



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning
Service
Strategic School Improvement Programme

CONSULTATION REPORT

**Proposal to establish a new
Welsh-medium
3-11 school in Neath Abbey**



Response to consultation on the Proposal to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey

- analysis and comments

Introduction

On 19th January 2022, the Council's Cabinet determined to consult on the proposal to establish a Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey. The consultation period ran from 25th January 2022 to 8th March 2022. A list of consultees is included at Appendix A. This consultation report summarises the issues raised by consultees during the consultation period. It responds to these by means of clarification and commentary, with supporting reasons.

Consultation responses were received in support of the proposal recognising the need for an additional Welsh-medium school in the area, the linguistic benefits to the community and the vision of making Welsh-medium education accessible to all. Concerns were raised relating to the traffic management of the proposed site and age of the current building.

The view of Estyn, the schools' inspectorate, is included in this consultation report together with views from parents, the community, the Community Council, Governing Bodies and Menter Iaith.

This report needs to be read alongside the consultation document, 'Proposal to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey.'

Context

The Council has consulted with interested parties on the proposal to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey located on the vacant site of the former Abbey Primary, St John's Terrance, Neath Abbey.

Background

The Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. Having the right schools in the right place and ensuring that they are fit for the 21st century learner is the challenge facing the Council. Achieving this will involve reviewing the number and type of schools the Council has in its area and assessing whether or not best use is being made of resources and facilities.

Implementing the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) involves reviewing existing provision and determining the number and type of schools needed to deliver education effectively and efficiently across the County Borough. It will most likely lead to substantial change involving opening new schools, closing existing schools, merging or amalgamating schools, federating schools and promoting new initiatives that support collaborative working between schools.

The Council has determined to review its provision on the basis of:

- educational standards
- the need for places and the accessibility of schools
- the quality and suitability of school accommodation
- effective financial management

The Council is proposing to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey.

It has been proposed that the new school will be located on the vacant site of the former Abbey Primary, St John's Terrace, Neath Abbey and is expected to open to nursery pupils in January 2023.

The new Welsh-medium primary school for boys and girls aged 3-11 years will be a starter school. It will open initially with only Nursery class, and a year group will be added each academic year until the first reception cohort reaches Year 6. Full capacity of the school will be realised in September 2029 when all year groups will operate under a one-form entry arrangement. As a result, the proposed new school will provide for up to 210 full-time primary age pupils and 45 part-time nursery age pupils in September 2029. This will deliver sufficient accommodation for the total combined forecasted pupil numbers, including potential growth in pupil population.

The proposed new Welsh –medium school will serve the combined catchment areas of Crymlyn, Coedffranc and Abbey primary schools, making it easier for parents to easily understand their Welsh-medium and English-

medium choices, and is a change to the current situation where pupils in this area attend either Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castell-nedd or Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn. Approximately 50 pupils from the Neath Abbey area also attend Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Lon-las which is a Welsh-medium school in the City and County of Swansea, approximately 3.5 miles from the location of the proposed new school.

It is anticipated that the majority of pupils attending will live within a two mile radius of the proposed new school, ensuring that Welsh medium education is available within their local area. Current data indicates that of the 125 pupils who currently travel from the area to Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn, 117 live within a 2 mile radius of the proposed new school site.

Consultation process

On 19th January 2022, the Council's Cabinet determined to consult on the proposal to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey. The consultation period ran from 25th January 2022 to 8th March 2022. A list of consultees is included at Appendix A. The consultation document was made available by e-mail to consultees. It was also available on the Council's website. Hard copies were available on request.

Responses to the consultation were submitted by email, and via the Council's online consultation portal. Details of how to respond were included in the consultation document and links to the online consultation portal were included on the website and on the Council's social media channels.

The consultation document invited views and opinions to be submitted in respect of the proposal. The Welsh Government's School Organisation Code requires the Council to consult on its proposal and to publish a consultation report summarising any issues raised by consultees, the Council's response to those issues and Estyn's view of the overall merit of the proposal.

