

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board**

**25<sup>TH</sup> May 2023**

### **REPORT OF HEAD OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION RHIANNON CROWHURST**

#### **MATTER FOR DECISION**

**WARDS AFFECTED: All**

**STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME -  
PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH SPECIALIST PROVISION FOR  
PRIMARY AGE PUPILS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER  
(ASD) AT BLAENHONDDAN PRIMARY AND TO INCREASE THE  
NUMBER OF PUPIL PLACES AT YSGOL MAES Y COED FROM 90  
TO 115**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To obtain approval to consult on the establishment of specialist provision for primary age pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) at Blaenhonddan Primary School, Main Road, Bryncoch, SA10 7PE and to obtain approval to consult on a proposal to increase the number of pupil places at Ysgol Maes Y Coed, Heol Hendre, Bryncoch, Neath SA10 7TY from **90 to 115**.

#### **Executive summary**

2. The Council is responsible for ensuring suitable provision is made for pupils with special educational needs.
3. Recent work on reviewing the number and type of planned places and assessment provision across Neath Port Talbot has indicated that there is a need for extra places in the areas of ASD, Social Communication Difficulties, severe learning difficulties, behavioural

or sensory difficulties and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

4. The proposal seeks to establish a specialist provision for primary age pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), at Blaenhonddan Primary School and to increase the number of pupil places at Ysgol Maes Y Coed from **90 to 115**.

## **Background**

5. 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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. This will include ensuring suitable provision for those pupils with special educational needs/additional learning needs.
6. Implementing the 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. It will also involve re-organising education provision to ensure pupils gain access to and benefit from the specialist support, skills and expertise available within the County Borough.
7. The Council has decided 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
8. Within Neath Port Talbot, there are currently 18 Learning Support Centres (LSC) offering 262 planned places for primary aged pupils with a range of Additional Learning Needs. The Local Authority also has five Learning Support Centres at secondary level, offering

177 planned places. These Learning Support Centres offer specialist placements for children and young people with needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD); Speech, Language and Communication (SLC); Hearing Impairment (HI) and Moderate / Severe / Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties S/M/PMLD. Additionally within Neath Port Talbot there are 2 special schools, catering for the needs of children and young people with the most complex ALN. There are currently 295 planned places within Ysgol Maes Y Coed and Ysgol Hendrefelin special schools.

9. Recent work on reviewing the number and type of primary planned places and assessment provision across Neath Port Talbot has indicated that there is a need for extra places in the areas of ASD, SLD, SEBD and PMLD.
10. Currently for primary age pupils with ASD who need specialist support or assessment, provision is made at Gnoll Primary (18 places), Maesmarchog Primary (18 places) and Waunceirch Primary (21 places). Secondary provision is available at Cwmtawe Community School (13 places), Ysgol Bae Baglan (29 places), Dwr y Felin (16 places) and Ysgol Hendrefelin (32 places). The high demand at both primary and secondary level is placing pressure on current provisions, which are consistently full.
11. Initial work has led to the development of a continuum of support for pupils with ASD with the aim of ensuring that pupils at all stages have their needs assessed and are appropriately supported to make progress. As a result, additional pupil places have been provided at primary age in Waunceirch Primary School, and a new secondary ASD provision opened in Dwr Y Felin. However, additional places are needed to meet the increasing need for specialist provision.
12. Additionally, increased numbers of pupils with PMLD and SLD has meant that additional places are needed at Maes Y Coed special school.

### **Proposal to establish specialist provision for primary age pupils with ASD at Blaenhonddan Primary School**

#### **Identifying Potential Host Schools**

13. In identifying host schools for the proposed primary ASD provision the following criteria has been applied.

The host school will:

- be fully committed to inclusion and provide a caring and supportive environment that will have a positive impact on pupils' personal well-being and development
  - demonstrate a good track record for ensuring the progress of all pupils
  - be a mainstream school delivering primary phase education as pupils will need to access Curriculum for Wales
  - provide the opportunity for integration, as appropriate, into mainstream classes and mainstream activities
  - be able to provide pupils with high quality learning experiences
  - have space available suitable to meet the needs and requirements of the pupils
  - be within reasonable travelling distance for primary age pupils and have easy vehicular access
14. Applying these criteria Blaenhonddan Primary School has been identified as being suitable for hosting this provision. The headteacher has been involved in the development of this proposal and is supportive of this initiative. The Governing Body and staff have also shown initial support for the proposal.

