

## CONSULTATION REPORT

Admission arrangements for community schools in relation to the 2017/2018 academic year.

### **Purpose of the consultation report**

1. This report is to inform Members of the outcome of consultation.

### **Consultation Process**

2. The consultation invited comments on proposed 2017/2018 admission arrangements for community schools within Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. Views were invited from head teachers and governing bodies of community and voluntary aided schools, neighbouring local authorities and the Admissions Forum.
3. Responses were received from: Cllr. Ellis, Pelenna Ward; the Headteacher, St Joseph RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre; the Chair of Governors, St Joseph RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre; and the Chair of Governors, Rhos Primary School.
4. The Admissions Forum also responded to the consultation in support of the proposal.

### **Summary of responses to consultation**

5. The responses received are summarised as follows:
  - a. A clear definition of catchment area is requested.
  - b. A clear definition of designated partner / feeder school is requested and an explanation as to why the term 'feeder school' had been replaced by 'partner school' is requested.
  - c. Greater clarity in order to distinguish between the responsibilities of the Council as admission authority for community schools and the respective governing bodies as the admissions authority for voluntary aided (i.e. Faith) schools is requested.
  - d. Clarification as to whether St Joseph RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre is the designated secondary school for pupils transferring

from St Joseph Primary school and all Catholic Faith schools within the Local Authority is requested.

- e. Clarification regarding the catchment area for St Joseph RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre is requested.
- f. Clarification regarding the Infant Class Size Regulations is requested.
- g. A clear link between the Council's Home to School Travel policy and the Council's Admission Arrangements is requested.
- h. A challenge to the Council's stated aspiration on inclusion and diversity together with the right for everyone to be educated in their local community.
- i. A challenge to the equality of access to schools.
- j. A lack of information in the admission arrangements relating to voluntary aided schools.

## **Officer Comments**

6. In response to the above points, the following comments are offered:
- a. For the purpose of the admission of a pupil to a community school, the term catchment area is defined as the geographical area served by a school, as determined by the Council. The definition has been included in the proposed admission arrangements for community schools, 2017/2018. Catchment area maps are available from the Council's School Admissions Section.
  - b. For the purpose of the admission of a pupil to a community school, the term partner school is used in connection with a primary school and a secondary school. It is defined as a school that has a catchment area in common with another school of the same category, e.g. an English-medium community primary school and an English-medium community secondary school. In this regard it does not necessarily follow that nearest schools are partner schools.

This definition has been included in the proposed admission arrangements for community schools, 2017/2018.

The terms 'feeder' school and 'partner' school are interchangeable in relation to admission arrangements. 'Partner' school has been used more widely latterly in recognition of the partnership between schools rather than the hierarchy implied by the term 'feeder'. For consistency, the term 'partner' will be used throughout the Council's proposed admission arrangements 2017/18.

- c. The Council's admission arrangements for 2017/2018, applies only to community schools. The Council is not the admission authority for voluntary aided (i.e. Faith) schools; responsibility for which rests with the respective governing bodies. This distinction has been highlighted in the amended proposed admission arrangements.

Additional information has also been provided regarding Faith school admissions, in particular, reference is made to the Council's School Admission Section undertaking an administrative function on behalf of St Joseph RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre. Applications for admission to Year 7 are initially processed by the Council.

- d. The designation of partner schools to St Joseph's RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre is a matter for the governing bodies of the schools concerned as they are responsible for their own admission arrangements.

St Joseph's RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre admission policy 2016/2017 states that its designated 'feeder' schools are St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, St Therese's Catholic Primary and St Joseph's Catholic Primary school.

The admission arrangements for community schools and voluntary aided (i.e. Faith) schools are published annually by the Council in its Information for Parents booklet.

- e. The designation of the catchment area for St Joseph's RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre is a matter for the governing body of the school as it is responsible for its own admission arrangements.