The proposal and the consultation report will be considered by elected Members of the Council and should it be agreed to proceed with the plans consulted upon then the next stage of the process will be to publish a statutory notice outlining the proposal. This would be published for a period of 28 days during which written objections may be submitted.

Where objections are received, an objection report will be published summarising the objections and the Council's response to those objections. Elected Members of the Council will consider the proposal in light of

objections received when taking a decision as to whether or not the proposal is to be implemented.

Consultation Responses

Online responses 44, 26 in support
 Emails 3, 2 in support
 Paper forms/letter 0, 0 in support

In total 47 responses

Although a count of the responses is shown below, no particular weight is given to the number received as it is the views expressed and issues raised which informed this consultation report.

Table 1

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|-----------------------------|----|
| Parents/Carers | 12 | Members of the Community | 20 |
| Staff | 1 | Others | 6 |
| Governors/ Governing Bodies | 2 | Community Council | 1 |
| ESTYN | 1 | Prospective parents/ carers | 4 |

- Summary of comments received

In order to reflect the sentiment and feelings expressed by respondents, extracts from the responses to the consultation are included below. These are a sample of the views expressed. Individual concerns and queries have been addressed either directly or indirectly in the officer response to each of the main themes arising from the consultation.

-I'm supportive. It is important that we allow accessible Welsh-medium education for everyone close to home.

-This will contribute towards the government's target for a million Welsh speakers.

- We agree that it is a great idea to establish a new Welsh-medium school in the area. Looking at statistics in the consultation we can see that the demand is here. The Council needs to remember how important it is to promote the benefits of Welsh-medium education with parents in the area, so that they understand all the benefits that they and their children have as they attend a Welsh-medium school. We as Menter Iaith would be keen to help with this important promotional work.

- The governing body of Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd has recently met to discuss your plan to establish a new Welsh-medium school aged 3-11 in Neath Abbey and we are pleased to say that we are in favour of the scheme.
- I think it would be excellent to have a school in the village of Skewen. It would serve a large area, reduce congestion through Neath Town Centre. Save parents from Skewen having to travel.
- YGG Castell Nedd is currently over subscribed with limited capacity to expand. Having more local Welsh school encourages more people to speak Welsh and can only be a good thing for our community.
- I think it gives a lot more options to the area if this was an option when my son started I would off 100% put him in the Welsh school.
- My son would have a great opportunity to learn the Welsh language within the community. He would potentially start on January in the first nursery class. I think this would be great for children of Neath Abbey and Skewen.
- The Welsh language is an important part of Wales. It is currently a dying language and it is our responsibility to not let it die out completely.
- For children living in Skewen and Neath abbey area there is no Welsh language school within walking distance at present. The Welsh government aims to give all children in wales the opportunity to learn in Welsh medium, and as it stands children in this area have less of a change due to having to commute in neighbouring towns and as a result a slap being out of catchment area.
- As a very local resident i would be pleased to see a welsh school in skewen, wish it was available when we moved here 4 years ago as we would have sent our daughter, unfortunately its to late for our daughter but wiuld be a fantastic benifit to local children when they reach school age, as well as being an asset to skewen itself.
- It is high time that there was a choice as to whether Welsh-medium learning would be provided within the local community.
- Having better access to Welsh Schools in the area would be a phenomenal advancement for Wales.
- There are no welsh schools this side of Neath and living in skewen but working in Swansea this would be ideal when my 1 year old comes to start school.
- This is a wonderful proposal to keep the Welsh language alive and thriving.
- I would likely move out of the area should there not be an opportunity to send my kids to welsh school. The building should be protected and rescued, as should the other site. Parking will continue to be an issue as it is now, however this could be mitigated with better policing in the area during key times.
- As a welsh speaker I would want my child to go to a welsh medium school the only option is Ysgol Castell Nedd and with Bro Dur open now too I feel there should be stronger and better feeder primary schools in the area.
- As a previous pupil and current community member it would be a waste for the building to be vacant, there's also no local Welsh schools that are easily accessible for our local community, I believe this will help the Welsh language flourish and create a stronger local Welsh community.

