

Consultation Report

Proposal to Close Cwm Glas Infant School



Proposal : Currently the pupils at Cwm Glas Infant School transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School at Key Stage 2. The proposal seeks to transition the pupils at Foundation Phase, to deliver inclusive all-through primary school provision from September 2024.

This will result in the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School.

Formal Consultation Period : 28th September 2023 – 9th November 2023

This report is published in line with the requirements of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018.

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This document is available in Welsh and English. Information can also be made available in other formats, languages and in hard copy on request. Please contact us on 01443 864817 to arrange this.



INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

The prime purpose of schools is the provision of education and in line with Welsh Government guidelines, any case for closure should be robust and in the best interests of educational provision in the area.

When considering whether a closure is appropriate, special attention is given to any reasonable alternatives and the overall effect of closure on the local community and how parents' and pupils' engagement with the alternative school and any facilities it may offer could be supported.

The School Organisation Code 2018, provides clear statutory guidance as to the processes that need to be followed. Undertaking a consultation exercise is one of the initial stages of progressing any proposal and is subject to Cabinet approval.

From the 28th September 2023 to the 9th November 2023 a consultation exercise was undertaken.

The purpose of the consultation was to gain views on the proposal. Currently the pupils at Cwm Glas Infant School transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School at Key Stage 2. The proposal seeks to transition the pupils at Foundation Phase, to deliver an inclusive all-through primary school provision from September 2024. This will result in the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School.

This Consultation Report is the prescribed method as outlined by the School Organisation Code 2018 for reflection, review and assessment to provide Cabinet with the information to make an informed decision as to whether to proceed with the proposal to the next stage, amend the proposal taking into account further information that has come forward through the consultation process or to close this proposal with no further actions taken.

The Report is divided into several sections with the aim to:

- Outline the consultation processes undertaken
- Provide clarification in relation to the information provided and consultee engagement
- Summarise each of the issues raised by consultees
- Set out Estyn's response to the consultation in full
- Respond to issues raised by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons

Statutory Obligations

This report is published in line with the requirements of the [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) and the [School Organisation Code 2018](#).

The Consultation report will be published on the Caerphilly Sustainable Communities for Learning website with hardcopies available on request. All information is published in Welsh and English. In addition, a child friendly summary has also been produced to ensure information is provided in an accessible format for any children and young people affected by the proposals.

Purpose of the Consultation Report

The publication of this Consultation Report discharges the Council of its duty under the School Organisation Code 2018.

The consultation period represented an opportunity for people to learn about the proposal, ask questions and make comments. Any negative responses made during the consultation period were not counted as objections to the proposal but as adverse comments.

Objections to a proposal can only be registered after the publication of a statutory notice.

The Consultation Report outlines the processes followed, provides clarity on the issues and comments received from consultees, ensures that the views of children and young people affected by the proposal are expressed and ultimately, provides Cabinet with the necessary information to take one of the following decisions:

- Proceed with the proposal
- Make changes to the proposal
- Not to proceed with the proposal

Full details of the decision making process and the stages of the proposal as outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 have been published as part of the initial Consultation Document and is publicly available via the Council's website with hardcopies made available on request.

PROPOSAL

What are we proposing to do?

We are proposing :

○ **Closure of Cwm Glas Infant School**

Currently the pupils at Cwm Glas Infant School transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School at Key Stage 2. The proposal seeks to transition the pupils at Foundation Phase, to deliver inclusive all-through primary school provision from September 2024.

This will result in the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School.

What is driving this proposal?

Due to the falling rolls at Cwm Glas Infant school which are projected to decrease further, a meeting was arranged by the Head Teacher and the Governing body with Local Authority representatives including the Chief Education Officer, to discuss the future viability of the school. The conclusion of the meeting, agreed the school could no longer maintain a balanced budget and an appropriate staffing level, therefore a decision was made by the Head Teacher and Governing Body of the School to pursue closure of Cwm Glas Infant School with effect from July 2024.

Options Appraisal

The planning and development of effective school organisation proposals is crucial to the Welsh Government's goal of transforming education in Wales and providing better educational outcomes with a commitment to increase school effectiveness, and narrow inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals.

The Welsh Government's Business Case Guidance in relation to utilisation of the Options

Framework approach has been followed to identify the widest possible number of feasible options, focusing on the following key dimensions: scope, service solution, service delivery, implementation and funding.

An options appraisal provides the opportunity to help councils make an informed and evidence based decision on how to deliver services. It does this by considering the relative advantages and disadvantages of a number of different delivery model options (including the current way in which the service is delivered).

The methodology helps decision makers to consider the:

- Desirability - the degree to which each option meets the strategic objectives and priorities of stakeholders
- Viability - the degree to which each option is financially viable and sustainable
- Feasibility - the degree to which each option can be implemented

As part of outlining the current proposal, an options appraisal was undertaken.

