



CONSULTATION REPORT: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF PONTNEWYNYDD PRIMARY SCHOOL

May 2014



Contents

1.	Background.....	2-3
2.	Methodology.....	3-4
3.	Results and comments.....	4-8
4.	Estyn response.....	8-12
5.	Consultation with children and young people.....	12-13
6.	Notes of meetings with staff/governors and parents/carers and other interested parties.....	13
	Appendix 1	List of consultees
	Appendix 2	Summary list of responses
	Appendix 3	Results of consultation with pupils
	Appendix 4	Notes of meetings with staff, governors & parents/carers

1. BACKGROUND

Torfaen County Borough Council's 21st Century Schools proposals were well received by Welsh Government in 2011. For some parts of Torfaen it will result in new schools. Unfortunately however, for some local communities it will mean the closure or amalgamation of their schools. This is not something new in Torfaen – since its inception, the council has been carrying out school reorganisation work to upgrade the estate involving a mixture of closures, amalgamations, refurbishments and new builds. This has resulted in the closure/amalgamation of some 28 schools with a net reduction of 18 schools overall.

The 21st Century Schools programme has been well documented, with the council taking the decision to include every school as part of it in October 2010. The council sought the views of all interested parties on its programme during a series of roadshows that were held across the county borough in March 2011.

The outcome of this public engagement was reported to cabinet in July 2011. Subsequent to this meeting, Welsh Government asked councils to revise their original Band A proposals (originally submitted in October 2010) against the following prioritisation criteria:

- The level of match funding required by the council increased from 30% to 50%
- The poorest condition of the estate (prioritisation to reside with the council although the independent school survey data will be applied)
- Surplus capacity – the key indicator being surplus places (both as a percentage and as an estimated actual reduction in a number of places)
- Running efficiencies (e.g. reduction in running costs, backlog maintenance)
- The length of 21st Century School Band's B, C and D are yet to be determined.

The revised Strategic Outline Programme was approved by Council in November 2011 with the Welsh Government confirming match funding in principle in December 2011.

Torfaen's primary school estate has some schools that:

- Are trying to operate in buildings or grounds which are not fit for purpose and have an unaffordable maintenance backlog
- Are too small to run economically in today's financial climate
- Have significant surplus capacity in their local cluster of schools
- Are not located where the demand for school places is concentrated

The Council has to reduce surplus capacity in its schools and has been set targets by the Welsh Government to reach those targets by 2015.

The 21st Century Schools Programme in Torfaen and across Wales is intended to tackle these issues in a strategic rather than piecemeal way.

The proposal in relation to Pontnewynydd Primary School is one identified in Band A (2014 to 2019) of the agreed Programme. The expectation is that the majority of pupils currently attending Pontnewynydd Primary will transfer to Penygarn Community Primary School.

2. METHODOLOGY

The consultation on the proposal was undertaken with prescribed consultees contained within the School Organisation Code 2013. A list of those consultees is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. Their views were sought on the proposal.

Consultation was also undertaken with children and young people at Penygarn and Pontnewynydd Primary Schools using the Torfaen Play Service. Pupils from Pontnewynydd also contributed to the process with a DVD presentation.

Consultation was conducted through a consultation document and accompanying response form distributed to prescribed consultees. Meetings were conducted with staff (teaching, non teaching and support), governors, and parents/carers and other interested parties.

The initial consultation ran from Monday 4th November to Monday 16th December 2013, but following the consultation events (details below) held at Pontnewynydd Primary School during this period, it was agreed to provide additional information and issue an updated consultation document and provide stakeholders with a further 42 days to comment. The updated document was issued on Monday 17th March 2014 with a closing date for comments of Monday 28th April 2014.

The following consultation events were attended by a number of council officers and the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-

Date	Venue	Time	Intended Audience
Tuesday 26 th November 2013	School	3.30pm	Teaching, non teaching and support staff of Pontnewynydd Primary School
Tuesday 26 th November 2013	School	4.30pm	The Governing Body of Pontnewynydd Primary School
Tuesday 3 rd December 2013	School	9.30am	Parents/carers of children attending Pontnewynydd Primary School and other interested parties.

The publication of a consultation document is central to the consultation process prescribed by Welsh Government for school reorganisation. The consultation document outlined the changes being considered, the rationale for these, details of the consultation process and incorporated a response form. Consultees were advised of the availability of an online version to complete and also contact addresses to send in comments via e-mail.

The consultation process was extensively promoted online, via the Torfaen Council website and social media channels, and also received coverage in the local press.

3. RESULTS AND COMMENTS

The Local Authority has received a number of responses to the consultation exercise.

A file of all the comments and views received during the consultation period has been made available to Elected Members as part of this process and, before any decisions are made.

A summary list of those responses is attached at Appendix 2.

Following the consultation meetings and responses received during the consultation period it was understandably clear that there was opposition to the proposal from the staff, governors, pupils and parents of Pontnewynydd Primary School.

These comments, with the Local Authority responses are summarised below.

COMMENT	RESPONSE
<p>Numbers on roll/school capacity/catchment areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is not going to be enough room for all the children from the two schools in Penygarn. • Classes will be too big and it will impact on the children’s education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current capacity of Penygarn Primary School (as calculated using Welsh Government methodology) is 475 (excluding nursery and Crownbridge accommodation). It is the view of the Council that there is sufficient space to accommodate the Pontnewynydd Primary School children, should parents choose Penygarn School. • Government Infant class size legislation does not permit Key Stage 1 classes to exceed 30 pupils. Whilst there is no statutory requirement for Key Stage 2, class sizes are monitored to ensure wherever possible they are not exceeded.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will Penygarn be extended to accommodate the extra pupils? • There will be an impact on Abersychan School, because Pontnewynydd is one of its feeder schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, there is sufficient space within the existing footprint of the building to accommodate current and projected numbers on roll. Some internal remodelling will be required however to accommodate the additional pupils. • The proposed primary school catchment for the current area for Pontnewynydd will be Penygarn Primary School. No changes are currently planned to secondary catchments in the area. <p>Parents/carers can express a preference to attend any school. The current situation sees the majority of Year 6 children at Penygarn transferring to Abersychan. It should also be noted that with over 100 children attending Penygarn from the Pontnewynydd catchment area, a lot of children will already be “in catchment” for Abersychan when they transfer to secondary school.</p> <p>It is the view of the council that there will be little if any impact on Abersychan School, and there are therefore no current plans to review and/or realign catchment areas as choice of schools will remain.</p>
<p>Staff issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are good staff here at Pontnewynydd who could lose their jobs. What will happen to them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the school closes then the posts would be made redundant. Although the governing body are responsible for recruiting (and making redundant) staff, the council has statutory duties in regard to this. Although no guarantee can be given, the council has a very good record of redeployment where schools have closed.
<p>Estyn report</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estyn has said Pontnewynydd is an excellent school, does that not count for anything? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council has to ensure that where a school closes, the alternative provision must be at least equal to or where possible better than that currently provided. If this is not the case and pupils were disadvantaged the proposal would not proceed. <p>In response to the proposed closure of Pontnewynydd Primary School, it is Estyn's opinion that the proposal is likely to maintain the present standards of education in the area.</p>
<p>Congestion at Penygarn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is already huge congestion outside the school, with parents parking, Welsh School buses and other traffic. What will it be like with all these extra children? • Congestion is already bad in other parts of Trevethin and Penygarn and this will only make it worst. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The situation outside the school is known, and is a situation common to a lot of schools in the county borough. The council will work with the school on its travel plan and try to encourage less use of vehicles. Welsh Government policy remains not to encourage driving and transport movement around schools. Safety is paramount. • The council is aware of the more general traffic issues in the area and will work with the Highways Department on a traffic impact assessment.
<p>Classroom Facilities/TV studio</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are excellent facilities at Pontnewynydd, as well as a broadcasting/TV suite. Will they be replicated at Penygarn? • Pontnewynydd is a solid building that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penygarn was one of the first primary schools in Torfaen to be provided with a plaza, offering flexible working spaces, a technology rich environment, and opportunity for large and small group work given the use of individual laptops and other technology (for example Interactive White Board, plasma TV etc). There is no reason therefore, why the facilities at Pontnewynydd could not be similarly replicated at Penygarn, if that was considered important. • The school has been identified in an

