



PONTNEWYNYDD PRIMARY SCHOOL FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Proposal to close Pontnewynydd Primary School with effect from 1st September 2015

Frequently Asked Questions

Q When would Pontnewynydd Primary School close?

A It is proposed that Pontnewynydd Primary School would close at the end of the 2014/2015 academic year.

Q Has the decision already been made to close the school?

A No, this is the consultation on the proposal. A report will go back to Cabinet in January 2014 to determine the next steps (see “**What happens next?**” below).

Q If I make comments now will they be counted as an objection?

A No, it is important to note that comments made during the consultation period will not be counted as objections to the proposal. Objections can only be registered following the publication of a statutory notice, should the Council determine this to be the next course of action. A decision on whether to proceed to the statutory notice stage will be made in January 2014.

Q Estyn said that Pontnewynydd Primary was an excellent school. Why are you closing it?

A The quality of teaching and learning at Pontnewynydd is not in question. The Authority must ensure that the quality of teaching and learning will be at least equal to that currently provided, and better if possible in any of its proposals.

Estyn’s inspection report for Pontnewynydd Primary School in March 2011 concluded that current performance and prospects for improvement were both excellent. Penygarn Primary School’s last inspection was in March 2009 and carried out using a different grading system.

Current assessments by the Education Achievement Service (EAS) suggest that the quality of teaching and learning will be at least equal to that currently being provided.

Q What school will my child attend if Pontnewynydd Primary School closes?

A Parents/carers can express a preference when deciding on a school for their child. However, it is expected that children from Pontnewynydd Primary will be predominantly accommodated in Penygarn Primary school.

It is proposed that the current catchment area for Pontnewynydd Primary School will be incorporated into the catchment area for Penygarn Primary School.

Q Is there room at Penygarn Primary School for all the Pontnewynydd children?

A Yes. Penygarn Primary School has benefitted from a £1.7m capital investment (completed late 2010) that has created a remodelled and refurbished primary school currently offering 475 places (plus a 54 Full time (108 part time equivalent place) nursery unit) in an “all through” setting. The School has also benefitted from a further £250,000 investment to establish a technology rich “plaza” learning environment (2009).

Should the proposal be implemented in September 2015, the 475 places available at Penygarn will be sufficient, to meet not only the demand from those parents seeking a place in their local school, but also an element for those who may wish to attend from outside the area, and also the impact from any other proposals arising out of the Council’s school strategic plan.

This is a key point as it will allow for a smooth transition for the children and those staff transferring with them.

Q With the new housing being built on the old Trevethin School site will there still be room for all our children at Penygarn?

The Authority annually reviews pupil numbers on roll and pupil projections. These projections take into account Health Authority live birth data, current parental preference trends, and any new housing developments that might generate additional pupils in a school’s catchment area.

The Council is aware of this particular development and has been for a number of years. Although construction is yet to begin, the Council estimates that about 33 primary aged children will be generated by this particular development (124 dwellings). This is based on a formula contained within the national planning supplementary guidance document which has been adopted and allows for a maximum of 27 pupils per 100 dwellings.

As and when building starts, any anticipated pupils will be added to the 5 yearly projections. It should also be noted that we are only considering potential numbers, as the age of children will remain unknown until they enrol at a school. Other factors that need to be considered are whether families have moved into Torfaen from another area, other parts of Torfaen or locally, and whether the children are already in a school, and if they move to their new catchment school area remain in their original school prior to the move. Parents/carers may also choose Welsh Medium or faith based education which will impact on school numbers.

Q Will class sizes be too big?

A No. Government Infant Class size legislation means that no Key Stage 1 class (ie reception, Year 1, Year 2) will exceed 30 pupils. At Key Stage 2 (Junior years 3 – 6) although there is currently no statutory requirement on class sizes the

Authority will wherever possible ensure classes are no more than 30 pupils. Class sizes are monitored by the Welsh Government.

Q What about transport?

A The new proposed catchment area school for the Pontnewynydd community will be Penygarn Primary School. In accordance with the Council's current policy, free School transport is provided if pupils live more than 1½ miles from the catchment school (statutory distance is 2 miles). Consideration will also be given to transport under these distances if the route is deemed to be dangerous.

Please note the transport policy is currently under review.

Q What about all the extra traffic around the school and the buses that pass Penygarn School on their way to and from Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw?

A Parking concerns and traffic congestion outside schools at the start and end of the day are acknowledged by the Council. The issues outside Penygarn are unfortunately no different from those experienced at the majority, if not all schools in Torfaen and further afield.

The Authority will wherever possible ensure there are "safe walking routes in the community" to help encourage less car use and if possible make the prospect of walking, particularly to school safer and a more attractive option than driving.

As the regional Welsh Medium Secondary Education provider for South East Wales Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw will out of necessity continue to generate coach traffic, but with the school nearing its capacity the number of vehicles transporting children should not increase above current levels.

Q What about staff?

A Wherever possible the Council will seek to secure alternative suitable positions within Torfaen Schools for staff. This has previously been achieved for other school reorganisation proposals by negotiating a local agreement with the relevant professional associations, and it is expected that this would continue for this proposal as well as others arising from the 21st Century Schools Programme.

Q What are the financial implications? Is this just a money saving exercise?

A As indicated above, Penygarn Primary has benefitted from significant investment (c£1.95M). This initial proposal does not see any immediate investment, but a £4M investment to remodel/refurbish Penygarn Primary School remains a band A priority (2014 – 2019) in the Council's 21st Century Schools Programme.

There will be revenue savings (e.g. heating, lighting, caretaking costs) from the Pontnewynydd Primary School site if it is vacated, which can be re-invested in the Education Service. However, the Authority has to address the issue of the condition of buildings, surplus places and above all, ensure all its learners are

able to access teaching and learning that is appropriate for the needs of the 21st Century.

Q You have previously stated that the Pontnewynydd Proposal would be 2015 – 2017. Why has this changed?

A In October 2011 Welsh Government asked Councils to revise their Band A proposals against new prioritisation criteria and a new time period of 2014 – 2019. The original submission for Penygarn/Pontnewynydd on a remodelled Penygarn site was Band B (2015 – 2017). Given the above requirements this has now been revised to Band A, but remains within the same time period and forms part of the Council's overall approach to reduce primary school surplus places to below 10% by 2015.

Q If you are proposing to close the school, why have the Council spent money on and in the buildings?

A The Authority has a duty of care to ensure that there is a safe learning environment for pupils and staff at all times regardless of proposals that may impact on the future of a building, and at the same time ensure no child is disadvantaged in terms of teaching and learning.

Q What will happen to the site if the school closes?

A The Council will review its use and if it is deemed to be surplus to educational requirements then the site will be sold.

Q When will the children move?

A Should the proposal proceed, all children from Pontnewynydd will be able to attend Penygarn Primary at the start of the Autumn Term in September 2015.

Q What happens next?

A The consultation ends on the 16th December 2013. In January 2014 Cabinet will receive a report on the outcome of the consultation exercise and determine the next steps. If Cabinet decide not to proceed to closure then there will be no further action. If however the decision is to proceed then the publication of statutory notices will be recommended.

The following dates are therefore indicative and will be confirmed in the January Cabinet report. In February 2014 a statutory notice will be published (with a 1 month objection period). If at the end of the objection period (March 2014) there are no objections then local determination of the proposal can be made via a report to the Executive Member for Children & Young People. If objections are received, under the new school organisation process/regulations the determination of the proposal will be the function of the Local Authority Executive.

A full term's notice of the decision would have to be given i.e. no later than the end of the Spring Term 2015. This will then allow the proposal to be implemented on 1st September 2015.