The options appraisal stage allowed for a number of different delivery model options to be explored and evaluated against a set of agreed criteria, leading to the selection of the preferred option.

Table 1: Options Appraisal Longlist	
Option	Longlist Options: Description
Option 1	Do Nothing: No change to existing school arrangements
Option 2	Do Minimum: Reduce staffing levels at Cwm Glas Infant School through reduction to 1 class
Option 3	Do Intermediate Co-location of services at Cwm Glas Infant School to offset costs to maintain the school
Option 4	Do Major: Collaboration/ Federation of Cwm Glas Infant School with another school in the area
Option 5	Do Maximum Transition Cwm Glas Infant School pupils to Coed Y Brain at Foundation Level and close Cwm Glas Infant School

Each option was evaluated against the investment objectives outlined in the Consultation Document and the extent to which it met the Critical Success Factors. This stage was an important part of the process, to raise important questions at an early stage and assist in developing proposals.

This resulted in options either being discounted, carried forward for further consideration in the short list with an eventual option identified as a preferred way forward. It is the option identified as the preferred way forward upon which the consultation exercise was based as all other options have been discounted at this point.

The process utilised was outlined in detail in the Consultation Document and resulted in **Option 5** being identified as the preferred option, namely, **Transition Cwm Glas Infant School pupils to Coed Y Brain at Foundation Level and close Cwm Glas Infant School.**

Benefits and Disbenefits

There are common challenges faced by all Local Authorities when adopting new proposals. The vast majority of Council policies are delivered through projects and programmes of various forms. It is therefore vital that projects are delivered successfully in order to realise their intended benefits for citizens.

Evidence shows that the best way to ensure successful delivery is by setting up projects correctly in the first place. The most common causes of failure, among others are a lack of clear objectives, insufficient resources and over-ambitious cost and schedule that impact on the level and amount of benefit that can be realised and can be avoided if tackled in a project's early stages.

As part of the development of the proposal, a number of benefits and disbenefits were identified as outlined in the Consultation Document. The consultation process was an opportunity to consult with relevant stakeholders to understand what they see as positive outcomes and what negative consequences may be delivered.

The Council recognises that people have different needs, requirements and goals and we will work actively against all forms of discrimination by promoting good relations and mutual respect within and between our communities. An Integrated Impact Assessment was carried out to initiate discussion and invite comments as to whether the principles for the proposal are supported.

All comments have been recorded and Cabinet members will be provided with copies of all the responses received within the consultation period and in their original format as part of the decision making process.



CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultation Process

The consultation process has followed the Welsh Government guidelines as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018.

Stakeholder Engagement

Through [TeamCaerphilly - Better Together](#), the Council is committed to ensuring high quality, citizen focused services for the communities that comprise our county borough. In future-proofing public services, we recognise the need to ensure effective engagement which is central to our decision making - [Read more about our approach to Consultation and Engagement here](#)

For this proposal, our consultation process must follow the Welsh Government Statutory guidance as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018.

The following consultees were advised of our proposals by letter or email:

Table 2: Consultee List	
Pupils and Pupil Councils*	Welsh Ministers
Parents, prospective parents, guardians and carers*	Assembly Members and Members of Parliament representing the area served *
Headteacher, Staff and Governing bodies*	Local CCBC Members
Directors of Education for Neighbouring Authorities	Local Town and Community Councils
Teaching and Support Staff Associations	Estyn
Parent Network	Welsh Education Forum
Diocesan Directors / Boards of Education	South East Wales Consortium (EAS)
Gwent and South Wales Police and Crime Commissioners	South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA)
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership	Mudiad Meithrin, Menter Iaith and voluntary nursery providers

**of schools directly or likely to be affected by the proposal only*

In addition to advising those we were obliged to under the stakeholder criteria, the following were also contacted and advised of our proposals in writing:

- All Headteachers in the Borough

Consultation Information

The School Organisation Code 2018 states that when undertaking a consultation process in connection with a school proposal, the Council must publish information to enable transparent, balanced and open decision making.

The consultation document must be published on a school day and consultees must be given at least 42 days to respond to the document, with at least 20 of these being school days as defined by Section 579 of the Education Act 1996. The consultation period opened on Thursday 28th September 2023 (a school day) and concluded at midnight on Thursday 9th November 2023.

As part of this proposal, the following documentation was produced:

- Consultation Notification Letter
- Consultation Document
- Child Friendly Summary Presentation
- Consultation Response Form
- Integrated Impact Assessment

All documentation was published in Welsh and English, complying with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. Information was also available in other languages and formats on request, however, no such requests were received as part of this process.

Hardcopies of the documentation were issued to the schools directly affected by the proposal including the child friendly summary for discussion with the pupils.

In addition to notifying the consultees in writing of the proposal, distribution of information was supported via the school text messaging service direct to parents and staff.