## **The Proposal**

15. It is proposed to establish a specialist provision for primary age pupils with ASD at Blaenhonddan Primary School.
16. The facility will provide learning support for pupils with ASD for up to 16 pupils who are in receipt of a Statement of SEN or a Local Authority Maintained IDP.
17. It is intended that the provision will be housed in 2 new modular buildings within the school site.
18. The provision will be managed by the school and be under the school's governance. However, it will be a provision recognised by the Council as reserved for pupils with ALN and pupils admitted to the provision would be in addition to the admission number of the school. Admission to the provision would be via a special

admission panel of the Council and specific entry and exit criteria would apply.

19. Pupils at the proposed provision will benefit from being taught by specialist staff, experienced in working with pupils with ASD needs. There is also the possibility that mainstream pupils with ASD could also benefit from the expertise available.
20. The provision will alleviate the current pressure to address demand for places for pupils with more complex ASD needs, avoiding potential costly out of county placements and allowing opportunities for children to access learning within their local community.
21. The proposal seeks to complement the specialist provision and support already available within the County Borough.

### **Information on Blaenhonddan Primary School**

22. Blaenhonddan Primary School, Main Road, Bryncoch, SA10 7PE is a 3-11 Primary School for boys and girls, situated on the outskirts of Neath. As of PLASC 2023, there are 208 full time and 44 part time nursery pupils at the school. The school also hosts a specialist Key Stage 2 MLD provision for 9 pupils.

### **Quality and standards in education**

#### **- Standards**

23. Since 2020, Welsh Government do not expect returns for all statutory data collections that would have been due to take place before the school summer holidays as a result of the Covid pandemic. This includes National Data Collection (NDC) 2020 data collection and Welsh National Tests (WNT) 2020 data collection.
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24. The school was inspected by Estyn in 2017 and current performance was judged to be good. It is reported that 'Most pupils at Blaenhonddan Primary School make good progress from their starting points and develop their literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and Welsh language skills well.' (Estyn 2017)

#### **- Wellbeing and attitudes towards learning**

25. Estyn note that, 'A major strength throughout the school is the positive attitude and enthusiasm that most pupils have for learning.'

In classes, almost all pupils are attentive to their teachers and are eager to do well.'

### ***-Teaching and Learning***

26. Estyn reported that across the school, 'Working relationships between staff and pupils are supportive and productive and place pupils' wellbeing at the heart of classroom activities. Teachers deploy assistants effectively and they work in purposeful partnership with teachers to enhance provision.'

### ***-Care, Support and Guidance***

27. Estyn also reported, 'The school provides a good range of different programmes and beneficial intervention groups to support pupils with additional learning needs in literacy and numeracy... This is a caring community that develops pupils' personal and social skills well.'

28. The report also notes that: 'Most pupils with additional learning needs make good progress from their starting points. Pupils in the learning support centre make appropriate progress in line with their abilities.'

### ***-Leadership and Management***

29. The Estyn report notes that, 'The headteacher has a strong and purposeful vision and sets a clear strategic direction for the school. She communicates high expectations, and senior teachers, staff and governors support her effectively. The headteacher leads strongly by example. As a result, throughout the school there is a purposeful and supportive atmosphere that benefits all pupils and staff.'

30. The most recent Estyn inspection report can be viewed at:  
[Inspection Report Template \(gov.wales\)](#)

### ***-Quality of Accommodation***

Overall the school is graded category C for condition and B for accessibility.

31. Backlog maintenance for this site is estimated at £820,465

### **Impact on Pupils**

32. The proposed new provision will increase the opportunity for pupils to access support in a specialist setting. The provision will

enable pupils to have their needs met and to acquire the skills and understanding to manage their individual behaviours and learning requirements.

33. The proposed specialist provision will be accessible to pupils from across the County Borough.

### **Impact on ALN provision**

34. As a self-contained provision, this will not have a direct impact on the ALN provision at Blaenhonddan Primary School, where pupils with additional learning needs, including children with statements of special educational needs or a Local Authority Maintained IDP, are supported in a mainstream setting with appropriate funding for this purpose.
35. However, the specialist knowledge and skills-set of the staff employed to work at the provision in Blaenhonddan Primary will be available to share with mainstream staff at the host school and, as such, will indirectly benefit ALN provision at the school.