<p>does not need such a large investment. If you have to spend money, spend it here!</p>	<p>independent survey commissioned by Welsh Government as a category C/D condition building (A being good). The school also requires significant investment just to bring it back to its “as built” condition, before any investment/improvements are made in the school to support a curriculum that is fit for the 21st Century.</p>
<p>Catering facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are already 3 sittings at Lunchtime and a lot of children are in receipt of free school meals. How will Penygarn cope? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the proposal proceed, the use of the Dining Hall now and how it would manage with additional pupils will be reviewed with the school to see how best to manage the situation. This will include looking at the kitchen capacity itself, and the equipment used.
<p>Safe walking routes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will transport be provided? • There are no safe walking routes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport will be provided in accordance with current policy and prescribed mileage criteria. The policy is currently under review, with a proposal to revert to statutory mileage (2 miles for primary aged children). • Where there are no safe walking routes and the home address is under the prescribed mileage, transport will also be provided, as is the case now.
<p>Big/small school issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big is not necessarily better. Some children will be “lost” in a bigger school environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small schools will have their benefits, but larger schools are able to offer significantly more. Pastoral care can be very good in bigger schools too.
<p>Extra housing in area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 120+ houses being built on the former Trevethin School site. Where will those children be expected to go? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This development will fall within the catchment area of Penygarn Primary School.

	Pupil projections will take into account pupils from new housing developments, as well as Health Authority live birth data and parental/admission trends. Whilst every effort is made to forecast numbers as accurately as possible, it will never be an exact science.
Protected species	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about the rare species of bats in the school buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the proposal proceed, and if the council has no further use of the site and it is sold, the council a full ecological survey would be undertaken, including an appropriate bat survey.
Objection to initial consultation document	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation document is misleading, flawed and inaccurate. It gives a biased view in favour of Penygarn Primary School. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the consultation meetings, at which a number of issues were raised about the content of the consultation document, it was decided to provide additional information in an updated document. This resulted in the consultation period being extended until 28th April 2014 and therefore provided an opportunity for stakeholders to comment further on the proposal,

4. ESTYN RESPONSE

The report received during the initial period of consultation, and based on the original consultation document is provided below in its entirety.

Estyn response to the proposal to close of Pontnewynydd Primary School

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 that 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

Are the proposals likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area?

It is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to maintain the present standards of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

How well has the proposer:

- **Given a clear rationale for the proposal?**

Torfaen County Borough Council has set out a clear rationale for the proposal to close Pontnewynydd Primary School. The proposal links well with the authority's strategic policy for 21st Century Schools.

Pontnewynydd Primary School is over 100 years old. In a Welsh Government survey of building condition, it is identified as a category C/D school, being in poor condition, requiring remedial work of approximately £746,000. Further investment would be required to support appropriate curriculum development. However, it does not specify how much this would be.

Implementation of the proposal will apparently release revenue savings that could help support further investment for the 21st Century Schools Programme. The authority states that the net recurring saving is estimated to be £162,000 per annum. The authority does not anticipate any immediate capital funding costs as part of this proposal. It does note that remodelling of the Penygarn Primary School is anticipated to cost £4m as part of their 21st Century Schools Programme. It does not yet have this funding agreed.

After local adjustments are considered, the authority states that Pontnewynydd school has 129 surplus places, and that Penygarn has 127 surplus places. The authority considers that the Penygarn site is better suited to accommodate the pupils from Pontnewynydd. It appears that the site could be better for a larger cohort of learners, with apparently more scope for learning indoors and outdoors.

- **Set out clearly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo?**

The authority has appropriately identified some benefits in the proposal. The disadvantages, other than the cost are not clear enough. The proposal would appear to save the authority large maintenance and upgrading costs, and reduce surplus places.

The proposal offers parents access to the nursery provision at the Penygarn site and at George Street Primary School. Nursery provision is not available at Pontnewynydd sufficient provision for the catchment area is currently available at

George Street Primary School and Penygarn.

The authority states that parental and community engagement is a key priority, and gives examples of appropriate activities that could be taken forward. It does not appear to be a significant issue within the proposal.

Pontnewynydd has a resource base for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. The authority states that the resource based has not been used for a number of years because pupils with moderate learning difficulties are now taught appropriately within a mainstream school environment. Because of this, the authority states appropriately that it does not need the resource base.

The authority states that current parental choice indicates that a higher percentage of pupils in the Pontnewynydd catchment area choose to send their children to Penygarn. This could confirm that it is an appropriate recipient school of choice for parents.

The authority states that Pontnewynydd is in the Abersychan cluster of schools, and Penygarn is within the West Mon cluster. However, it appears that through choice, 89% of pupils' progress from Penygarn to Abersychan. The authority would need to review and realign catchment areas under this proposal to ensure that this choice would remain.

The authority states that implementation of the proposal would have a positive impact on neighbouring schools and educational impact. However, there proposal does not detail exactly what this impact would be.

The authority states that it would seek to secure alternative suitable positions for staff within Torfaen schools. It does not detail how many staff or analyse how the changes of teaching staff will impact on pupils.

The proposals appear to indicate that those pupils transferring to Penygarn will be accommodated in existing buildings, with class sizes remaining within current legislation.

- **Managed any risks associated with the proposals?**

The authority has identified the risks on the premises and sites, and community provision associated with the proposal. It has indicated that wherever possible it will seek to secure alternative suitable positions for staff within Torfaen.

It does not appear to have examined fully the risk if parents choose alternative provision to Penygarn school, which would be likely to lead to a reduction in the planned numbers transferring.

- **Considered suitable alternatives and given good reasons as to why these have been discounted?**

The authority has appropriately considered suitable alternatives through their open consultation process for 21st Century schools programme.

- **Considered the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements and**

on accessibility of provision?

The authority has given appropriately relevant information on the impact of the proposed changes to learner travel and accessibility of provision to learners. Included are appropriate details of relevant school cluster arrangements, catchment areas, distance and travel time for learners.

• Effectively shown how surplus places will be affected? If surplus places will be increased has the proposer given adequate reasons for this?

The proposal details relevant information regarding the numbers of pupils on roll previously, currently and forecast. These are based on the current primary schools in the area. It states that information on how these numbers will be affected if this proposal is implemented is provided later in the proposal. However, the proposal does not appear to contain that information. It is difficult to determine exactly how many and which projected surplus places the proposal is intended to address.

• Where relevant, taken sufficient account of the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium provision within the local authority?

The authority does not assess the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium education.

Educational aspects of the proposal

How well has the proposer:

• Considered the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management?

The proposal gives a comparison between the education provided at Pontnewynydd and at Penygarn schools. The proposal refers to the Estyn inspection outcomes in both schools. Pontnewynydd Primary School was last inspected in 2011 and were judged to have excellent current provision, and excellent for prospects for improvement.

Penygarn was inspected under the previous Estyn inspection framework in 2009. Most of the Key Questions were judged to be good, with one judged as excellent.

Current performance at Pontnewynydd is judged by the regional school improvement service to be 'orange'. The proposal describes the orange category at Pontnewynydd as one where there are significant issues for the school to address. It gives a general view of issues of leadership and management, but does not analyse the issues that need to be addresses well enough. It describes the excellent inspection outcomes of 2011 as positive rather than excellent. Issues of poor performance are not analysed well enough.

Penygarn was categorised as green in the Regional Consortia's school categorisation model. Penygarn is described as displaying a strong and improving performance. It gives a general view of leadership and management, but does not analyse these well enough.

In general, the details provided for each of the schools is not consistent enough. For

example, Pontnewynydd has information on attendance but Penygarn does not.

- **Considered the likely impact of the proposals to ensure delivery of the full curriculum at the Foundation Phase and at each key stage?**

The proposal gives a comparison between the education provision at Pontnewynydd and at Penygarn schools. In general, this information lacks sufficient detail.