A child friendly consultation summary was also produced to support the consultation process with pupils of the affected schools to present information in a manner relevant to their likely understanding, allowing them to participate in the consultation process and reach an informed opinion. In addition to this documentation, local teaching staff provided assistance to children and young people who wished to submit a consultation response in their preferred format and language.

The Council's Social media channels were also utilised.

Response Methods

As outlined in the Consultation Document, anyone wishing to comment in relation to the proposal could do so in writing by:

- Completing the online response form on the Council's website
- Completing a response pro forma and posting it to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team at Caerphilly
- Emailing comments to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team at Caerphilly

Pupils of the schools directly affected by the proposal were also given the opportunity to engage in the process through focused 'Pupil Voice' sessions.

The response forms were designed in such a way as to capture the relevant information required to discharge the Council's obligations required under the School Organisation Code for undertaking a consultation linked to the regulated alteration of a maintained school.

This consultation was undertaken to capture the views of consultees in relation to the proposal. These views have been incorporated into this document, which will be published and considered by Cabinet when determining whether to proceed to Statutory notice stage. The separate statutory processes were outlined in the consultation document and any adverse comments received as part of this process have been recorded as such.



CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultation Responses

Overall a total of 21 responses were received during the consultation process.

Please note: The figure above and the data reported on for Questions 1 to 7 does not include the responses received by Estyn, Scrutiny or captured as part of any pupil engagement sessions. These are outlined in more detail later in this document.

Of the prescribed methods for providing a response during the consultation period:

- 17 responses received via Online Survey

- 4 responses received via email
- 0 responses received via post

0 responses (0%) were returned in the medium of Welsh.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Team received no requests for the documentation to be provided in any additional format or languages to those already available.

QUESTION 1

The consultees were asked to confirm the proposal they were responding to as part of the process.

QUESTION 2

The consultees were asked to identify a category that best described them in relation to the proposal for the school affected. The options provided were selected to demonstrate that the key consultee groups as outlined in the School Organisation Code had been engaged with. These included, Pupil, Parent, Staff Member, School Governor, Elected Member, Local Resident, Group and Other.

Of those who responded, the following categories were selected:

29%	14%	5%	0%	24%	19%
Parents	Staff Members	School Governors	Elected Members	Local Resident	Other

For those selecting 'other', the opportunity was given to elaborate further as they felt appropriate.

QUESTIONS 3 TO 7

As part of the consultation process, consultees were asked to provide basic contact information, including their name, address and email. This psychographic data was collected in order to help paint a picture of the consultee and enable the Sustainable Communities for Learning team to understand trends in response data and response groupings that would assist in compiling this Consultation Report.

As information can be collected for many purposes, the Caerphilly County Borough Council's privacy notice for consultations/surveys was referenced, which outlined the purpose and legal basis for collecting the information, data usage and data retention periods.

For the purposes of this Consultation Report, Cabinet will be provided with a separate digest of the consultation comments received. Please note that comments that are considered to be offensive or compromise anonymity have been edited or removed.

QUESTION 8

As part of our duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, consultees must be given the option to request notification as to the publication of this Consultation Report. Contact information has been collected to this end and the preferred method for communication will be notification via email if this information has been made available by the respondent.



17 out of the 21 respondents have requested notification. These individuals have been added to the notification list and will be contacted concurrently with stakeholders when this document is made publicly available through the Council's website. Hardcopies of the documentation will be made available on request.

QUESTION 9

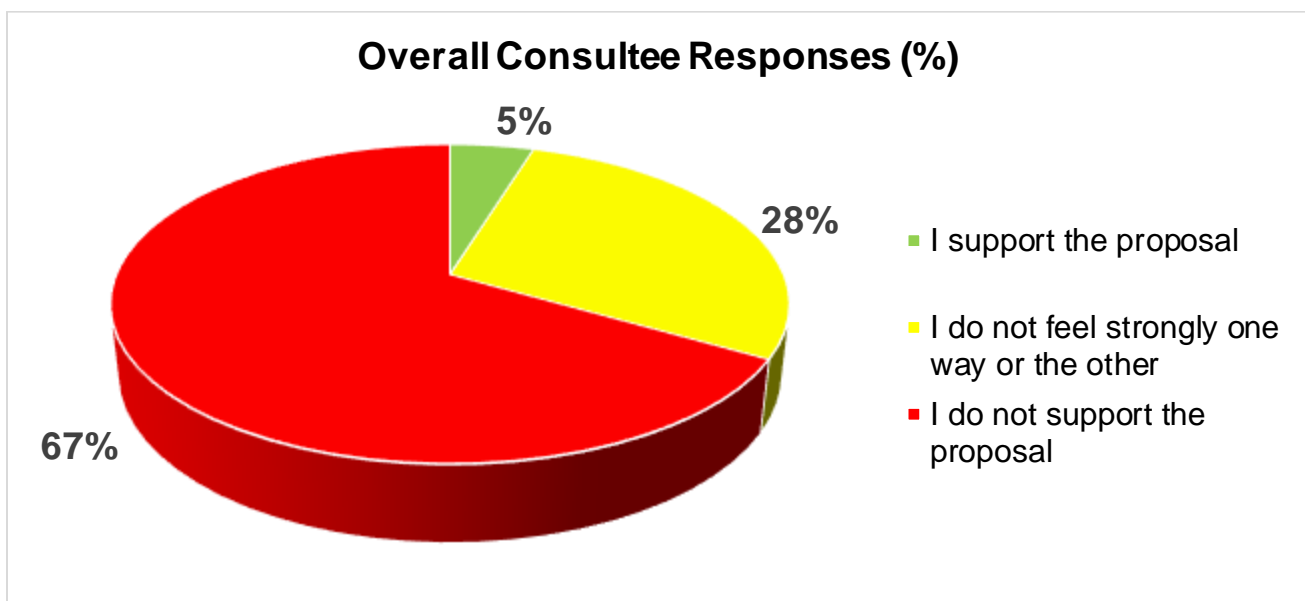
Consultees can submit their views either in favour of or against the proposals.