- It would definitely have a positive impact because we are going to offer golden opportunities for the children of the area to use the Welsh language.
- I would question why it is being sited where it is given the current chaos that traffic and parking causes for both residents and parents every day.
- This is far too dangerous for a school, so pleased new school built in Longford, so this is adding even more traffic to already congested chaos and no parking outside school.
- My understanding of the reason the current school was moved was due to safety concerns of children on the main road. This is not a good location for a school. I support the opening of extra Welsh schools in the area but not in this location.
- Whilst a new Welsh school is much needed the site was closed as unsuitable for English medium education but is deemed suitable for children attending a Welsh medium school. It is situated on an extremely busy road which is not suitable for young children.
- Traffic ,congestion, pollution. All the reasons the previous school was moved. Why should children at a Welsh school be of less concern of these issues than those at an English one. Not good enough for those attending an English speaking school but ok for Welsh speaking ones. Is this another example of the resurgence of the Welsh Knot?
- The establishment of the new school on this site will bring with it all the traffic problems previously experiences by Mynachlog Nedd Junior School over the years.
- It is a pity that the proposal is not a brand new building rather than being established in an old building.
- Another ageing building, limited site capacity to grow, failure to take into account what it takes to develop a high performing school, and a failure to address the ageing and limited site capacities of existing welsh schools in the area. It also fails to take into account the needs of a site in line with the new curriculum e.g outdoor space and a flexible learning space.
- Once again Welsh language schools are being given the leftovers when English medium schools are built a new campus to suit today's needs. It is not fair on Welsh medium children. Why do they not get a purpose built state of the art school?
- Why not a new building rather than an old building?
- Only as long as the school is temporary and leads to a move to a brand new school.
- My understanding is that there would be a school sited closer to the Coed Darcy estate. I am not sure why this isn't happening.
- Also my children are now settled with friends and class mates in castell nedd I would not like them to be forced to move schools due to this decision.
- There are already two Welsh medium schools within the area and how will this new school affect their intake/numbers?
- Long has been the expectation, and difficult to understand this choice of site after 25 years and in remembering the consultation that has been and the promise to build a Welsh-medium school in Llandarcy

Governing Body Responses

The governing body of Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd have responded and state *'The governing body of Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd has recently met to discuss your plan to establish a new Welsh-medium school aged 3-11 in Neath Abbey and we are pleased to say that we are in favour of the scheme'*.

Additionally the following specific point was raised:

- *'While we support the proposed opening of a new Welsh-medium school we would like to express our disappointment that that school is to be established in the old Neath Abbey school buildings'*

Trade Unions

No responses were received from Trade Unions

Community and Town Councils

A responses has been received from Clydach Community Council.

Clydach Community Council raised concerns around traffic and parking issues around the site of the proposed new school.

Estyn

It is Estyn's view that that the proposer has given a clear explanation of the rationale behind the proposal to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey.

Estyn states that it would also provide more local Welsh-medium education in an area where there are parents who want Welsh-medium education for their children. Estyn considers that the proposal is likely to maintain current standards of education, provision, and leadership and management.

They also consider that a 'seedling school' is the most appropriate solution for a new Welsh-medium school, which would prevent the problem of creating instability in existing Welsh-medium schools that currently provide education for this catchment area.

ESTYN states that another major advantage is the new Welsh-medium childcare provision that will be located on the school's site as the nearest provision is currently some distance away in Neath. Locating the new childcare provision at the school will give parents more choice and flexibility to choose Welsh-medium education for their children.

