



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning
Service
Strategic School Improvement Programme

CONSULTATION REPORT

Proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary schools



Response to consultation on the proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg primary schools - analysis and comments

Introduction

On 21st October 2020, the Council's Cabinet determined to consult on the proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg primary schools, with a learning support centre (LSC) for up to 16 pupils with statements for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The consultation period ran from 3rd November 2020 to 19th January 2020. A list of consultees is included at Appendix A. This consultation report summarises the issues raised by consultees during the consultation period. It responds to these by means of clarification and commentary, with supporting reasons.

Many of the responses relate to similar issues, with the most comments being received relating to the size (pupil numbers) of the proposed new school, the traffic management of the proposed site, transport and the impact on the community.

The view of Estyn, the schools' inspectorate, is included in this consultation report together with notes of meetings with pupils.

This report needs to be read alongside the consultation document, 'Proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg primary schools.

Context

The Council has consulted with interested parties on the proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school with specialist learning support centre, in new build premises to accommodate pupils from the catchment areas of Alltwen Primary, Godre'rgraig Primary and Llangiwg Primary all of which will subsequently close on 31st August 2024.

Background

The Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. Having the right schools in the right place and ensuring that they are fit for the 21st century learner is

the challenge facing the Council. Achieving this will involve reviewing the number and type of schools the Council has in its area and assessing whether or not best use is being made of resources and facilities.

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

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

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

The Council is proposing to build a new, 21st century primary school for the Swansea Valley to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary schools, all of which will close on 31st August 2024.

It has been proposed that the new school will be built on land in Parc Ynysderw, Pontardawe and that it will form part of a learning, health and wellbeing community campus made up of Cwmtawe Community School and Pontardawe Leisure Centre. The campus will be further enhanced by the addition of a new build 25 metre, 6 lane swimming pool with additional learner pool on the site to complement current provision and enhance the health and wellbeing offer for pupils and the wider community.

The new English-medium primary school for boys and girls aged 3-11 years will accommodate 630 full-time pupils and 140 part-time (70 a.m./70 p.m.) nursery age pupils in a new build 21st century facility which will provide a stimulating teaching and learning environment in state of the art facilities.

The new school will serve the combined catchment areas of Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary schools and will have sufficient capacity for pupils from the area. Pupils from the three existing schools will automatically transfer to the new school subject to parental preference. It will be managed with one head teacher and one governing body and will have one budget allocation and one group of staff.

Additionally the new school will provide a learning support centre (LSC) for up to 16 pupils with statements for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It will also provide the opportunity to become a community hub for the area, building on the work already being undertaken by other well established primary school LSCs.

The new build will be funded jointly from Welsh Government 21st century School Programme capital grant monies and from the Council's prudential borrowing capacity.

The combined new build school, specialist ASD provision and pool will form part of a learning, health and wellbeing community campus at the Parc Ynysderw site, complementing the existing Cwmtawe Community School and Pontardawe Leisure Centre provision. In locating the new build facilities close to Cwmtawe Community School the development will enable pupils and staff from both schools to benefit from increased partnership working, made easier due to their close proximity.

The school building stock is ageing and the Council is facing increasing backlog maintenance and repair costs. As money and opportunity becomes available the Council will seek to replace existing schools with new builds and state of the art teaching and learning facilities. This proposal will remove circa. £2m of backlog maintenance costs across the three schools, and will also remove a split site arrangement at Llangiwig Primary School.

Currently the three schools are separate establishments, on sites some distance apart. Creating a single larger primary school can lead to increased benefits for staff and children, as well as enabling a more efficient and effective use of resources.

Consultation process

On 21st October 2020, the Council's Cabinet determined to consult on the proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig primary schools, with a learning support centre (LSC) for up to 16 pupils with statements for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The consultation period ran from 3rd November 2020 to 19th January 2020. A list of consultees is included at Appendix A. The consultation document was made available by e-mail to consultees, with the schools managing distribution to their school communities. It was also available on the Council's website. Hard copies were available on request.

A pupil version of the consultation document was also made available to the schools to distribute as appropriate.