Consultees were asked to indicate which of the following statements most accurately reflected their views about the proposal. Consultees were reminded to read the consultation documentation prior to providing any responses during this consultation exercise and that unfavourable comments made during the consultation period will not be treated as objections at this stage.

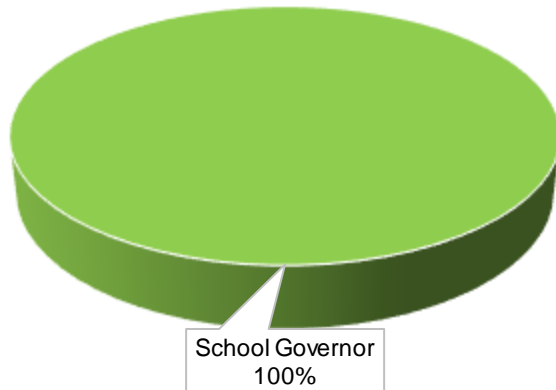
The options available were:

- I support the proposal
- I do not feel strongly one way or the other
- I do not support the proposal

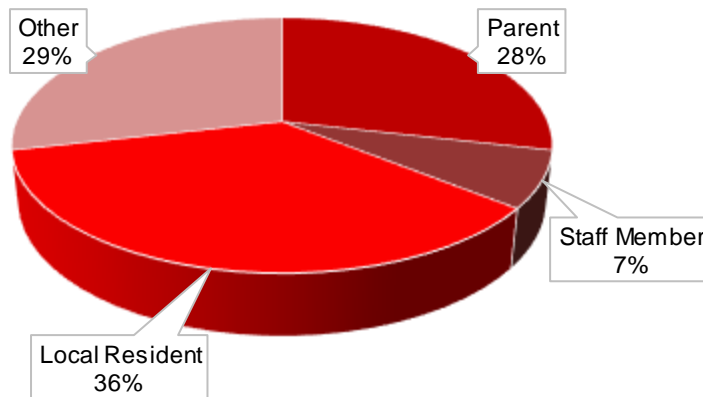
Of the 21 responses returned, 1 supports the proposal, 14 do not support it, 6 either didn't feel strongly either way or failed to select an option.



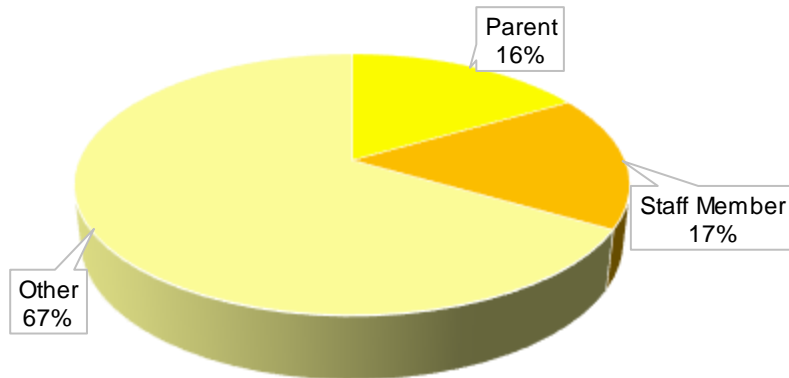
"I support the proposal"
5% of overall responses broken down by category



"I do not support the proposal"
67% of overall responses broken down by category



"I do not feel strongly one way or the other"
28% of overall responses broken down by category



It is prudent to bring to the attention of readers that the commentary provided as part of Questions 10 to 12 may offer additional insight into the views of the consultees and that the response

provided to Question 9 should not be considered in isolation, for example where there are duplicate responses or multiple responses from a single household.

QUESTIONS 10 to 12

This was a free text box, enabling consultees to provide additional comments as to why they supported or did not support the proposal as outlined in the Consultation Document, or to suggest changes or alternative options that could improve the proposal.