Estyn have commented that - *The proposer has not clearly explained the process they intend to follow in terms of securing an effective governing body*

for the seedling school, nor the plans for recruiting a headteacher and staff. Should the proposal be approved then a new Governing Body will be formed, which might include some Governors from other Welsh-medium schools in the area, and governors who are local to the proposed new school. The Governing Body will receive support and advice from officers to help guide them through the process of recruiting and appointing staff.

When considering the four options in the consultation, ESTYN agree with the decision to support this option as the ideal one, especially when considering the local authority's target of increasing the number of pupils in Welsh-medium education over a 10-year period.

The full response is included as Appendix B.

Officer responses

-Coed Darcy

Comments have been received asking why the new Welsh-medium school will not be built as previously stated in Coed Darcy.

It is anticipated that when a school is built in Coed Darcy, it will be a Welsh-medium school. At present, the Local Authority does not own any land on this site. There is currently an outline planning application, with all matters reserved except for strategic access, for residential uses (C2 & C3 use class), including land for education (D1 use class) with associated public open space, commercial uses (A1, A2, A3, B1, D1 & D2), commercial/employment (B2 & B8) uses, public open space, highway works, sustainable drainage, ecological mitigation and enhancement, landscaping, ground remediation, and associated engineering and infrastructure work.

This is currently undetermined, but within the masterplan a site for education provision to serve the development has been identified.

It is for this reason that we have taken the decision not to wait for further building developments in Coed Darcy and to open a Welsh-medium seedling school in the area. Currently there are 124 pupils from the area attending Welsh medium education within NPT. 52 of these pupils are traveling on school transport from the area to YGG Castell-nedd and Tyle'r Ynn (schools at or close to full capacity) along with an additional 51 pupils in the area attending Welsh medium schools in a neighbouring authority. The current need for a Welsh-medium school in this area is clear.

The seedling school will have 210 places (one form entry) and could potentially transfer to Coed Darcy when a new school is built in the future. Alternatively, if the demand for Welsh medium education should grow as expected, there is a possibility that the Welsh-medium seedling school will

remain in Neath Abbey and an additional Welsh-medium school could be built in Coed Darcy to accommodate the growing numbers. Comprehensive demographic and geographic assessments will be completed in order to assess the situation when contractors complete the number of builds needed to trigger the build of a new school in line with planning requirements.

-The proposed location

Comments have been received which question why the site was not fit for purpose for an English-medium school but is acceptable for a Welsh-medium school. Abbey Primary did not move to a new site as a result of the poor condition of the buildings nor as a result of any issues relating to safety. The decision in relocating the English-medium school was made due to capacity issues and the practical issues of having one primary school split over 3 sites. Therefore, the site in St. John's Terrace remains suitable for a one form entry school.

Another key reason for using an existing site as a starter school using the seedling model is to ensure that when a new Welsh-medium school is built in Coed Darcy, it will be of a correct size and capacity. At present, using catchment area data and the number of existing pupils from the area in Welsh-medium education, it is predicted that a single form entry Welsh-medium school is needed within the Neath Abbey area. Due to the high percentage of population growth in the area and its proximity to neighbouring Local Authorities, it is expected that the school will grow. At this stage, it is not possible to accurately predict the rate of growth in Welsh-medium education in this area due to the existing lack of Welsh-medium provision. Therefore, by establishing the first cohorts within the existing site and analysing admission application trends and population growth over the first years, we will be able to better predict the size and capacity needed for a new build Welsh-medium school within the area in the future.

A comment has been received in relation to lack of outdoor learning space on the proposed site. The site in St. John's Terrace comprises of a range of hard surface playground areas and an extensive grassed area adjacent to the buildings. These areas provide an excellent opportunity to develop a range of flexible outdoor learning spaces in line with the new curriculum.

-Pupils forced to move schools

Pupils who live within the catchment area but are currently attending other schools are not expected to transfer to the new Welsh-medium school. As the new school is a starter school, there will be no option for pupils in other

schools to transfer in January 2023, other than Nursery pupils, with Reception pupils in September 2023, Year 1 in September 2024 and so forth.