Responses to the consultation were submitted by email, post and via the Councils online consultation portal. Details of how to respond were included in the consultation document and links to the online consultation portal were included on the website and on the Council's social media channels. During the consultation period Welsh Government imposed both local and national lockdown periods due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Restrictions meant that it was not possible to hold face to face meetings during consultation, however in every other respect the consultation proceeded as expected despite imposed restrictions. The consultation period was extended from 6 weeks to 11 weeks to allow consultees additional time to consider the proposal and submit comments. Additionally officers were available to answer queries by email and telephone should consultees require more information to enable them to respond to the consultation, and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section was also added to the Council's website to address more general queries on the proposal.

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

The proposal and the consultation report will be considered by elected Members of the Council and should it be agreed to proceed with the plans consulted upon then the next stage of the process will be to publish a statutory notice outlining the proposal. This would be published for a period of 28 days during which written objections may be submitted. Where objections are received, an objection report will be published summarising the objections and the Council's response to those objections. Elected Members of the Council will consider the proposal in light of objections received when taking a decision as to whether or not the proposal is to be implemented.

Pupil Consultation meetings

During the consultation period and before schools moved to online learning on 15th December 2020, face to face meetings were held with pupils of Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig primary schools to gather their views on the proposal. Arrangements allowing the meetings to take place were managed by the schools, in line with Welsh Government's Operational guidance for schools and settings

Meetings were held as follows

Alltwen 2nd December 2020
 Llangiwg 3rd December 2020
 Godre'rgraig 4th December 2020

Pupils at all three schools gave their views on their current schools and voiced concerns over moving to a new school. Notes of the comments made and officer responses given at the meeting are included at Appendix A.

It should be recognised that the notes of the meetings reflect the officers' understanding of the views expressed and, as such, may not wholly capture the substance of individual comments made and queries raised. In this respect and to support the consultation process, at each meeting pupils were also reminded to submit their comments in writing if they so wished.

Consultation Responses

Online responses 161, of which 14 support the proposal
 Emails 26, 1 in support
 Paper forms/letter 47, 6 in support
 Online petition 413 signatures, 50 of which have included comments

In total 234 responses (not counting petition)

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

Table 1

Pupils	0	Pupils' relatives	4
Parents/Carers	118	Members of the Community	61
Staff	8	Others	24
Governors	2	Unspecified	6

Additionally the following responses were also received.

Table 2

Governing Bodies x3 (Alltwen Primary School, YGG Trebannws and YGG Pontardawe)	Trade Unions x 1
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Pontardawe Town Council	Councillor Chris Jones Town Councillor Andrew Nicholson
Community Councils x 2 (Cilybebyll and Ystalyfera)	Jeremy Miles Member for the Senedd of Neath Dr David Lloyd Member for the Senedd South Wales West
ESTYN	

Prior to the commencement of the formal consultation period queries were received from local Councillors and Tegwch. Direct responses have been provided and points raised have also been addressed in this report.

Copies of all written responses will be made available to Members prior to the meeting of the Council's Cabinet at which the proposal and consultation report will be considered.

- ***Summary of comments received***

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

- *I support all of the proposal as it will be a big benefit to the children.*
- *A new modern school with greater opportunities is in the best interests of all children.*
- *More collaborative approach*
- *The old school buildings were not designed for children with disabilities. With the new curriculum coming in education is changing. Multi functional spaces with outside spaces are a must. I understand that issues around transport and traffic could be a concern but I trust these will be addressed through the planning stage if this consultation is successful.*
- *Totally support the principle to provide an EM 21st Century Primary school with Specialised Unit for children with Special Needs and specifically designed to help children and teachers etc. deliver the new NC.*
- *I think its a awesome idea that my child may get the Oppurtunity to learn in a state of the art modern school. And yes my current school where*

daughter attends is at the bottom of my road however if it means waking up ten mins early for my child's future Lets do it.