All comments received have been read and analysed.

General themes that emerged from the consultation, including those raised at Scrutiny Committee:

- Transition Processes and Impact
- Staffing Implications
- Future Developments

These themes are outlined in more detail in the section on 'Consultation Clarification'.

QUESTIONS 13 to 18

In line with the Caerphilly County Borough Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 and the Consultation and Monitoring Guidance 2016 document, a reduced version of the Equalities and Monitoring questionnaire was included as part of the consultation response to support effective planning and to ensure that a representative sample was achieved to identify any equality issues.

From the responses received, of those that completed the Equalities monitoring section:

I am ...			
Female	14	Prefer to self describe	0
Male	7	Prefer not to say	0

Age			
Under 16	3	40-65	9
16-25	0	Over 65	1
26-39	4	Prefer not to say	4

Disability			
Yes	2	No	13
Prefer not to say	6		

Preferred Language			
English	14	Other	0
Welsh	0	Prefer not to say	7

QUESTIONS 19 to 20

We have to make sure that the Welsh Language is treated in the same way as the English language.

Respondents were given the opportunity to make suggestions on how we can increase opportunities for people to use or access services in Welsh. In addition, respondents were able to comment on how the proposal could be changed to have (more of) a positive impact on the Welsh language.

2 consultees highlighted the fact that the closure of the school would mean one less facility capable of delivering Welsh language opportunities.

QUESTION 21

In relation to equalities implications that respondents highlighted, 0 respondents indicated that their decision was influenced as per the list outlined in the consultation response form.

Scrutiny Response

The Council's Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee is a consultee for any policy or service developments in relation to Education within the Borough.

A Multi-Locational meeting (Penallta House & MS Teams) took place on Tuesday 17th October 2023 at 5.30pm.

As part of this meeting, the proposal relating to the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School was discussed as agenda item 8.

All consultation documentation was made available to members as part of the agenda reports pack and officers linked to the proposal were available to take questions. Any queries raised have been acknowledged and included as part of the themes analysis.

A recording of the session is available to view:

[Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting](#)

Estyn's Response

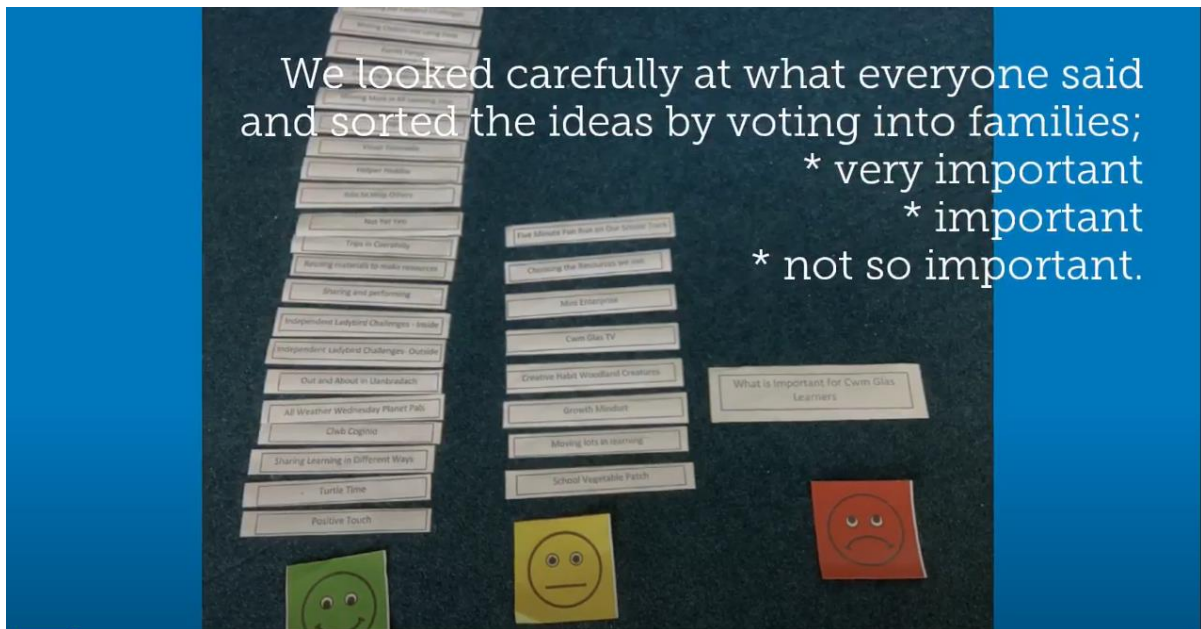
Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018, the Council, as the proposers, is required to send a notification with regards to the consultation to Estyn.

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales and their vision is to improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for all learners in Wales. 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.