- **Considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs?**

The proposal lacks sufficient detail about the impact on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs.

- **Ensured that the disruption to learners is minimised?**

The authority describes how it will minimise any disruption to learners if the proposal is implemented. This includes travel times to and from school and accessibility for learners.

Local Authority response to Estyn comments

The Authority has considered the comments provided by Estyn and would like to comment as follows:

It is an expectation that the proposals impact at least equally if not better on the standards of provision and education currently provided. It is therefore pleasing to note that Estyn believe that this proposal is likely to maintain the present standards of education provision in the area.

Overall, the views of Estyn are welcomed, which confirm that the Authority has as a minimum adequately addressed the educational aspects of the proposal.

It should be noted that this Estyn assessment has been based on the initial consultation document issued on 4th November 2013. The authority has taken into consideration the issues and concerns raised by Estyn in this initial document, and are confident that they have now been addressed with the issue of the revised consultation document on 17th March 2014.

No further comments have been received from Estyn during the extended consultation period in relation to the revised consultation document.

5. CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Torfaen Play and Short Break Services were contacted to carry out consultation with pupils in both Pontnewynydd and Penygarn Primary schools.

Torfaen Play Service were asked to consult with children that attend Pontnewynydd Primary and the proposed school for the pupils to be transferred, Penygarn Community Primary School, if the closure goes ahead to gain their views and opinions on the proposals.

Methodology

The method that was used to consult Children and Young People who attend Penygarn Community Primary School and Pontnewynydd Primary School was to engage with a group of children of mixed ages by delivering inclusive group activities.

Firstly, the first group activity implemented in the workshop was the Traffic Light Game. The Traffic Light Game involves 3 flash cards, one green, one yellow and one red. A question is read out to the children and they will be given a choice of which flash card to go to. For example, if their answer to the question was 'yes', they go one behind each other on green. If they are not sure, undecided or like/don't like them both, they go to yellow. Finally, if they disagree they go to red. The numbers from each colour are tallied up for the results and any comments made by the children recorded. This method was used when there were only 3 choices to choose from the question that was asked.

Another method we used was the Corner Game. This game involves working within a squared space with four different coloured cones placed in each corner of the squared space. A question is read out and the children are given four choices to decide the answer which relates to them. For example, if a child is worried about being taught by new teachers, then they are directed to go to the red cone or if a child feels that they are worried about meeting new children, then they head towards the green cone when instructed to do so. Again, like the Traffic Light Game, the numbers for each cone are tallied up and any comments made recorded.

Finally, it was explained to each group what will happen with the information they had given and how it will be followed up. During the conclusion the children were thanked for their input and told that although the information and ideas they gave would be passed on to the council, there could be no guarantee their ideas would become reality, therefore ensuring no promises were made and the children had no unrealistic expectations from the exercise.

Attached at appendix 3 of this report are the outcomes of the consultation.

6. NOTES OF MEETINGS WITH STAFF, GOVERNORS AND PARENTS/CARERS AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

Attached at appendix 4 of this report are the notes of meetings held with staff (teaching, non teaching and support), governors and parents/carers and other interested parties.

Appendix 1 - Distribution List for the Consultation Document and Consultation Report

- The Governing body of each school maintained by Torfaen LA
- The Headteacher of each school maintained by Torfaen LA
- The Diocesan Director of Education of the Roman Catholic Church
- The Diocesan Director of Education of the Church in Wales
- The Board of Mission of the Church in Wales
- Awdurdod Cynwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales)
- The Welsh Joint Education Committee
- The Welsh Language Commissioner
- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- Welsh Government (Welsh Ministers)
- ESTYN
- Pan - Gwent Chief Education Officers (Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, to distribute to schools in their areas as appropriate)
- The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
- Children & Young People's Partnership
- Coleg Gwent
- The Careers Service
- Torfaen Association of school Governors
- The Parent Teacher Association of Wales
- The Welsh Primary Schools Association
- The Welsh Secondary Schools Association
- Libraries; (Blaenavon, Cwmbran and Pontypool)
- Other Directorates of Torfaen County Borough Council
- Schools Library Service
- Blaenavon Community Council
- Cwmbran Community Council
- Pontypool Community Council
- Ponthir Community Council
- Henllys Community Council
- Croesyceiliog and Llanyrafon Community Council
- DCELLS (Welsh Government)
- National Council for Education and Training in Wales
- All relevant Professional Associations (NUT; NASUWT; ATL; UCAC; UNISON; GMB)
- Local AM – Lynne Neagle
- Local MP - Paul Murphy
- AMs and MPs for other authorities in Pan-Gwent area
- All Elected Members of Torfaen County Borough Council
- Parents/Carers of all pupils affected by proposals
- RhAG (Parents for Welsh Medium Education)
- Registered Private/Voluntary Early Years Settings/Providers in Torfaen
- Torfaen Voluntary Alliance
- Communities First Partnership Board
- CYDAG (Cwmdeithas Ysgolion Dros Addysg Gymraeg)
- Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin
- Education Achievement Service (EAS)
- The relevant Regional Transport Consortium
- The Police and Crime Commissioner for the area

Appendix 2 – Summary of responses received during the consultation period

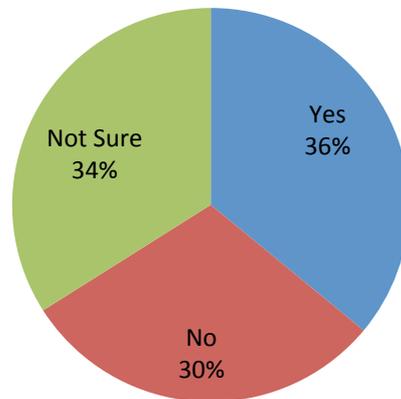
The following have responded as groups or individuals to the consultation document:

- The Governing Body of Pontnewynydd Primary School(2 responses)
- The Governing Body of Penygarn Primary School
- The Governing Body of Abersychan School
- Pontnewynydd Primary School Council(DVD presentation)
- Paul Murphy MP
- Lynne Neagle AM
- Lower Penygarn Community Association
- NASUWT Cymru
- 35 individual letters from pupils attending Pontnewynydd Primary school
- 22 individual letters/emails from parents/carers and other interested parties.

Appendix 3 – Results of consultation with primary aged children

**School Closures Consultation Penygarn Community Primary School 8th
November 2013**

**Are You Worried About More Children
Coming to a New School?**



Comments:

Not nervous at all

I'm used to making new friends

I am not sure if they would fit in

There could be too many children in each class

Some new children could be nasty and some new children could be kind

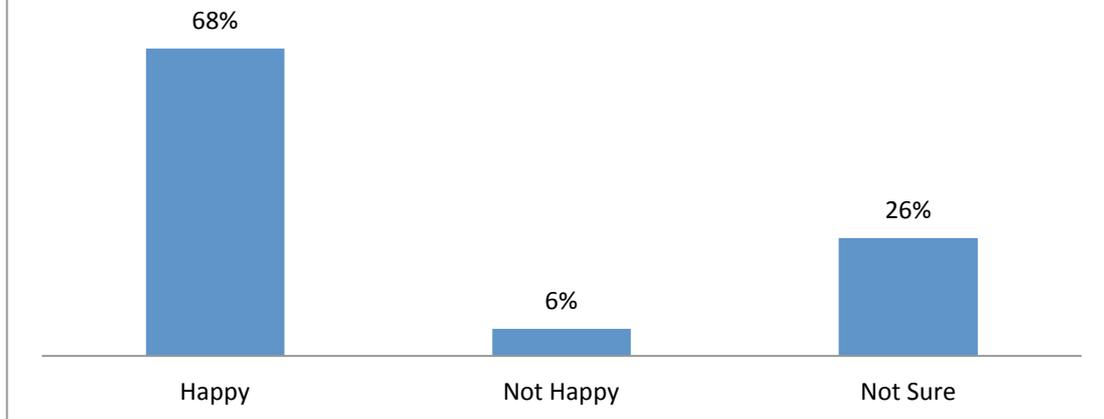
I know lots of them and it would be good to see them

I don't care!