- There is an already good to excellent standard of education at all schools and combining into a larger organisation is unlikely to improve this, indeed some evidence is that larger schools in fact reduce the effectiveness of education.*
- Education will be diluted and children will not receive the one to one learning they do now.*
- This proposal is not in the interest of the children or their parents. We believe it will have a detrimental effect on their young lives and general wellbeing.*
- Adverse behaviour in younger children may escalate and take longer to identify in a larger school environment.*
- The document states that 21st c facilities impact positively on the self-esteem and wellbeing of pupils. I believe self-esteem / wellbeing is determined by the adults who look after, care and nurture our children not state of the art facilities.*
- It would cause additional change and distress to the children who are already living through a unprecedented worldwide pandemic.*
- As a former secondary school teacher I know that, even for an 11 year old, entering large school can be a traumatic, overwhelming experience. How much more so than for a 3 year old.*
- Feedback on super schools has been negative. Merging the individual primary schools into 1 will have a negative affect on our communities and our children*
- Local schools in communities give children the opportunity to socialise and play with people who they know in their immediate and local area, such as neighbours and friends etc. The new Super School would disadvantage the children, as they will be immersed into a very large mix of children from around a much larger area, than they would otherwise be socialising in.*
- I also feel that children as old as 16 are better off not being mixed in the same area as little children.*
- Many parents enjoy the communication with other parents and staff in the mornings. Parents form good relationships with the parents of the pupils within their child's class. This is going to be nearly impossible with so many pupils entering the proposed school.*
- I choose a small school so that each teacher knew each child and each teacher knew each parent I do not want my children to be a number.*
- Large buildings and classes with more staff seems at odds with a child centred approach.*
- The new curriculum for Wales emphasises learning about social influences, pupil directed learning based on their local area. The aim is to*

support learners to become citizens of Wales who are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world. The curriculum asks that pupils are involved in investigation and exploration of the human experience in their own localities, discover their heritage and develop a sense of place and 'cynefin'. Moving children away from a school that is based within the community will significantly reduce the possibilities for doing this and negatively impact on the deliverability of the new curriculum and sense of belonging within the villages of Godre'rgraig, Ystalyfera and Cilmaengwyn.

- Having spoken to staff at schools that have previously gone through this process, I am concerned that the existing staff at the schools will move on as they will not be happy teaching in this new environment.*
- There would be a loss of employment opportunities in the area.*
- How many of the total employed staff will be employed at the new site? How will the loss of staff numbers be covered?*
- Should a separate ASD unit be established, it needs to be much larger than what is currently proposed. Based on current and predicted statements of educational need, Alltwen Primary alone could fill the proposed spaces; there is a lack of future-proofing regarding the increasing number of pupils being identified with ASD.*
- I do not support the creation of a new LSC - children will be stigmatised by this, and evidence points to maintaining the demographic involved within a normal classroom has far more beneficial effects on a child's cognitive developmental process than segregation.*
- Whilst I am in favour of additional provision for SEN pupils, I am not in favour of this when it discriminates against disadvantaged pupils to the north of the valley, nor when it creates traffic chaos and increases the risk of further injury to children during drop off and pick up times.*
- The choice of location for the new school is inappropriate. The traffic in Parc Ynysderw area is already terrible.*
- The addition of the new proposed Super School will mean a further 770 pupils will be travelling to Parc Ynysderw, in addition to the approximate 1283 pupils that already attend Cwmtawe School, and which already causes a rush hour nightmare. This is not to mention the new proposed swimming pool which will also be located at the site further increasing the volume of traffic travelling to Parc Ynysderw.*
- The access road to the Leisure Centre is used by many people, Will this be controlled to reduce speed of vehicles especially during school hours?*
- What will happen if no suitable walking routes are found from all areas?*
- As a parent of a child at Cwmtawe School, I see near misses between pupils and cars on an almost daily basis.*

- *This proposal will also cause problems for the parents and grandparents regarding childcare. At the moment we can walk to the school to pick up our granddaughter, it will be impossible for us to do this at the proposed location of the new school.*
- *The School Organisation Code (011/2018)) also states that likely walking routes should be assessed prior to bringing forward proposals. It also states that pupils should not have to travel for more than 45 minutes to school. How long would it take the very youngest pupil to walk the 2 miles?*
- *It is thought that many of the pupils from Alltwen and Llangiwg schools live within walking distance of Pontardawe. The new proposal would therefore heavily discriminate against the upper valley communities.*
- *Children would have to get a bus or be dropped off by car. This would have health implications for the children as they would get less exercise than if they walked to school as well as being bad for pollution and the environment.*
- *Nursery pupils are not entitled to transport to school. In an area of deprivation, it is particularly the nursery age pupils who need the early language and socialisation development that comes with school attendance. Yet it is these pupils who would be unlikely to be able to access the proposed new school and who probably need it the most. They potentially could miss out on 2 years of education as a result.*
- *Home-to school transport does not transport pupils in time for Breakfast Club, and does not provide transport home from after school clubs, resulting in a negative impact on their educational and social development.*
- *The School Organisation Code (011/2018) states that alternative provision should remain accessible to pupils in the local area and that account should be taken of the impact of proposal on educational attainment among children from economically deprived backgrounds.*
- *The new school will not be accessible to pupils from the lower end of the catchment for Godre'rgraig School who do not qualify for free transport.*
- *Younger children are sharing journeys with older children and are therefore being exposed to conversations above their years at far too young an age. I imagine the journey to be traumatic for many.*
- *I also feel that attendance of pupils would suffer, as on days' parents and children alike maybe too tired to walk the journey.*
- *Even if there is a school bus, what will happen if they miss the bus? A parent/grandparent/carer trying to get 3 children ready for school will know this does easily happen. What happens if the child is taken ill in school? How do parents without transport collect them?*
- *The three existing schools are ideally located, well attended, good quality of teaching and in solid buildings that are designed for minimum maintenance.*