-Traffic/ parking issues

The proposal currently under consultation relates to establishing a new Welsh-medium school on an existing school site. It is proposed that this school will be for pupils within a two mile catchment radius and therefore within walking distance to school. It will open with a possible maximum number of 45 part time pupils (spread over 2 sessions) in January 2023 with an additional maximum of 30 pupils per additional year group per year. When at full capacity in 2029, the single form entry school will have a maximum of 210 full time pupils and 45 part time pupils. This total will be significantly less than the current number of pupils attending Abbey Primary.

During the first few years of the school opening the situation will be closely monitored by road safety and health and safety officers. Discussions have already taken place about some possible mitigating measures which could address traffic concerns, and these could be progressed if there is a need to do so, as the school population grows.

– Transport to school, Travel

All schools in Neath Port Talbot are committed to encouraging walking and cycling to school where possible. For many of the primary aged pupils the location of the proposed new school remains within 2 miles travel distance for homes in the catchment area.

It is anticipated that the majority of pupils attending will live within a two mile radius of the proposed new school, ensuring that Welsh medium education is available within their local area. Current data indicates that of the 125 pupils who currently travel from the area to Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn, 117 live within a 2 mile radius of the proposed new school site.

Support with home to school travel will be made available in line with the Council's Home to School Transport policy. This means that primary school aged pupils living 2 miles or more from their nearest suitable or designated school will be considered for transport assistance.

Under the School Travel Plan requirements, all schools, together with the Council's Road Safety Team, are committed to:

- improving road safety within the local community
- raising awareness about travel issues
- encouraging walking, cycling and public transport for the school journey where applicable
- encouraging independent travel where applicable

In the longer term this proposal will negate the need for transport from the area to Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn.

– ***Impact on other Schools***

A comment has been received which questions the impact of this proposal on intake/ admission numbers of the two Welsh-medium schools in the area, Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn.

The new Welsh-medium school will follow the starter school model. A starter school is a model that can be used when establishing a new school to allow the facilities and staff to be used efficiently whilst the school grows to its full potential. The benefits of using the starter school model is that the new school capacity will grow as demand increases, it will ensure stable growth to support existing schools and it will reduce the possibility of mass movement of pupils from other schools.

The starter model of growth will minimise the likelihood and impact of a reduction in intake numbers in YGG Castell-nedd and YGG Tyle'r Ynn by limiting the availability of additional pupil places in older year groups.

The school opens initially with only Nursery class, and a year group is then added each academic year until the first reception cohort reaches Year 6. The benefits of using this model is that it ensures stable growth to support existing schools and reduces the possibility of mass movement of pupils from other schools.

In the last 2 years significant funding has been secured for Ysgol Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn and Ysgol Gymraeg Castell-nedd, with the aim of increasing the school capacity and providing enhanced teaching and learning environments across the school due to capacity pressure.

In Tyle'r Ynn, £1.14m of funding was awarded which enabled the provision of 2 extra classroom spaces and a new Welsh medium childcare provision. It is anticipated that this will ease accommodation pressures in the area, with demand for Welsh medium pupil places increasing year on year. The project

has been successfully completed and is a very welcome and timely addition to the school. Pupil numbers have already shown an increase with both nursery and reception classes full in September 2021.

A new 60 place Foundation Phase classroom provision at YGG Castell-nedd has also been provided as part of the Reducing Infant Class Size grant in order to alleviate capacity pressures. Pupil numbers have already shown an increase with most classes near or at full capacity.

Alternative Options

Consultees have responded with alternative suggestions which are responded to below.

A. Build a new Welsh-medium school on an alternative site

Comments have been received suggesting a new Welsh-medium school should be built on an alternative site. Suggestions have included Coed Darcy, Longford, Bryncoch and Neath Abbey. Progress with the developer as regards a proposed new Welsh-medium Primary school at Coed Darcy (funded through a S106 Planning Agreement) continues to move forward slowly. Consideration has also been given to the building of another whole new school in the Neath Abbey area. Land of sufficient size to accommodate a new Welsh-medium primary school in the area is scarce and given the likely planning and construction programme associated with delivery of a new school, there is unlikely to be any timely easing of the short-term pressures on the increasing demand for Welsh-medium primary education in the general Neath Abbey area.

