this can be kept to a minimum and the children's education does not suffer.
- for some learners, there will be further travel to get to school; the Council's policy regarding free transport will continue to apply;
- some parents may feel that two schools are better for learners rather than one larger school - in other words there could be a view that smaller schools may be more personal and less daunting, particularly for new entrants. Large schools often create smaller "schools" within the body of the secondary school to ensure learners are not overwhelmed by the number of learners and to ensure the management and teaching teams have a greater knowledge and day to day involvement in each individual pupil;

- there will be staffing implications in that, for example, there will be a need for only one Headteacher. Staff will be concerned about the security of their jobs which is why we are developing a voluntary agreement amongst the 3 schools.

In general, the proposer has identified some of the benefits and challenges but has not expanded on any of these issues. For example it mentions that some learners will have to travel further to school but does not include the cost of this. Neither does the proposal mention the possible impact on standards, provision or leadership and management.

- **Managed any risks associated with the proposals?**

The proposer has not clearly identified the range of risks relating to such a proposal, whether it made sufficient risk assessments or how any identified risks would be managed.

However, the proposal does identify the following possible issues along with a brief explanation on how the proposer hopes to address them:

- transitional arrangements for GCSE learners;
 - Special Learning Needs;
 - transport arrangements; and
 - staffing issues.
- **Considered suitable alternatives and given good reasons as to why these have been discounted?**

The local authority has set up a Working Group to undertake an appraisal of the options. The proposer has suitably considered other alternatives and given reasonable arguments to support its proposal. It is clear from the consultation document on what overall basis the proposed alternative school site has been chosen.

Doing nothing was discounted as it would not address the extent of the secondary surplus places. Doing the minimum was discounted as it would leave most schools below the viability thresholds determined by the local authority. Closing two schools in a region and opening a new school to replace them was identified as a preferred option. The proposer believes that this approach would substantially reduce the aggregated cost liability in relation to the 25 year maintenance for schools.

- **Considered the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements and on accessibility of provision?**

The proposer shows clearly that it has considered the impact of the changes on accessibility of provision with regard access to the four proposed sites.

The proposer notes that should the new build go ahead it is likely that some children will be required to travel further to the new school; subject to parental preference. However, the information does not include the estimated associated costs to the local authority or the resulting journey times for learners.

- **Effectively shown how surplus places will be affected? If surplus places will be increased, has the proposer give adequate reasons for this?**

The proposal shows clearly how surplus places in the authority will be affected. Currently the projected surplus places in secondary schools is 24.9%. If the proposal is accepted and the two identified schools closed and a new 900 capacity school (or 950 including the Special Needs units) built then the projected percentage of surplus places would decrease to 20.4% across the authority.

The proposal also includes pupil projections and how they will address the risks with the capacity of the new school being over 900 between 2016 and 2019.

- **Where relevant, taken sufficient account of the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium provision within the local authority?**

The proposer has not indicated whether the proposal will impact on Welsh medium provision within the authority.

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?**

Blackwood and Oakdale were inspected during the previous Estyn inspection cycle, while Pontllanfraith was inspected in 2012 during the current cycle. In providing an analysis of the relative inspection outcomes of the schools, the proposer has attempted to merge the grades and judgements from both frameworks. As the frameworks differ in terms of judgement descriptors and the key questions, this exercise is not valid. However, the information from the inspection reports suggests that standards when inspected were at least good in all schools. On January 22, the proposer submitted additional information which included brief but useful summaries of the outcomes of the most recent school inspections. The proposer has also included Welsh Government banding outcomes for the last three years. All three

schools were in band 4 in 2013 which suggest that performance and progress are weak relative to other schools.

It is difficult for the local authority to consider the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership. There are too many unknowns especially in relation to leadership and staffing in general. It is assumed that the proposal will result in the appointment of a new leadership team and governing body. The proposal seeks to minimise the impact on staff in terms of compulsory redundancies and the council intends to deploy other staffing procedures for example redeployment and cross-matching arrangements.

However the proposal does not evaluate well enough the present performance of the schools involved in the consultation and how they view the likelihood that the best practice demonstrated in the schools involved would be transferred to the new school.

It is reasonable to assume with the better facilities afforded by the new build that learners would experience a broader and more diverse curriculum that would better meet their needs, and the proposal does suggest this. It also suggests that the proposal would broaden the range of extra-curricular and out-of-school activities which is a claim that is dependent on staff commitment and establishing the correct ethos by the school leaders.

The proposal mentions that the Cross Party Working Group looked at curriculum data as one of the factors in deciding which of the four regions within the authority they should prioritise as phase 1 of their secondary rationalisation plan. However this information is not included in the document.

On balance, Estyn's view is that the proposal is likely to maintain the present quality of outcomes, provision and leadership.

- **Considered the likely impact of the proposals to ensure delivery of the full curriculum at each key stage?**

The proposer indicates that learners would experience a broader and more diverse curriculum that would better meet their needs. It also suggests that the proposal would broaden the range of extra-curricular and out-of-school activities. The proposal lacks detail with regard to how it plans to deliver the full curriculum at key stage 3 or key stage 4 or give sufficient reasons for learners to be educated in a larger school.

- **Considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs?**

There is clear inspection evidence that the complex learning difficulty units at Pontllanfraith are successful in meeting individual pupils' needs and that support for pupils with additional learning needs is effective. However the proposal does not

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refer to this or how they plan to transfer the good practice demonstrated at these units to the new school.

The proposal states that these units would be incorporated into the Oakdale Plateau 3 secondary school and that the learners would benefit from modern teaching accommodation. The proposer does not include a sufficient analysis of how the proposal will impact on learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The proposer has not considered the impact of the proposal on any other vulnerable group of learners, for example looked-after children or Gypsy Traveller children.

- **Ensured that the disruption to learners is minimised?**

The proposer does not include specific reference to how it will ensure that the disruption to learners is minimised.