

Estyn response to the proposal by Caerphilly County Borough Council to establish a Rhymney 3-18 school by extending the age range of Rhymney Comprehensive from 11-18 to 3-18 and incorporating the new Abertysswg/Pontlottyn Primary 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 and other additional information such as data from Welsh Government and the views of the Regional Consortium which delivers school improvement services to the schools within the proposal.

Introduction

This is a consultation proposal from Caerphilly County Borough Council. The proposal is to:

- establish a Rhymney 3-18 school by extending the age range of Rhymney Comprehensive from 11-18 to 3-18 from 1st January 2018;
- incorporate the planned Abertysswg/Pontlottyn primary school within the new school;

Summary/Conclusion

The proposer has provided an appropriate rationale for its proposal to establish an all-through school incorporating Rhymney Comprehensive and the new Abertysswg/Pontlottyn primary school. However, it has not considered in sufficient depth the risks associated with the proposal and how it would manage these. For example, it identifies the challenge of creating a unified vision for the new school and avoiding a two-tier approach but does not indicate how it would address this issue. Furthermore, the proposal does not adequately consider the current quality of leadership and management in the three schools and the standards achieved by pupils.

Although the proposal lacks detail and there are gaps in important areas, it is Estyn's opinion that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the present standards of education provision in this area will at least be maintained.

Description and benefits

The proposer provides a clear rationale for the proposal. The proposer bases its case on a wide range of arguments. It usefully points to sources of evidence that support the benefits of all-through schools including the Department for Education and Skills in England and the National College of School Leadership. The proposer argues reasonably that the changes would lead to a continuity in provision that avoids a potential dip in pupil performance when pupils transfer from one school to another. Furthermore, the proposer asserts that organisational benefits arise from the new arrangement through the opportunity to share expertise and resources across year groups and key stages. The proposer considers appropriately the benefits of the proposal in assisting the implementation of curriculum reform as outlined in Professor Graham Donaldson's Successful Futures report. It maintains that all through schools align well with the report's proposed removal of phases and key stages and break down the distinction between what happens in primary and secondary schools and the various key stages.

The proposer reasonably assumes that the combining of the budgets for the existing schools will allow the new school to use its budget more effectively to achieve economies of scale. The proposer does not envisage any changes to home to school transport as a result of the proposal.

Overall, the proposer provides strong arguments in favour of the proposal. However, the proposal document does not outline the disadvantages of the proposed changes in sufficient depth or discuss the alternative of maintaining the new combined Abertysswg/Pontlottyn primary school and Rhymney Comprehensive School as separate bodies. Similarly, whilst the proposal indicates clearly a number of associated risks, it does not indicate how it would manage these other than to suggest that the proposer would develop a risk matrix to address these challenges if the proposal proceeds.

The proposer considers the current number of students attending Rhymney Comprehensive School and its feeder primary schools including the existing Abertysswyg and Pontlottlyn schools. It also considers the projected pupil numbers for these schools over the next five years. However, the proposer does not consider in sufficient detail the effect of the proposal on the total number of surplus places in the area nor how the proposal may reduce or increase this figure.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposer has sufficiently considered the impact of the proposal on the quality and breadth of provision. It argues appropriately that the proposal would increase opportunities for an uninterrupted education, enabling the school to develop pupils' skills without the negative impact of transition between key stages. It asserts,

reasonably, that the new arrangements would allow teachers to develop consistent approaches to teaching and learning across the age ranges and to share specialist staff and curriculum expertise that would benefit pupil progress. Furthermore, the proposer argues that the establishment of an all-through school will allow teachers to better track the progress of pupils from entry at the age of three to leaving at sixteen or eighteen.

The proposer makes appropriate reference to the outcomes of the existing schools' most recent Estyn inspections and any follow up activity. The proposer considers the National School Categorisation support category of all three schools. However, it does not examine in sufficient detail the current improvement capacity of the three schools or indicate in enough depth the impact of the proposals on leadership and management overall. The proposer has not provided a data analysis of the schools involved in the proposal.

The proposer has undertaken an impact assessment that considers community, Welsh language and equality issues. However, the outcomes of this activity are not included within the proposal document. The proposer considers broadly its expectations for pupils with additional learning needs. However, it does not outline in sufficient detail the implications of the proposal for pupils with additional learning needs.