### **Financial Impacts**

36. Blaenhonddan Primary will receive additional funding to manage the provisions for up to 16 pupils.
37. The provision will be funded from the delegated schools budget and the school will receive funding for additional places at Band F, which equates to approximately £242k per annum.
38. The provision will be resourced by specialist teachers and teaching assistants with the appropriate skills set.
39. The self-contained accommodation will be developed in new modular accommodation at the school. There will be a one-off capital cost for the 2 modular buildings and associated work, for which £745k has been secured from the capital programme.
40. There are no capital receipts or recurrent costs savings directly related to this proposal other than savings from potential home education/out-of-county placement costs.

41. Primary age pupils living 2 miles or more from the identified provision will be considered for assistance with travel costs and as such there is likely to be an increase on transport costs as a result of this proposal. Annual transport costs are difficult to predict as this will depend on the number of children needing to be transported and on the distance they will need to travel to the provision from their home.

## **PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PUPIL PLACES AT YSGOL MAES Y COED FROM 90 TO 115**

### **Proposal**

42. It is proposed to increase the number of pupils who can be admitted to the school by 25 places
43. The school provides for pupils with ASD, SLD and PMLD. The proposal does not seek to change the type of specialist provision available at Ysgol Maes Y Coed but to increase access to it.
44. The additional pupils can be accommodated within the current school layout with some internal reconfiguration of the spaces available, and as such the proposal does not require any structural changes to the building.

### **Information on Ysgol Maes Y Coed**

45. Ysgol Maes Y Coed is a community special school serving boys and girls aged 2-19 years. It is situated at Heol Hendre, Bryncoch, Neath SA10 7TY.
46. It is a purpose built special school that opened in 2007 to replace the former Briton Ferry Special School. In June 2012 a new build extension was added to the school to further increase the capacity, deemed necessary due to the increased number of pupils identified with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and severe learning difficulties (SLD).

### **Quality and standards in education**

47. Ysgol Maes Y Coed was last inspected in January 2015 and Estyn reported that it was a school with good and excellent features, awarding good judgements in the 3 inspection areas. Past



judgements from the school National Categorisation System placed the school in the green support category which recognises it as an effective school which has secured good levels of learner outcomes in key performance indicators.

- ***Standards***

48. Since 2020, Welsh Government do not expect returns for all statutory data collections that would have been due to take place before the school summer holidays as a result of the Covid pandemic. This includes National Data Collection (NDC) 2020 data collection and Welsh National Tests (WNT) 2020 data collection.

- ***Wellbeing and attitudes to learning***

49. Wellbeing and attitudes to learning of pupils was judged to be 'good' in the recent Estyn report (January 2015) which states: 'All pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and engage well in tasks'.

Attendance has been consistent, with current 2021/2022 data showing a percentage of 80.35% for secondary age pupils and 77.58% for primary age pupils, and no exclusions in the period 2020-2022.

- ***Teaching and Learning***

50. Estyn, in 2015, reported that across Ysgol Maes Y Coed, 'Teachers and teaching assistants have strong working relationships with the pupils they teach and a clear understanding of their complex needs. All lessons have clear learning objectives, which relate well to pupils' individual targets'.

51. The Estyn report states that, 'The school uses a wide range of appropriate strategies to support the varied and complex communication needs of the pupils. This helps them to gain the skills they need to access the curriculum'.

- ***Care, Support and Guidance***

52. Estyn also reported that care, support and guidance were good, noting that staff work sensitively with pupils to address their personal care needs and that teachers use information from specialist services effectively to plan for pupils with multi-sensory impairment and autistic spectrum disorder.

53. Estyn also report that the school provides a highly supportive and positive environment, which helps pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem.

- ***Leadership and Management***

54. In 2015, Estyn judged Ysgol Maes Y Coed's leadership and management to be good, reporting that: 'The headteacher and senior leadership team have a clear vision for the school that is shared by staff, governors, parents and carers. There is a clear focus on ensuring that every pupil has the opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability'.