They will be nice!

The more children we have in this school the more fun we have

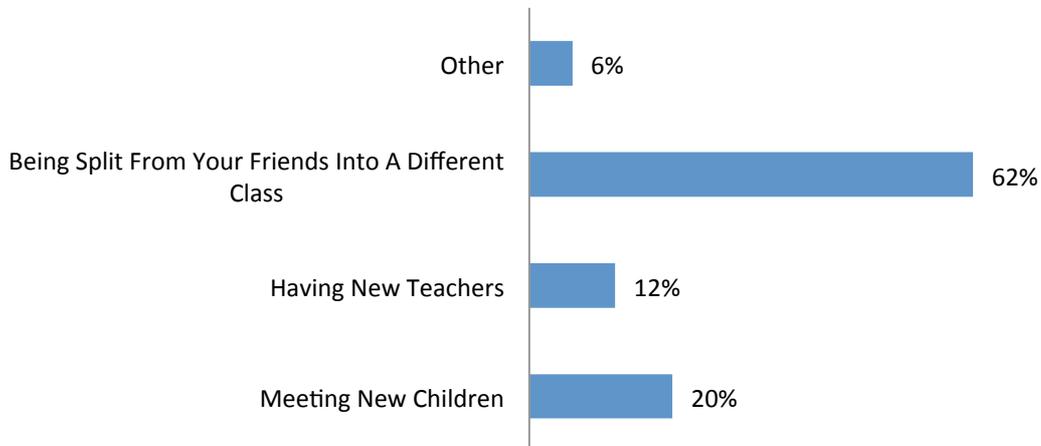
How Do You Feel About Making New Friends With Children From A Different School?



Comments:

- I am not comfortable with this*
- I like to make new friends*
- There will be more people to play games with me*
- I am scared of making new friends*
- I am nervous about making new friends*
- Some will be nasty and some will not*
- I love making new friends*
- If someone is upset we can help them*
- It will be exciting to see new people at the school*

What Are You Mostly Worried About New Children Coming To Your School?



Comments:

The new children may not like to play my games

I would not like to get told off by a new teacher

I don't want to split from my friends

I will miss my classroom

I would feel nervous

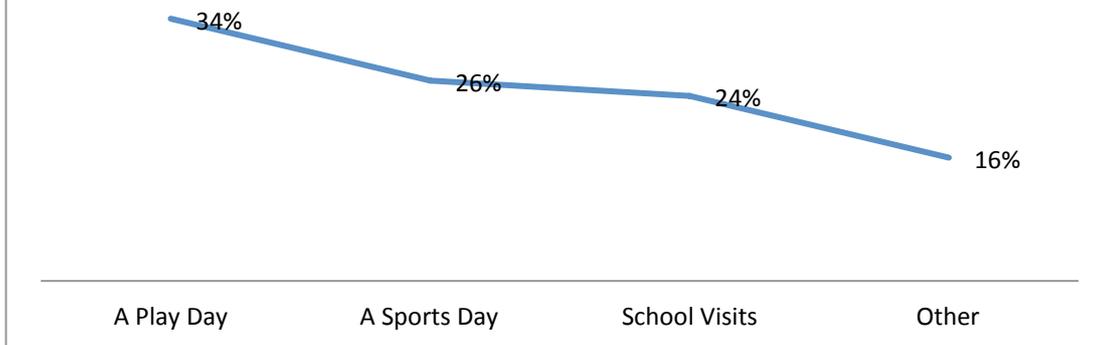
New teachers might be strict

I don't want any nasty people to come to the school

We don't know the new teachers

We might get disturbed by people we don't know while working

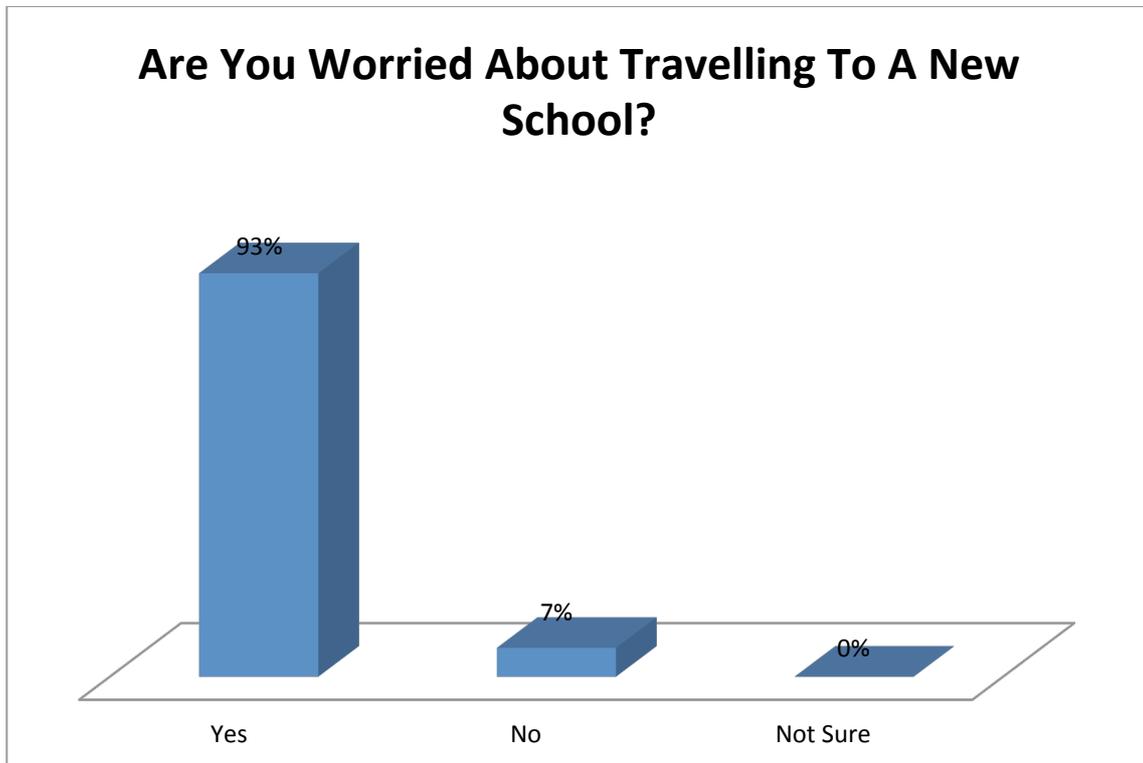
**We Would Like To Help You In The Transition Of New Children To Your School.
 Which Of The Following Would You Think Is A Good Idea?**



Comments:

- A play day would be fun and more entertaining*
- We can show we are good at sport*
- We will know what everyone likes doing*
- To have a day off school work*
- Making new friends and playing with them*
- We can get to know each other better*
- We can have a day of circle time to get to know each other*
- Everyone can get to know their new class mates and teachers in a class room*
- A working fun day*
- Taster days*

**School Closures Consultation Pontnewynydd Primary School 29th November
2013**



Comments:

I would not like to walk long distance to a new school

It would be too far away

I will miss my friends

I don't mind

I have already moved schools before and wouldn't want too again

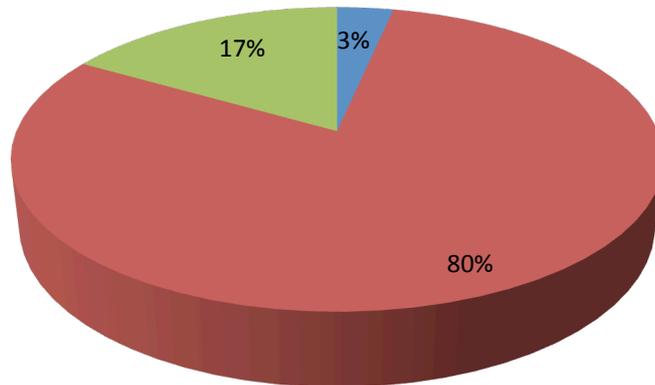
There are no pavements on some roads on the way to Penygarn School

I would have no one to take me

Our school is closer and easier to access

How Do You Feel About Making New Friends In A Different School?