B. Extend YGG Castell-nedd to accommodate increases pupil numbers

YGG Castell-nedd benefitted from two additional modular classrooms funded through the Welsh Government's Infant Class Size Reduction Grant totalling £325K. YGG Castell-nedd occupies a restricted site in a town centre setting and is now fully developed. The school is easily sustainable from pupils attending from the designated catchment. The majority of pupils likely to attend from the Neath Abbey would not be within walking distance which would lead to an accompanying increase in transport costs. Also, land of sufficient size to accommodate a new Welsh-medium primary school in Castell-nedd is scarce and given the likely planning and construction programme associated with delivery of a new school, there is unlikely to be any timely easing of the short-term pressures on the increasing demand for Welsh-medium primary education in the general Neath Abbey area.

C. Make the new school a dual language school

At present there are sufficient numbers of English-medium places within the catchment area but no Welsh-medium provision or places. The purpose of this proposal is to promote and grow the Welsh language and to ensure that there is equity between both languages thus ensuring that parents have a choice. The aim of this proposal is not to further increase the sufficient number of English-medium places within the catchment. Also, a larger site would be required to accommodate a dual language school as it would attract more pupils from within the catchment area. This would potentially put English-medium schools within the area at risk.

D. New build on the existing site

There is no room on this site to expand the capacity further or build a new school that meets Welsh Government Sustainable Communities for Learning Standards in terms of area per pupil. Due to the size of the site, the new Welsh-medium school will be a single form entry school. The current site would not allow expansion due to its limited area.

Conclusion

Having considered all the information gathered to date, it is the view of officers that establishing a Welsh-medium starter school on the site of the former Abbey Primary in St John's Terrace, Neath will deliver the greatest benefits to pupils, staff and the wider community as a whole within the given constraints of time, and capacity issues in neighbouring Welsh-medium schools.

The inclusion of a Welsh-medium childcare facility would ensure that families from the area are offered greater choice and flexibility, and will also support parents to opt for a Welsh medium school for their children, as well as helping to develop early Welsh language speaking and listening skills in preschool children.

The next step

Following the publication of this consultation report, should the Council decide to progress with its plans as consulted upon then the next stage will be for it to approve the publication of a proposal, allowing 28 days for objections.

Consultees are advised that, unfavourable comments made during the consultation period will not be treated as objections. Anyone wishing to object

will need to do so in writing during the statutory objection period. Comments submitted as part of this consultation process will need to be re-submitted in writing during the statutory objection period if they are to be considered as objections.

Appendices

Appendix A

| List of Consultees | |
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| Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tyle'r Ynn: Pupils Parents / carers Staff Governing Body Wider School Community | NAASH (Secondary Schools Forum) |
| | LLAN (Primary Schools Forum) |
| | Bordering authorities – Swansea/ Bridgend/ Carmarthenshire/ Powys/ RCT |
| All other NPT schools | Dyffryn Clydach Community Council Coedffranc Town Council |
| NPT Elected Members | WG Schools Management Division |
| Diocesan Directors of Education - Diocese of Menevia, Swansea - Diocese of Llandaff, Vale of Glamorgan | MP (for Neath) – Christina Rees |
| | AM (for Neath) – Jeremy Miles |
| Trade Unions | Regional Assembly Members |
| Estyn | ALN Partners |
| Regional Education Consortium (ERW) | Children and Young Person Partnership (inc. Early Years Development and Childcare) |
| NPTCBC Integrated Transport Unit | Police and Crime Commissioner |
| Communities First Partnership | NPTCBC Officers |
| | |

Estyn response to the proposal

Response by Estyn to the proposal by Neath Port Talbot Council to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey.