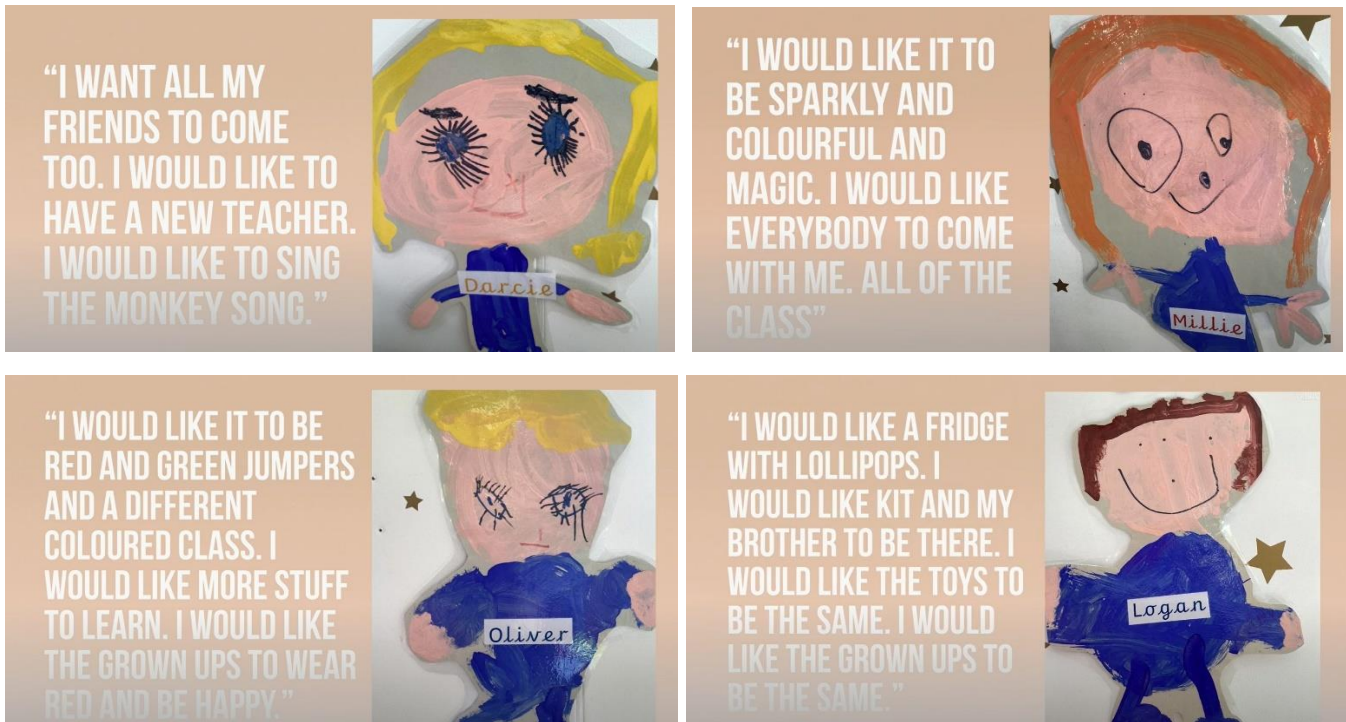
Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal. The full response from Estyn is included as Annex 2 at the end of this document. However, in summary:

"It is Estyn's view that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area."

The Council acknowledges Estyn's response.



2) If they went to a new school, what would they like to be there?



Other Schools identified as being affected

The other school identified as 'affected' in relation to this proposal was Coed Y Brain Primary School. The Head Teacher of the school was contacted during the consultation period whereby the consultation proposal was discussed and the pupils, governing body and staff at the school invited to provide their responses as part of the consultation process. Where information has been submitted, responses are included as part of the separate annex available to Cabinet.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Consultation Clarification

When analysing all consultation response comments received as part of the consultation period, a number of emerging themes became evident.

Table 3: Summary of Response Themes		
Theme	Overview	Number of Mentions
Transition	Infant to Primary setting	8
	Admission Processes	1
	Capacity of Coed Y Brain Primary	1
	Travel distance to Coed y Brain Primary	2
Staffing	Staffing Implications	5
Future Developments	Use of Cwm Glas Infant School site	2

To assist Cabinet in the decision making process, the following information is provided by Council Officers involved in the formulation of the proposal by means of response for clarification with supporting reasons.

Transition

- Infant to Primary setting

A selection of consultees highlighted their experience of the benefits of pupils attending a smaller school, for example, having that strong sense of school community which they perceived may be lost in a larger primary school environment. However, it should be acknowledged that Cwm Glas Infant School is a feeder school to Coed Y Brain Primary School both of which share the same catchment area and are located in Llanbradach, whereby pupils currently transition at Key Stage 2.

A primary school provides an environment where children can work and play together over a longer period of time developing a greater understanding and appreciation of one another's diverse strengths, skills and personalities. This has been shown to have a positive impact on social skills, problem solving and relationship development between all members of the community.