■ Happy ■ Not Happy ■ Not Sure



Comments:

I like my friends here

I would be scared and frightened

I would be a little worried

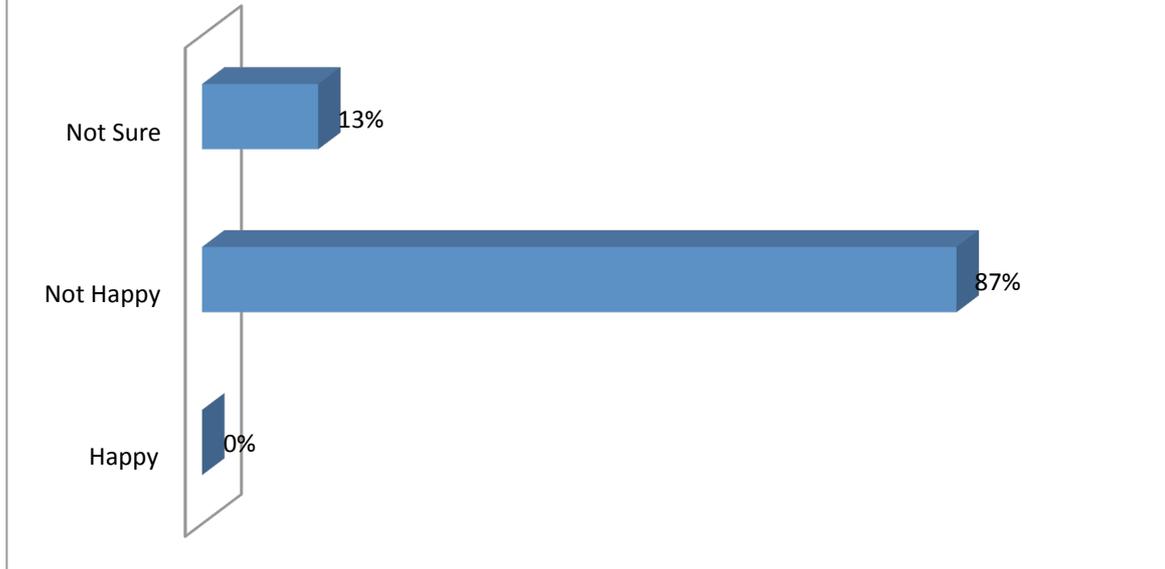
Don't want to split from my friends in this school

I want to stay with my friends

I am happy with the friends I got

What if they don't want to be your friends?

How Do You Feel About Wearing A Different Uniform?



Comments:

I like both uniforms

I don't want to change my uniform

A new uniform might be uncomfortable

Don't judge the uniform until we see them

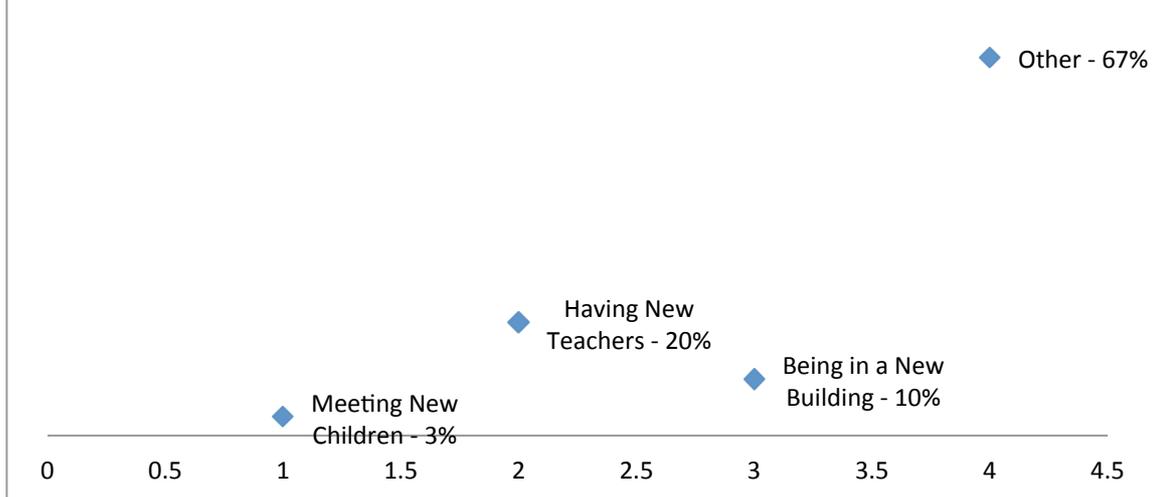
I like our school colours as they are cosy, comfy and warm

We designed our school badge so we don't want to see it go!

I would stay in this uniform, even if we move to a different school!

It would cost more money to buy more uniform

What Are You Mostly Worried About Going To A New School?



Comments:

We might not know the teachers

Travelling would be an issue

I would be scared to make new friends

Our teachers are very nice and others may be mean

We might not carry out fun activities in different schools

The classrooms in a new school might be cramped and small

I really like my teachers here

I don't want to split from my friends

We might have to carry out different work in a new school

I am scared of bullies

We won't like to have different rules

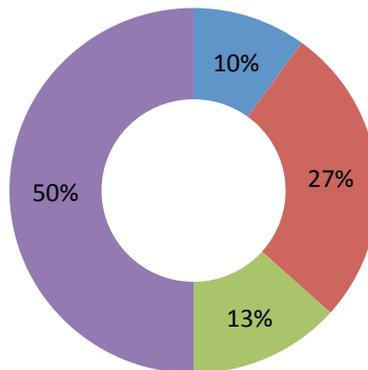
I love this school

I have grown up in this building

I would like to see you younger family go to this school and see different generation carry on the tradition of coming to this school

We Would Like To Help You In A Proposed Move To A New School. Which Of The Following Would You Think Is A Good Idea?

■ A Play Day ■ A Sports Day ■ School Visits ■ Other



Comments:

A sports day would be fun

We would have lots of exercise from a sports day

It would be a fit and healthy activity to carry out a sports day

I love Playscheme so a Play Day would be great

We would get to know the teachers better

We don't need to do anything

Swimming lessons

Appendix 4 – Notes of consultation meetings

Pontnewynydd Primary School

Notes of Consultation Meeting (Staff: teaching; non-teaching; support) held at the School on Tuesday 26th November 2013 at 3.30pm

Present:

Dermot McCrystal, John Tushingham, Granville Hern and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service;
Liz Jones, Alexis Edwards, Systems Leaders, Education Achievement Service (EAS)
Rob Gibb, GMB Representative
17 Staff

Welcome and Introductions

JT welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the officers present. It was at this point in time important to note that this was consultation on the proposal and that no decision had yet been made in respect of the future of Pontnewynydd Primary School. It was not a reflection of the teaching and learning in the school now but other factors (building condition and surplus places).

Personnel/ Human Resource Matters

Granville Hern explained that 1:1 sessions would be held on an individual basis that would help profile people's skills and knowledge should redeployment opportunities arise. The profile would help identify any fears and aspirations of staff and also help provide opportunities.

If the school closes then the posts would be made redundant, although the governing body are responsible for recruiting (and making redundant) staff, the Council has statutory duties in regard to this. Although no guarantee can be given, the Council has a very good record of redeployment where schools have closed.

The audience were then invited to comment on and ask questions about the proposal.

Questions and Answers

Comment: If you cannot give a 100% guarantee on redeployment what happens next?

In response: The worst case scenario would be redundancy, with payment based on length of service. We would expect the majority of staff to find alternative

employment, if that is wanted. By way of example, the Kemys Fawr Infants School closure is down to 3 teaching assistants looking for posts.

Comment: What about early retirement? What age?

In response: For teachers it would be 55+ years; Support staff because of the different conditions of employment would be via the voluntary retirement scheme.

Comment: Would all staff move to Penygarn?

In response: This would depend on circumstances. Penygarn may decide to accommodate all, but that would be a matter for the school/governing body.