Introduction

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

The proposer has given a clear explanation of the rationale behind the proposal to establish a new Welsh-medium 3-11 school in Neath Abbey. Currently, 125 pupils from the Neath Abbey, Coedffranc and Crumlin area travel to Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castell-nedd and Ysgol Gynradd Tyle'r Ynn to receive Welsh-medium education. Both of those schools are full, or almost full, so a new school in this area would probably alleviate the problem in those schools. It would also provide more local Welsh-medium education in an area where there are parents who want Welshmedium education for their children. Estyn considers that the proposal is likely to maintain current standards of education, provision, and leadership and management.

Description and advantages

The proposer has set out a clear rationale for providing Welsh-medium education locally to a number of parents who choose Welsh-medium education for their children. They also consider that a 'seedling school' is the most appropriate solution for a new Welsh-medium school, which would prevent the problem of creating instability in existing Welsh-medium schools that currently provide education for this catchment area. The proposer explains the 'seedling school' model in detail and how this model works as it develops from nursery-only to a fully-grown school. They have also set out

clearly the expected timetable for statutory procedures and implementation of the proposals. Neath Port Talbot Council has identified the expected advantages and disadvantages of establishing a 'seedling school' and has also listed the expected advantages of the proposal. These include moving towards the local authority's WESP targets, providing more opportunities for pupils to benefit from Welsh-medium provision and reducing travel times to school. Another major advantage is the new Welsh-medium childcare provision that will be located on the school's site. The nearest provision is currently some distance away in Neath. Locating the new childcare provision at the school will give parents more choice and flexibility to choose Welsh-medium education for their children. The proposer has considered potential risks and risk management actions appropriately. Risks are identified, such as the risk that demand for Welsh-medium education is lower than expected or that there is resistance to change leading to a lack of support from pupils, parents and staff. The main factor in mitigating these risks is the local and national pattern of growth in demand for Welsh-medium education when a new school opens. The main risk to consider is the failure to realise the opportunity for capital expenditure, since this will greatly affect the nature of the project as the scheme will need remodelling and renovation which will significantly impair the plans and advantages listed in the consultation. The proposer considered four options before deciding on this proposal as the ideal option. The other three options include either expanding another Welsh-medium school or allocating a different site in the Neath Abbey area. Expanding other Welsh-medium schools would not meet the requirements for Welsh-medium education locally and allocating land for a new school would be more time-consuming and much more costly. We agree with the decision to support this option as the ideal one, especially when considering the local authority's target of increasing the number of pupils in Welsh-medium education over a 10-year period. To achieve this, they aim to establish three new Welsh-medium schools within the local authority, and this consultation is the first. The Council has given fair consideration to the effect of the changes on learners' travel arrangements. It is reasonable to expect that the majority of pupils that will attend the school will live within two miles of the new school. This is because current data show that of the 125 pupils that travel from the area to neighbouring Welshmedium schools, 117 live within 2 miles of the site of the proposed new school. In the long term, this should reduce the need for transport from the area to the two neighbouring Welsh-medium schools. The proposer gives detailed consideration to financial costs including the impact on the budget as the school grows. The main factor is whether or not the Council will succeed in its bid for grant funding to help meet additional capital and revenue costs through the 21st Century Schools programme. Without this funding, the proposal cannot be realised in full.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposer has not clearly explained the process they intend to follow in terms of securing an effective governing body for the seedling school, nor the plans for recruiting a headteacher and staff. For example, it is not clear whether the seedling school will be under the supervision of a successful headteacher or governing body from another school as it establishes. The proposal appears to consider recruiting new staff and a new governing body at the outset, but this is not considered a risk and there are no steps to mitigate the impact should the process not succeed. The proposer has considered information from the latest Estyn reports for the two neighbouring Welsh-medium schools that are likely to be affected. They have also considered the potential impact on other nearby schools.