- Admission Processes

One respondent expressed concerns relating to the transfer of pupils to Coed Y Brain Primary School. The authority will work with both schools and parents and pupils to ensure a smooth transition between the schools.

Should the decision be taken by Cabinet to close Cwm Glas Infant School, all pupils currently on roll will be able to transfer to Coed Y Brain Primary School, at the relevant time, subject to parental preference.

Further information regarding the admissions process for prospective pupils can be found here: [Starting School – A guide to Admission Arrangements and Education Services 2024-25](#)

➤ Capacity of Coed Y Brain Primary

A scrutiny member sought confirmation with regards to the ability of Coed Y Brain Primary school to accommodate current pupils from Cwm Glas Infants and any future additional demand. Cwm Glas Infants School is a natural feeder into Coed Y Brain Primary, and based on current surplus places and future projections, has ample capacity to accommodate current and future pupils.

➤ Travel distance to Coed Y Brain Primary

A selection of consultees raised concerns with regards to the impact of the new location on learner travel. Cwm Glas Infant school and Coed Y Brain Primary share the same catchment area and are both located in Llanbradach Village circa 1 mile from each other with existing active travel routes established.

As outlined in the Consultation Document, it is anticipated that the likely effect of different travelling arrangements as a result of the proposal will be minimal, although it is acknowledged that some existing Cwm Glas Infant school pupils may find themselves living closer to the Coed Y Brain Primary school site and conversely others finding themselves further away although the difference between the sites is minimal.

Those pupils that reside within catchment and live more than 1.5 miles away from their nearest catchment school are eligible to free transport under Caerphilly's transport policy which is more generous than the legislative requirement under the Learner Travel Measure (Wales) 2008.

Staffing

➤ Staffing Implications

There were concerns raised in relation to the future employment of the existing staff at Cwm Glas Infant School. The Council's Human Resources Team will work closely with all relevant parties to ensure that processes are adhered to, and support is provided as required dependent on the final outcome.

Future Developments

➤ Use of Cwm Glas Infant School site

Local neighbours raised concerns relating to the future use of the Cwm Glas Infant School site. Subject to the proposal gaining approval and the closure of Cwm Glas Infants School, the existing school building and site would then be classified as surplus to educational requirement and become an unallocated Corporate Asset. Future use of the building and site would then be subject to a stringent series of tests to ensure legitimate Council use, Welsh Language and Local Community use are considered in the first instance.

Reasonable Alternatives Identified

Following the consultation period, the Council is required to carry out a further assessment for the proposal. The purpose of this further assessment is to take account of any further information that has come forward through the consultation or otherwise.

As outlined in the Consultation Document, the proposal under consideration is to close Cwm Glas Infant School . This was the preferred option as identified through the options appraisal process and scored against the critical success factors of Strategic fit, Educational fit, Accessibility, Financial fit and Environmental impact.

Through the consultation process and the comments returned, there is evidence that there is a positive level of support in relation to Cwm Glas Infant School. However, no reasonable alternatives have been highlighted that have not already been discounted at Options Appraisal Stage as a result of the Consultation Process.



NEXT STEPS

Recommendation

In reviewing the proposal to take account of further information that has come forward through the consultation and in consideration of the likely impact on quality and standards in education, the community and travelling arrangements, it is the recommendation of this report that the proposal is progressed as outlined in the Consultation Document, namely:

- **Closure of Cwm Glas Infant School**

Currently the pupils at Cwm Glas Infant School transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School at Key Stage 2. The proposal seeks to transition the pupils at Foundation Phase, to deliver inclusive all-through primary school provision from September 2024.

This will result in the closure of Cwm Glas Infant School.

Decision Making

To deliver our reforms across the entire system, we will need a bold commitment to effective collaboration along with integration of services where appropriate. This will include Welsh Government, the teaching profession and the wider education workforce, our key partners in local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional services, Estyn and others. Successful implementation of any proposal will require effective and honest engagement between all facets of the education system and our local communities and we are committed to providing the conditions to enable this to happen.

Cabinet Members are asked to:

- a) Consider the information contained in the Consultation Report
- b) Approve the recommendation, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Cwm Glas Infant School by July 2024

Reporting, Notification and Publishing of Information

Should Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposal, a Statutory Notice will be published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal has the opportunity to do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections must be made in writing and sent to the Council within the 28-day period.

Cabinet will then consider the outcome of the Statutory Notice at a future meeting and determine whether to implement the proposal having given due consideration to all the information provided.

In the event of objections, the Council will publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and Cabinet's response to those objections within 7 days or the day of the determination of the proposal. This report will be available for all persons to view on the Council website and paper copies will be available on request.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Annex 1 :

[Consultation Notification Letter](#)

[Consultation Document](#)

[Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

Annex 2:

Estyn's Full Response

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.