Comment: Is there room at Penygarn Primary? We've heard that George Street Primary is losing its computer room to accommodate extra pupils.

In response: Yes, there is room. We would of course talk to the school about how best to use the places available, but the Welsh Government formula used to calculate capacity provides sufficient space per child, based on the available accommodation.

We will provide an indicative plan of Penygarn Primary School to show how pupils can be accommodated.

Comment: There is traffic congestion at Penygarn, and this proposal will only make it worse.

In response: The Council will try to support wherever possible, but this is an issue faced at many if not all our schools and those further afield. Wherever possible, we should try to encourage less car use and if possible make the prospect of walking, particularly to school safer and a more attractive option than driving.

Comment: What about all the new housing. Where will those children go?

In response: We take into account all known housing developments in a school's catchment area and build potential numbers of pupils into our projections. We accept that it is not an exact science, but we base our assumptions on the best available information at the time.

Comment: There are a number of schools listed on page 8 of the consultation document, which will be full, so why list them? Parents won't travel such distances anyway.

In response: We agree that perhaps the relevance is limited, but as with previous school reorganisation proposals we have identified schools within a 2 mile radius of Pontnewynydd as the principal school affected. Parents/carers could choose to send their children to any school but we have to draw the line somewhere. The Council has to reduce surplus places to below 10% by 2015. By reducing surplus places, parental preference will be reduced but the Authority's admission criteria will ensure that "in catchment" children are given a higher priority than those applying from out of the school's catchment area.

Comment: Is this proposal just one of affordability ahead of education?

In response: No, the issue of surplus places has to be addressed. There will be revenue savings with the removal of surplus places which will allow any savings to be reinvested in education.

Comment: The document states that standards have dropped here, but this is not the case.

In response: We are working closely with colleagues in the EAS to ensure that all schools are good. Everybody in the community should be clear about how schools perform. It is important to note that if the proposal is to proceed, the Council must put the interest of learners above all others and must therefore be convinced that the quality of teaching and learning will be at least equal to that currently provided, and better if possible.

Comment: The document refers to the seven core aims of the UN convention on the rights of the child and suggests that whether intentionally or not the needs of children would be better met at Penygarn.

In response: Apologies if this is the impression given, but it is not intended. We have to make reference to this and community and equality impacts in the document in line with the requirements of the School Organisation Code.

Comment: How will this affect the children? Have you thought of this?

In response: It will be important to get the views of the children, in terms of a possible change of school and how to support this. The System Leaders(EAS) would come in to school and discuss what would need to change and would support any changes to the curriculum as part of the transition. The transition plan will therefore be critical. We will ensure that a clear plan is in place and that there is as little disruption as possible. The Authority has good experience of this with for example the move of Crownbridge pupils to Penygarn.

Comment: There is a school bus from Trevethin to here now, would transport be provided?

In response: Yes in line with distance criteria, and if the route is deemed unsafe under those published distances. We are currently being consulted on new Welsh Government guidance in relation to assessment of safe walking routes to school so the guidelines may change.

Comment: There is a large sum of back log maintenance. Where does it go?

In response: We can provide a schedule of the required works. The more fundamental issue here is that Welsh Government commissioned surveyors to look at schools in all the Local Authorities (EC Harris selected to review all Torfaen Schools) in order to provide an independent assessment of the school building stock in the country. This was because Local Authority assessments were not consistent with each other.

Comment: What about the money spent on the buildings (EC Harris data sheets referred to)?

In response: The EC Harris data is historical and was based on an assessment undertaken in January 2010. It was provided upon request to the Chair of Governors, and the reference to the reception area is one that was not made public by the Authority.

Comment: Pontnewynydd Primary School has not been broken into for a number of years but other local schools have. We are a safe school.

In response: This is the reality of where we are, but Pontnewynydd has been very fortunate in this regard.

Comment: Would it not be more cost effective to use the backlog maintenance monies or 21st Century Band A budget to bring this building up to standard?

In response: No, because it would still not address the issue of surplus places. If the Council does not address it Welsh Ministers will impose a solution.

Comment: Penygarn will still be over capacity if this proposal is implemented?

In response: Our view remains that there will be sufficient space, and by working with the school the best use of the building will be made to accommodate these children. This will be done without compromising the quality of teaching and learning that will remain key. We will take account of all your comments as part of this consultation, particularly your concerns in relation to this specific matter.

Comment: If the school was to close would our salaries be protected?

In response: Yes, teachers would be for 3 years and support staff for 2.

Comment: Would staff be released to go for interviews and would they be paid?

In response: Yes.

The meeting closed at 4.40pm

Pontnewynydd Primary School

Notes of the Consultation Meeting with the Governing Body held at the School on Tuesday 26th November 2013 at 4.45pm

Present:

Councillor Brian Mawby, Executive Member for Children & Young People;
John Tushingham, Granville Hern and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service;
Liz Jones, Alexis Edwards, Systems Leaders, Education Achievement Service (EAS)
7 Governors

Welcome and Introductions

JT welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the officers present. It was important to emphasise that this was consultation on the proposal and that no decision had yet been made in respect of the future of Pontnewynydd Primary School. The proposal had not been developed out of concerns regarding the teaching and learning at the school but is rooted in the need to deal with surplus places and the condition of school buildings (which are national drivers).

Governors were then invited to comment on and ask questions about the proposal.

Comments/Questions and Answers

Comment: From the outset I have been opposed to this proposal. It would be madness to fit both schools in Penygarn. The quality of learning will be destroyed. There is a huge percentage of children receiving free school meals, and lunch currently operates over 3 sittings, so how would the school manage with these extra children? Pupils enjoy the “plaza” environment and these would need to be converted to make additional classroom space.
There is also significant housing that will generate more pupils.

In response: We have no plans to increase the footprint of Penygarn, so we need to look at the best way to use the existing facilities. We believe we will be able to accommodate all the children should they decide to attend Penygarn. The space is there.

In terms of new housing, projections include potential pupils from known developments. Projecting pupil numbers is never an exact science, but we take into account live birth data, current parental preference and school admission trends and new housing to forecast numbers as accurately as possible.
The main focus in all proposals is to provide at least a level of education that is as good as that currently provided at present.

Comment: Why have you not spoken to Penygarn before?

In response: We need to consult with you on proposal first, before going onto next stage. The purpose is to get your views and give reassurances wherever we can. We can't consult with Penygarn first, but will do so in due course.

Comment: You gave cast iron guarantees when Trevethin School closed that children could go to either West Mon or Abersychan. Can you do the same here?

In response: No, but it remains our view that in terms of pupil capacity there is room at Penygarn. If parents choose to send their children elsewhere that would be their

choice, but because of Infant class size legislation we cannot give that guarantee of places.

We will report back on the outcome of consultation to you and to the decision makers who can then make an informed decision. We don't of course know what the parental views are at this stage.

Comment: I don't doubt that you will fit them in, but don't think you have thought about this properly. It has been done too quickly.

In response: Council have accepted a report about surplus places, condition of buildings, and schools of the right size in the right place. It (the proposal) is not about the quality of teaching and learning.

Comment: It is just about surplus places. Big is not better. The Health Authority closed small hospitals and now there is bed blocking and insufficient beds. The same will happen here with school places. There will also be no parking for parents. Will you advertise schools?

In response: I accept the intention is to remove surplus places, and this is a key driver. Have to remove surplus which will free up money which can be directed back into education in the best possible way. I don't accept that we are not interested in the teaching and learning, this will ultimately determine if the proposal is to proceed or not.

Comment: This is a solid school/building, but the value will be small if the school closes and you manage to sell the site.

In response: There will be a capital receipt if the site is sold, but the value is not the prime driver. There will also be revenue savings, as a result of running costs not being incurred.

Comment: What are the revenue savings?

In response: These will be the day to day running costs for example, heating, lighting, caretaking costs.

Comment: The children will not receive the same level of education as they are receiving now?

In response: If we cannot satisfy teaching and learning then this proposal will not proceed. The proposal will need to demonstrate that teaching and learning will be at the very least equivalent to that provided currently, and better if possible.