55. The most recent Estyn inspection report can be viewed at: [Inspection Report Template \(gov.wales\)](#)

- ***Quality of accommodation***

56. Ysgol Maes Y Coed is a purpose built special school that opened in 2007 to replace the former Briton Ferry Special School. In 2012 a new build extension was added to the school to further increase the capacity, deemed necessary due to the increased number of pupils identified with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and severe learning difficulties (SLD).

57. Overall the school is graded category A for both condition and accessibility which are the highest categorisations possible and can be expected to perform adequately to its full normal life.

58. Presently, the building is deemed not to have any backlog maintenance and accessibility costs.

## **Financial Impacts**

59. Meeting the special needs education of pupils in local settings, i.e. within the County Borough, avoids having to secure expensive out-of-county provision. The cost of providing education outside the County Borough for pupils with specialist needs in the 2022/ 2023 financial year is as follows:

Table 1

Special Educational Needs - Out of County	£169,689
Special Educational Needs Post 16 - Out of County	£18,336

This annually presents a significant demand on the Council's education budget.

60. Maes Y Coed will receive additional funding to manage the additional 25 places.
61. The provision will be funded from the delegated schools budget and the school will receive funding for additional places at Band F which equates to approximately £346k per annum.
62. Primary age pupils living 2 miles or more from the identified provision and secondary pupils living 3 miles or more from the identified provision will be considered for assistance with travel costs and as such there is likely to be an increase on transport costs as a result of this proposal. Annual transport costs are difficult to predict as this will depend on the number of children needing to be transported and on the distance they will need to travel to the provision from their home.

### **Consultation**

63. This school organisation proposal is being brought forward under the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme. Formal consultation is required in line with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code November 2018, which specifies the procedures to be followed, including the content of the consultation document and those to be consulted.
64. Object to approval, it is intended to consult on this proposal between 6<sup>th</sup> June and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023. Responses to the consultation will be reported to Education, Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board (ESW) for consideration by Members.

### **Impact on travel arrangements**

65. Pupils' travel needs will be assessed in line with the Council's Home to School Travel policy. Primary age pupils living 2 miles or more from the provision deemed most suitable to address their needs, will be considered for assistance with travel costs. Secondary age pupils living 3 miles or more from the provision will be considered for assistance with travel costs.

66. 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
67. Both schools are relatively centrally located within the County Borough and readily accessible by vehicle.

### **Impact on governors**

68. The governing bodies and the school leadership teams at the host schools will be responsible for the day to day management of the provisions, including the specialist staff who will become part of the school's staffing complement. The school budget will be funded accordingly.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

69. An integrated impact assessment has been carried out and found that there is no adverse effect on any particular group and the process has checks and monitoring in place to ensure that any unmet need is identified and any potential adverse effect is fully evaluated and impact mitigated.
70. Establishing the ASD specialist provisions within a mainstream primary schools breaks down barriers and aids the elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Both the primary school and the ALN provision are inclusive for pupils of all backgrounds. The proposal will promote the understanding of the needs of different groups.
71. Having the ASD provisions attached to mainstream school in Blaenhonddan allows the pupils attending them to have the same opportunities as their mainstream peers as all pupils will be able to access the same curriculum and facilities.
72. The proposal will have a positive effect on the staffing compliment of both schools as an increase in pupil numbers by the establishment of the provision in Blaenhonddan and the increased

capacity in Maes y Coed will require additional members of staff with specialist skills to support pupils.

73. The integrated impact assessment is attached to this report as appendix A.

### **Welsh Language Impact assessment**

74. Both Blaenhonddan Primary and Maes Y Coed special school are categorised as English-medium schools where Welsh is taught as a second language as appropriate in accordance with the National Curriculum. The Council is satisfied that the provision for Welsh language education at each provision will be sufficient to meet the language requirements of the pupils admitted.

### **Workforce impacts**

75. The position of staff currently employed at both schools will not be adversely affected by this proposal. In fact, the increased number of pupils secures staff employment by creating additional employment opportunities by way of an increased staffing complement.
76. Additional staff posts have been identified for the ASD provisions. These will comprise specialist teachers and teaching assistants in each provision. The skills and expertise that these additional staff members will possess will be available to be utilised for the benefit of the wider, mainstream school community.