Summary/ Conclusion

Caerphilly County Borough Council are consulting on their proposal to close Cwm Glas Infant School with effect from July 2024. It is Estyn's view that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The council has presented a clear rationale outlining the reasons for the proposal. Due to continued and projected falling rolls at Cwm Glas Infant School, the headteacher and governing

body are now unable to set a balanced budget with an appropriate staffing level, therefore the decision has been made to pursue closure.

Under current arrangements, pupils at Cwm Glas Infant School transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School at the end of Year 2. This proposal seeks to bring forward transition to the start of the early years phase which would allow pupils to receive an 'all-through' primary provision from September 2024.

The council has provided a suitably detailed description of the proposal along with an estimated timetable for statutory procedures. As pupils already transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School, the council states that there are no requirements for interim arrangements. The consultation document states that additional support would be available to families where required.

The council has included a useful 'Children and Young People's Consultation Document' which accompanies the main consultation document. This document refers to a list of Frequently Asked Questions available on the council website however these do not yet appear to be in place.

The council has outlined the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal appropriately. The main advantages noted are a significant reduction in surplus places along with the provision of wider opportunities for pupils in a larger, primary provision. The consultation outlines additional benefits in terms of easing arrangements for families with primary aged siblings which appear to be appropriate.

The council states that it will manage risks pro-actively in accordance with its risk management procedures. The consultation notes that transition arrangements are already well established between the two schools and therefore any risks would be minimal. This appears to be a reasonable statement.

The council has considered a range of options which include consideration of reduced staffing levels, shared use of the building to help offset costs and collaboration or federation with another school in the area. The council has identified reasons as to why each has been discounted in favour of school closure. These reasons appear to be fair and reasonable. However, although the council states that further discussions will be made with both schools concerning the impact on staffing, potential impact on staff is not made explicit within the 'Benefits' and 'Disbenefits' section.

The council has considered the impact of the proposal on transport arrangements. Both schools share the same catchment area and the distance between the two schools is 1.1 miles. Pupils from Cwm Glas Infant School currently transition to Coed Y Brain Primary School at the end of Year 2 and 'safe travel' routes are already established. The council does not anticipate that the proposal will affect transport arrangements, and this appears to be a reasonable statement.

The council has demonstrated the impact of the proposal on surplus places. There are currently 50.88% surplus places at Cwm Glas Infant School and 32.23% surplus places at Coed Y Brain Primary School. It is reasonable for the proposal to suggest that surplus places will reduce significantly as a result of the intended closure.

The council has appropriately considered the financial costs of the proposal. The consultation document states that Coed Y Brain Primary School has existing capacity to fully accommodate all current and future pupils from Cwm Glas Infant School and therefore requires minimal further investment. Savings will be realised through the upkeep and maintenance of a single site which benefits from a greater energy efficiency rating.

The local authority has provided a Welsh Language Impact Assessment as part of this proposal.

The local authority has provided a Community Impact Assessment as part of this proposal. The local authority note that the two schools are English medium and anticipates that the proposal will have minimal impact on the Welsh medium offer across the borough and this is a reasonable assumption.

NB. Estyn provides their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals and does not evaluate the Welsh Language Impact Assessment or the Community Impact Assessment.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The council has considered the educational aspects of the proposal by outlining the benefits of a primary school provision over an infant school provision. The benefits are outlined under curriculum, quality of teaching and professional development. The consultation implies that standards should improve under a single vision, a smoother continuity of provision and access to a wider range of enrichment activities.

The consultation suggests that the provision of increased opportunities to learn alongside a wider age range of peers will improve well-being and attitudes to learning across both settings. In addition, pupils would have access to a wider range of extra-curricular activities and wraparound school care.

The consultation outlines perceived benefits of learning under one management team. The local authority claims that these benefits will stem from unified leadership of the curriculum and quality of teaching and learning under one whole school development plan. In terms of continuity for learners across the primary phase, this is a reasonable statement.

The consultation does not make comment on each school's most recent Estyn report but does provide a link to the Estyn website. Cwm Glas Infant School was last inspected in 2017 and Coed Y Brain Primary School in 2023. Neither inspection report outlines any serious shortcomings.

The local authority has considered the impact of the proposal on vulnerable groups through the completion of a full Integrated Impact Assessment. The assessment considers the impact of the proposal on all protected characteristics and notes that Coed Y Brain Primary School is accessible to pupils and the wider community regardless of other specified characteristics. The consultation concludes that there are no perceived negative impacts, and this seems reasonable.

With regard to pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), the local authority states that it would continue to provide support for ALN pupils. The local authority also states that it is unlikely that the Special Needs Resource Base at Coed Y Brain Primary School will be affected by this proposal. This appears to be appropriate.

The council has considered the impact of this closure on the local community. The consultation states that as Cwm Glas Infant School is a feeder school to Coed Y Brain Primary School, there will be minimal impact on other local primary schools. This is a reasonable statement. The council also states that both schools currently have limited community use. Should the proposal go ahead, the council states that the Cwm Glas building will be prioritised for Welsh language and local community use in the future.

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