It is the accepted understanding of officers that St Joseph's RC School and 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre's catchment area covers the whole of the County Borough.

- f. With regard to Infant Class Size Regulation, the regulation applies to both community and voluntary aided schools. The Welsh Government School Admissions Code 005/2013 applies to all admission authorities. Each admission authority has a statutory

duty to act in accordance with the School Admission Code and the School Admission Appeals Code.

The Code states (3.7) that it is important to note the difference between class size legislation and admission numbers. Class size legislation should not be confused with the admission number for a school. If the admission number is lower or higher than 30, pupils must be admitted up to the admission number in the normal year of entry as this reflects the school's capacity to admit children in the relevant age group. The infant class size limit of 30 applies to the organisation of the classes not to the number of children to be admitted.

- g. The Council's Home to School Travel policy and the Council's Admission Arrangements are separate policy documents dealing with separate processes in relation to the assessment of pupil/parent requests and entitlements. Whereas an individual's entitlement to assistance with home to school travel is dependent in the first instance on a successful school admission outcome, the opposite is not the case. In this regard, the availability of school places is a separate consideration to their accessibility, save for the individual merits of exceptional cases.

However, the Council recognises that, in practice, there is an inter-relationship between the admission arrangements and the home to school travel policy as parents are likely to want to know whether or not they will be entitled to assistance with transport before they express a preference for a particular school. In this regard, the proposed admission arrangements reference the Council's Home to School Travel policy for parents' consideration.

- h. The Council stated position of inclusion and diversity is supported by the range of provision it delivers. As set out in the consultation draft, the Council provides:
- part-time nursery education, available in all primary schools. Successful learning begins in the nursery where children have access to rich experiences in a secure environment;
  - primary schools, (including Welsh medium and voluntary aided schools), provide a broad education based on practical experiences designed to meet individual needs, including national curriculum areas of study.
  - secondary schools, (including Welsh medium and a Roman Catholic school), set high standards in examinations, sport and cultural activities, and personal and social education. Pupils in

- all schools have access to a wide range of curricular opportunities and the national curriculum;
- special schools, provide rich and stimulating learning experiences for pupils with severe and complex difficulties. All pupils attending these schools have a statement of special educational needs. Specialist support for primary and secondary pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is available within the County Borough.
  - learning support centres, based at a number of primary and secondary schools, provide specialist support in mainstream schools for pupils with statements of special educational needs.

In addition, the admission arrangements follow the Welsh Government School Admissions Code 2013, ensuring that admission procedures do not unfairly advantage or disadvantage any groups.

As regards providing education within the local community, the term 'local community' holds a range of potential meanings and can as readily be applied to social groupings and situations as well as physical locations. In this respect it need not necessarily refer to a specific geographical area, and even where that is the intention then it can describe a village, a town, a Ward or the County Borough as a whole.

- i. It is commented that there is inequality of access. A stated aim of the Council Strategic School Improvement Programme is that schools are accessible and that the right school is in the right place. This is not an exact science and will depend on balance and judgement as well as the consideration of the efficient use of resources supported by the relevant data. Within the boundaries of accepted arrangements for school access, officers contend that the range and location of schools is fair and reasonable.
- j. The Councils' admission arrangements are intentionally specific to community schools as voluntary aided schools are individually responsible for their admission arrangements. However, the Council's Information to Parents Handbook, which is produced to help parents through the admission arrangements process, provides important information on voluntary aided schools across the County Borough and includes the admission arrangements for each Faith school.

k. Additional officer comment

- Melin Infant and Melin Junior schools will amalgamate in September 2016 to become Melin Primary. As of this date there will no longer be infant and junior community schools within the County Borough and as such, references to community infant and junior schools have been removed from the Council's admission arrangements for community schools.
  
- In September 2017, an 'all-through' 3-18 Welsh-medium school over two campuses (north and south of the County Borough) will replace YG Ystalyfera and YGG Y Wern.