

Welsh Language Impact Assessment

Strategic School Improvement Programme – proposal to open a new 3-16 school to replace Groes Primary School and Dyffryn School

Context

1. This Welsh language impact assessment¹ has been carried out in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code.
2. Implementing the proposal will result in the establishment of a new build 3-16 all through school to replace Groes Primary and Dyffryn School, both of which will close.

The reasons for the proposal

1. At its meeting of 9th July 2015 the Council's Cabinet has determined that the Faith school scheme should be withdrawn from Band A and be substituted with an alternative, replacement scheme comprising a new build at the site of Dyffryn (upper) School/Groes Primary, Margam, Port Talbot. Members duly authorised officers to develop a 21st Century Schools Programme funding submission to this effect.
2. On 26th October 2016, Cabinet approved consultation of the 3-16, new school proposal.
3. The new school will replace Groes Primary and Dyffryn School, which will both close, and will provide for up 210 full-time primary age pupils, 45 part-time (23 a.m./22 p.m.) nursery age pupils and 1200 secondary age pupils in a new, 21st century purpose built building.
4. Dyffryn School is currently located over two sites, the lower school site at Talcanneu Road, Port Talbot which is condition category grade D, and the upper school at Bertha Road, Margam which is condition grade C. Groes Primary is also situated at Bertha Road Margam and is condition grade C.

¹ First iteration: 25.02.16/rvg. / Second iteration: 19.12.16/rvg

5. The new school will bring both the primary and secondary phases together on one site, removing the split site aspect of Dyffryn School, and creating opportunities for realising teaching and learning benefits and improving pupil wellbeing.
6. On completion, this scheme will remove approx. £7.5m of backlog maintenance and accessibility liabilities and potentially reduce surplus.
7. The proposal with its new build element should have a positive impact on other services within the Council and community. The project has an estimated capital cost of approx. £31m with a planned completion date of September 2018.
8. The proposal will deliver more efficient and effective use of resources and should result in revenue savings for reinvestment in the general schools budget. It will also provide a stimulating teaching and learning environment and address school improvement issues.

Welsh language impacts associated with the proposal

9. The Council recognises that language and culture are essential parts of an individual's identity and is committed to promoting and celebrating the Welsh language and culture in a pro-active and inclusive way. The Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2015– 2018 details how it intends to support and further develop Welsh language education in schools.
10. The current profile of the Welsh language within Neath Port Talbot presents a sound foundation for future growth and development. Nearly 90% of the County Borough's population was born in Wales, 15.3% of whom can speak Welsh. This compares with 19% of the total population of Wales and is the 9th highest percentage among local authorities in Wales. The percentage of Welsh speakers remains high (50%+) in communities of Lower Brynaman, Gwaun Cae Gurwen and Cymllynfell.
11. Records show that the majority of staff at both schools categorise themselves as having little or no knowledge of the Welsh language, although each school has both fairly fluent

Welsh speakers and Welsh language learners.

12. For children from non-Welsh-speaking backgrounds whose initial and main contact with Welsh is through school, exposure to education through Welsh language provision improves understanding and fluency.
13. Primary education through the medium of Welsh is available at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Rhosafan, the Welsh-medium school serving catchment area of Groes Primary school. Secondary Welsh-medium education will be available at Ysgol Newydd Gymunedol Gymraeg (south campus) which opens in September 2018.
14. The commitment to the Welsh–medium schools are strong and the proposal should not impact upon the numbers seeking to be educated through the medium of Welsh.

Welsh language provision at Groes Primary and Dyffryn School

15. At Dyffryn School almost all Year 10 pupils follow the full GCSE course in Welsh second language, with many pupils following the course at the higher level. This was reported by Estyn to be strength of the school, who also noted that the school has been effective in promoting positive attitudes to the learning of Welsh.
16. Estyn also report the following
 - At Dyffryn School pupils' performance in Welsh second language at key stage 3 was better than that in similar schools (2013). At key stage 4 a majority of pupils followed the full-course GCSE Welsh second language and achieved a level 2 qualification (2013). This is well above the national average. Performance in the short course was close to the national average.
 - From 2013, almost all Year 10 pupils follow the full GCSE course in Welsh second language, with many pupils following the course at the higher level. This is a significant strength. With the help of Year 9 pupil 'Welsh ambassadors', the school has been effective in promoting positive attitudes to the learning of Welsh.

17. At Groes Primary school Estyn report that teachers make frequent use of basic Welsh phrases to ensure that pupils frequently hear the language across the school.
18. Estyn also report that:
 - Standards in Welsh are adequate. Pupils in Foundation Phase show developing reading skills and use basic phrases appropriately, for example when speaking about events in Welsh reading books. Pupils in key stage 2 write brief sentences, for example when describing themselves.
 - Teachers make frequent use of basic Welsh phrases to ensure that pupils frequently hear the language across the school.
19. Both schools are working towards improving pupils' Welsh language skills beyond formal Welsh lessons, and to encourage greater pupil self-confidence when using the language.

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20. In light of the findings above and the fact that the complement of staff at the new 3-16 all through school will comprise many of the staff from the existing two schools, the Council is satisfied that provision for Welsh language at the new school will be at least comparable with the provision currently offered at the existing schools and implementing the proposal should result in a positive impact on Welsh language development.