Comment: How have the pupil projections been calculated for Penygarn?

In response: Projections are reviewed annually for all schools, based on actual September numbers on roll. Health Authority live birth data for each catchment area is used and adjusted to take into account current parental preference/admission trends, Those numbers are then used to project reception aged children entering

each school. Where housing developments are known in each catchment, the pupils these are also likely to generate are also included. This allows the Authority to see where supply and demand is and can be planned accordingly.

Comment: The consultation document is flawed. You must include ESTYN reports and you must include a statement regarding when objections can be made.

In response: We do not believe the document is wrong, but we would be happy to receive the views from the Chair of Governors to look at the legal requirements of the document. Consultees are sign posted to ESTYN reports and other information in the document. Where we are able to respond to consultees who have commented on the proposal we explain the process for making formal objections then.

Comment: There is a comment in the document that states that, “an effective management structure is in place”, but you will be aware that there have been changes at Penygarn. Also, the data is not being compared like with like.

In response: The Head and Deputy of Penygarn will be leaving at the end of the Autumn term. This was not confirmed until after the document was published. The data is correct, but we will work with EAS colleagues to check the data and the years to which it relates. We would also welcome the schools interpretation of the data.

Comment: This document is causing a rift between Penygarn and Pontnewynydd Schools and also its parents. The schools have worked hard to build up a relationship, but the document is biased and suggesting one school is better than the other.

In response: As previously mentioned we will work with the EAS and check the data and timelines that they apply too.

Comment: You have said that the Council must demonstrate the quality of teaching and learning to be at least equal to or better. How can people make an informed decision?

In response: ESTYN will provide a view of the overall merits of the proposal. This will all be made available in a report to Cabinet who can then make an informed decision. The outcome of the consultation exercise will also be made available (in the form of a consultation report) to all interested parties.

Comment: When?

In response: The parents meeting is next week, and a report on the consultation is due to go to Cabinet in January 2014.

Comment: Parents will want to have answers. Will there be another meeting?

In response: We anticipate that we will have some answers for Tuesday. The outcome of the consultation has to go back to Cabinet to determine the next steps, but we will share any additional information with you.

Comment: If the process is flawed it can be referred to Welsh Ministers or the Ombudsman.

Comment: Will parents have a say? If objections are made will it go to Welsh Government?

In response: Yes parents do have a say. They can , write or email their views to the council. Under the new code, the proposal does not go to welsh government but is determined by the Local authority Executive.

Meeting closed at 5.50pm

Pontnewynydd Primary School

Notes of Consultation Meeting(Parents/Carers; local Residents; Other Interested Parties) held at the School on Tuesday 3rd December 2013 at 9.30am

Present:

Councillor Brian Mawby, Executive Member for Children & Young People;
John Tushingham, Cliff Day and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service;
46 Parents/Carers, Local Residents and Other Interested Parties.

Welcome and Introductions

JT welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the council's representatives.

It was highlighted that the council was consulting on the proposal and that no decision had yet been made in respect of the future of Pontnewynydd Primary School.

The 21st Century Schools Programme had been launched in 2010 and the Council's strategic plan had been agreed in 2011.

This proposal was not about the teaching and learning in the school but largely about the need to address surplus places and building condition. This was therefore not a criticism in any way of the teaching and learning, and if it the proposal was to proceed the Council must be satisfied that the quality of education must be at least as good and if possible better than that currently provided. ESTYN will be the final judge in this respect.

This therefore was an opportunity to share information and receive comments on the proposal which will go to Cabinet before a decision is made.

The audience were then invited to comment.

Questions and Answers

Comment: If a child goes to Penygarn, and there is no safe route will transport be provided? What about parking at the school, the extra traffic? Have you done a risk assessment?

In response: If the route is deemed to be unsafe, we will provide transport as we do now. The issues outside the school are known, but unfortunately this is a situation faced at a lot of schools. We will continue to work with schools on their travel plans and try to encourage less use of vehicles. Welsh Government policy remains not to encourage driving and transport movement around schools. Safety is paramount, and these concerns are noted. In relation to free transport, there is a policy review underway, with a proposal to go to 2 miles for primary aged children.

Comment: There still remains the issue of buses going to and from Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, the regional Welsh medium secondary school. This is already a problem outside Penygarn, and extra children attending Penygarn will bring massive issues.

Comment: Will the plaza's be taken out to accommodate these children? What about the dining arrangements for all the extra children?

In response: We will talk to the Head and Deputy Head at Penygarn, now there is a proposal on the table. That discussion will be around how best to use the available space.

Dining will need to be looked at. We are aware Penygarn operate a 3 shift lunch break. The hall is big enough, but again as with the overall accommodation this will be a discussion with the school.

Comment: The Head and Deputy are leaving. How can you discuss it with them?

In response: The Head teacher issue will be resolved shortly.

Comment: When we met as a governing body (Councillor Barry Taylor) and asked questions, you (Councillor Brian Mawby) said, "I only answer to Cabinet, I don't answer to parents"

In response: No, I (Councillor Mawby) said I was responsible in reporting to Cabinet. If I wasn't prepared to listen to parents then why I am I here now? You are quoting me badly, wrongly and I am unhappy with that. You are creating a smoke screen I am here to listen to parents and their concerns and how best to answer their questions.

Comment: I don't have children here, but am a local resident and have real concerns with traffic issues on Penygarn Hill. There is only a pavement on one side; kerbs/roads are on the same level, which means there is a crushing risk to pedestrians against the wall if vehicles mount the kerb. There is poor access in the area for the community. Added to this will be the 124 houses going on the former Trevethin School site.

In response: We are aware of these issues. We will be meeting with Councillor Jones to discuss traffic (school buses) on Leigh Road/Hospital Road, but we will look to extend that to the area as a whole with colleagues from the Highways Department.

Comment: Which school will the children from the new houses go to?

In response: They will be in the catchment area of Penygarn Primary.

Comment: I have 2 children here at Pontnewynydd. The teaching at Penygarn is not as good as it is here. Will you build an extension at Penygarn?

In response: No an extension is not necessary. As stated earlier, we will work with the school and review the accommodation within the existing footprint of the school.

In terms of teaching and learning, ESTYN the school inspectorate are a statutory consultee and have been asked to comment on this proposal. We cannot presume what ESTYN will say but they won't allow us to proceed where pupils could be disadvantaged.

Comment: You are removing parental choice. How big are classes going to be? There will be too many children and not enough places. Why have you spent money on this school if you are now planning to close it?

In response: Parents can express a preference for a school place but no guarantee can be given. Because of surplus places parents have been able to pick any school for their children, but as surplus places are removed then that choice is reduced. We have to make these difficult choices because the retention of such a large number of surplus places is not a good use of resources.

Our pupil projections take into account current numbers, live birth data, parental preference trends and potential children from new housing. It is our view that there will be sufficient places.

Classes at Key Stage 1 will not exceed 30 pupils; at Key Stage 2 there is no statutory requirement but class sizes are monitored.

We have a responsibility to ensure all children have the best facilities available and it is for that reason that money has been spent here in the recent past.

Comment: The capacity at Penygarn is 475. Where will the children go?

In response: We have a number of ways to increase the number of places. The internal organisation of classes will be a matter for the Head teacher and Governing Body, but a discussion will be held.

Comment: The consultation document is biased. You state the management is in place at Penygarn when there is no Head teacher in post. It gives the impression that everything here at Pontnewynydd is "xxx" and everything at Penygarn is good.

In response: When the Head teacher leaves there will be an Acting Head teacher appointed (as there is here).

If you feel the document is biased then apologies, but that was not the intention.

Comment: This proposal was originally a priority 8 or 9 in your plan. Why has it been pushed forward? When will the £4M be spent on the school?

In response: Welsh Government asked us to put plans together for all our schools, but in 2011 the game changed and we were asked to put a plan together with a 50/50 split on funding (initially 70/30) and look at prioritisation of projects in terms of surplus places and building condition. This proposal is now being advanced as part of the Council's decision in November 2011.