### **Legal impacts**

77. The proposal will establish ALN provision in a mainstream school (Blaenhonddan Primary) where the pupils admitted are in addition to the admission number for the school and where the provision is recognised by the Council as reserved for pupils with ALN. The proposal will also increase the capacity in an existing ALN provision (Maes Y Coed). As such, this constitutes a regulated alteration requiring the statutory publication of the proposal. The School Standards & Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (the Act) provides the legislative framework by which the Council may implement a proposal. The Welsh Government's School Organisation Code, July 2013, made under Sections 38 and 39 of the Act, imposes on the Council requirements and guidelines on

matters relating to school organisation. The Council's procedures are in line with legislative requirements.

78. Pupil travel arrangements will be in line with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008; the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014; and the Council's Home to School Travel Policy, 2017.
79. Revenue funding will be in line with the requirements of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998; the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010; and the Council's approved formula for funding schools.

### **Impact on community usage**

80. The proposal should have no adverse impact on community usage at either schools as there is no closure or reduction in community facilities involved with this proposal. The provisions will be self-contained provisions within each school having no impact on the school's operation regarding community usage.

### **Valleys Communities Impacts**

81. The impact on Neath Port Talbot's valley communities will be the same as all other areas of the County Borough as both provisions will admit pupils from across the whole of the county borough.

### **Risk management**

82. A risk assessment has been carried out under the Council's Risk Management Policy 2015.
83. Potential risk areas in implementing the proposal include:
  - educational outcomes for pupils are not improved
  - integration at a provision is unsuccessful
  - negative response from parents of host schools
  - negative response from parents of pupils to be accommodated at the provision
  - discrimination against protected characteristics resulting in a negative impact on one or more protected groups
  - staff with appropriate skills and expertise not available

- increased home to school travel time for some pupils leading to poor attendance.
  - Welsh language development not supported
84. Failing to implement the proposal will result in a range of teaching/learning benefits not being fully realised, particularly in relation to:
- opportunities for a pupils to access specialist staff and support
  - early intervention for younger pupils, reducing the risk of more costly support at a later stage
  - host school indirectly benefit from specialist staff on site
  - mainstream school benefits from increased support and training in order to improve skills and build capacity
85. Given that the proposal builds on the experience, skills and expertise that currently exist at the schools, the potential effects of identified risks will be mitigated by implementation of the proposal.

### **Recommendation**

86. Having given due regard to the impact assessments in relation to equality, risk, community usage and Welsh language, it is recommended that, in line with Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, Members approve -
- Consultation on a proposal to establish a 16 place specialist provision for primary age pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) at Blaenhonddan Primary School and
  - Consultation on a proposal to increase the number of pupil places at Ysgol Maes Y Coed from **90 to 115** as set out in this report.

### **Reasons for proposed decision**

87. This decision is necessary to comply with the formal consultation requirements imposed on the Council by the School Organisation Code. Subject to the outcome of consultation, implementation of the proposal will enable the Council to promote high educational standards and the fulfilment of every child's potential. It will also enable the Council to meet its duty to secure efficient education in its area.

## Implementation of the decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Integrated Impact Assessment

## List of background papers

- a) Strategic School Improvement Programme Principles Paper: September 2008  
[https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/20080924/Agenda/\\$CAB-240908-REP-EL-KN.doc.pdf](https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/20080924/Agenda/$CAB-240908-REP-EL-KN.doc.pdf)
- b) Welsh Government - School Organisation Code: July 2018  
<http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/130719-school-organisation-codes-en.pdf>
- c) School Standards & Organisation (Wales) Act 2013  
[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/pdfs/anaw\\_20130001\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/pdfs/anaw_20130001_en.pdf)
- d) Learner Travel (Wales) Measure: 2008 & the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance: 2014.  
[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2008/2/pdfs/mwa\\_20080002\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2008/2/pdfs/mwa_20080002_en.pdf)  
<http://gov.wales/docs/det/publications/140616-ltqg-en.pdf>
- e) Home to School Travel Policy: 2017  
[https://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/NPT\\_Home\\_to\\_School\\_Travel\\_Policy\\_2017.pdf](https://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/NPT_Home_to_School_Travel_Policy_2017.pdf)
- f) Estyn  
<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/search>

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