The £4M spend needs a business plan, but this will not be done until after 2015.

Comment: You are setting up children for a fall at secondary level. This is a piecemeal plan.

In response: It is not piecemeal. The council has approved a strategic plan that names every school in the Borough. We have massive issues at Secondary level in terms of surplus places particularly in Cwmbran, so we are trying to tackle both. Tough decisions have to be made.

Comment: Children here go onto Abersychan at secondary level, Penygarn go to West Mon. You are making us send our children to West Mon?

In response: Parents can express a preference. The majority of children attending Penygarn currently transfer to Abersychan. Parents will still be able to express that preference.

Comment: What about our broadcasting suite?

In response: This will be discussed along with the other accommodation requirements.

Comment: Have you done a feasibility study? Where is your evidence? There is no room.

In response: It is feasible. The evidence is there. There is sufficient floor space for the numbers on roll.

Comment: Children will be affected by this proposal?

In response: Children's education is paramount in any proposal. We do not believe it will affect children, as a thorough transition plan will be put in place should the proposal proceed.

Comment: When are ESTYN at Penygarn?

In response: We don't know yet when their next visit is, but they will comment on this proposal.

Comment: You should get rid of Brynteg Nursery, and move it here; Spend the £4M on a sixth form at Abersychan.

In response: We still have to deal with the surplus in our nursery provision. Your suggestion will be noted.

Comment: The building survey is out of date. Reception office is said to be on first floor; there are security issues? Everyone here has commented on this excellent building.

In response: Welsh Government commissioned the survey and we have used that. Work has been done since the survey was completed, but there remain issues not least in terms of access and DDA compliance (3 floors).

Comment: The new Barrett site will need places for its children. Where?

In response: The development will fall in the catchment area of Penygarn Primary School.

Comment: Victoria School is not suitable. You are looking to move them to Garnteg. The children have to cross a road to access their canteen. Why not move those children here?

In response: The Band A list of proposals is not sequential.

Comment: Pontnewynydd Primary is the only excellent school according to ESTYN.

In response: We acknowledge the ESTYN report, and as previously stated this proposal has nothing to do with and is not a criticism of the teaching and learning at the school. ESTYN will provide a statement and this will be provided to Cabinet before decisions are made. It remains fundamental that teaching and learning has to be at least equal to or better in the receiving school. ESTYN will make that judgement.

Comment: Where do I send my child if Pontnewynydd closes? I don't like any of the other schools in the area. This is my only choice. I had a bad experience at a local school. Will I have to home teach?

In response: Sorry to hear about your personal experience, but this is not the arena to discuss. Your child is too important to discuss in a public place, although it can be arranged for outside the meeting.

There is a parental and legal responsibility to ensure children are in school. Places will be available.

Comment: Out of all schools in Torfaen this is the best.

Comment: Why was Pontnewynydd brought forward? This has been a bombshell to staff, governors and parents alike. The Victoria/Garnteg proposal was ahead of this one.

In response: It is a question of timing. The original plan changed in 2011 in terms of funding/banding of projects.

Comment: The document criticises the buildings here; lack of outside play; £750,000 to bring it up to standard. We've got ICT, movie studio; good KS2 space; the list goes on? Will you instigate another report with a more balanced and recent view?

In response: That is not disputed, but there has been no material improvement in the fabric of the building. The sum referred to is needed just to bring it back to its "as built" condition. We do not believe that it will be necessary to instigate a new report, but we will note your concerns.

Comment: If you shut the school what happens to the site?

In response: If it goes ahead the site will be deemed surplus to educational requirements and offered to other council departments. If it is still deemed surplus, then the reality is that the site will be sold.

Comment: If you don't own it you can't sell it.

Comment: The consultation is flawed.

Comment: This school does not need any investment.

In response: We note your comment but we believe it does.

Comment: In terms of investment Penygarn is not a grade A school (page 10 of consultation document).

In response: Some internal remodelling will impact positively on the proposal.

Comment: The Council have failed the children by not maintaining this building. What needs to be done?

In response: Welsh Government used to give Councils funding called SBIG (school building improvement grant). This has now stopped and any funding will now be through the 21st Century Schools Programme.

In terms of what needs to be done here, windows, boiler plant/heating distribution, radiators, the roof needs some work, walls need repointing.

Comment: My children went to St Peters but hated their new school, so came here and love it. We don't want bigger schools. It is all about safeguarding; you can't guarantee that. In small schools things are picked up. This is a Communities First area.

In response: There is a lot to be said for small schools, but pastoral care can be very good too in bigger schools.

There is never a perfect time to put proposals forward, but along with teaching and learning the school can support the wellbeing of its pupils.

Comment: Welsh Ministers are narrowing the gap between socially deprived areas and education. Why are you not working with them?

In response: We are working with them on both that and the 21st Century Programme. There is no reason why you can't advance both together.

Comment: When did someone come to look at the school? You should have looked at the buildings before the consultation started. The information is factually incorrect. Foundation phase and Key Stage 2 teachers from outside are brought here for training. How are staff here not "ticking boxes?"

In response: We don't accept that it is wrong. Issues still need to be addressed in terms of surplus places. This proposal won't proceed if its just an economic argument.

Comment: But there are errors. Why hasn't correct information been put in the document – it is incorrect.

In response: The proposal is correct. The governing body have agreed to provide us with information in this matter, and we will look at what they think is wrong.

Comment: This information, will we see it by the end of the consultation?

In response: It will be provided before we report back to Cabinet

Comment: The £4M investment at Penygarn, is it guaranteed?

In response: It won't be done until after 2015, and we will still need to submit a business case to Welsh Government.

Comment: "A stitch in time saves nine". The hospital was closed and the site sold, but nothing has happened there since. It's all about money and nothing else.

In response: We are sorry how you feel, but your comments are noted.

Comment: Why are you closing us, ESTYN said we are an excellent school.

In response: ESTYN will make a judgement to inform the decision making process.

Comment: EAS say Pontnewynydd is rated "orange" and Penygarn is rated "green" This is not clear.

In response: We have talked to the governing body, who also feel this information has not been presented in a fair and equal way. It is accurate, but accept it could be presented more clearly and we will therefore work with the EAS, use their

assessment criteria and set out the information in a matrix measured against those criteria.

Comment: This is about children and their education, not inaccurate information.

In response: As stated we will prepare a further document.

Comment: Are you coming back to look at the roof? Could I get someone in to get a quote.

In response: No. You are at liberty to do what you like, but we hope you wouldn't until we have done our work. However, we will take whatever you send in, into consideration.

Comment: Education in Torfaen and Wales is going through turmoil. If Mark Provis was here, he wouldn't agree to this.

Comment: I've written in (to the Leader) but had no response.

In response: We will check if you provide us with your details.

Comment: The document remains flawed, particularly page 10. Anyone reading the document would say, "Oh my god!" I won't send my child there. Specific facilities don't mean children don't benefit; bigger schools are not better; inaccuracies in references to staff turnover, benchmarking data, targets.

In response: The information is accurate, but ESTYN will be judge of that. If the balance is not right then we will address it.

Comment: (Councillor Barry Taylor) The letter from Brian Mawby to the Head in response to the children's letters talks about poor quality photocopies. Find out who they are from?

In response: (Councillor Mawby). What else does the letter say? I wrote to the head and asked that she speak to and thank all the children and the head has provided more information. I have offered to reply in an equitable manner.

Comment: The Council policy seems to be to run schools into the ground?

In response: No, that is not the case.

Comment: In conclusion, we believe the proposal is bias and the information is inaccurate. Michael Jones (Welsh Government legal representative) has demonstrated in previous cases that such proposals are not in the best interests of schools; you have given no guarantees for example in my question about the plaza and the 21st Century school plans; I believe the proposals are not worth the paper they are written on.

In response: I do understand how frustrating it is, but we will look to see where clarification is needed (particularly around buildings and teaching and learning), and

to be fair to everyone we will if necessary provide additional information and extend the consultation by 42 days from the date it is published.

Close: Meeting closed at 11.20am