- *These primary schools are also part of the history of Pontardawe, they have been there for multiple generations and it would be historically and culturally sad to lose them.*
- *What would happen to the current Godre'r Graig school building as well as the 2 other current primary school buildings if the proposed project went ahead. It is feared that they may be left to become unoccupied ruins.*
- *The repairs for Llangiwig total £701,000.00 - to the best of my knowledge no-one associated with school (Headteacher or Governing Body) has seen this repair quotation.*
- *If the current plans were rejected following the consultation, would all the outstanding planned work be carried out on the Pool and Primary Schools?*
- *The figures stated in order to get the three current schools up to scratch were not large sums of money compared to the building of a new school.*
- *My view is that public funds will be better spent on improving the existing primary schools that are concerned in the proposal and also that public funds will be better spent on improving the existing Pontardawe Swimming Pool, if improvement is needed.*
- *Maintain the school as it stands and continue to improve the sport and leisure facilities in the local area, so many more can enjoy the new improved leisure centre and swimming pool all under one roof.*
- *The issue with the quarry tip in Godre'r Graig should be further investigated. If the tip can be removed, then the current issue at the school could be rectified and the school could be re-instated.*
- *Had any other areas for the relocation within the Godre'graigi area? i.e. former Tirenny tip site?*
- *It was suggested that keeping Alltwen School the way it is currently but with an additional building built within the grounds to house a unit specifically designed for children with additional learning needs would be a preferred option.*
- *The three existing schools have large outdoor play areas and a learning needs centre could be accommodated in one of the existing school grounds.*
- *Alternative sites for the Super School, such as Riverside in Pontardawe, had not been reviewed*
- *Merge just Alltwen and Godregraig because these are the two primary schools closest to the new site.*
- *It was assumed that to split the children from Godrergraig school would be divisive however many children from the Godrergraig catchment area resided closer to Ystalyfera. It was therefore suggested that there may be a case for the children to be split and amalgamated partly into one of the*

current Pontardawe Schools and partly into schools in Ystalyfera with the other schools remaining in their current positions.

- I would support the creation of two 400max pupil schools. One in the northern end of the valley covering Godrergraig, Graig Newydd, IPanteg and Ystalyfera and a second one based in the southern end. The southern school could be established on the land adjacent to the existing Alltwen school. It could cater for pupils from Llangiwig and Alltwen.
- It is undisputable that the primary schools within local communities are the identity, heart and soul of the community.
- Empirical evidence has shown that once a community school is closed the ‘soul’ of the community is lost. The current pandemic has identified the vital role that communities play in helping people through life.
- The lack of After-school and Wraparound provision at the proposed new school is a cause for significant concern.
- I doubt that the community and parents will have access to the proposed new school.
- The impact on local businesses also needs to be included in the consultation.
- It was not clear if some of the current sports fields, children’s play areas etc would be lost during the relocation
- The proposed leisure improvement is absolutely needed for the local area but I think it should be considered as a separate development and not used to try and gain support for the super school proposal.
- I appreciate the reasons for this consultation being carried out over the internet instead of in person because of the Covid 19 pandemic, but I am concerned that as a result this consultation may be discriminating against members of the public who have not got internet such as the elderly members of the community etc. It is important that their views are also listened to.
- I have huge concerns about the timing of this proposal, whilst the country is in the grip of a pandemic and struggling to cope, this is seemingly being pushed through under the radar. We need to discuss this proposal and the positives and the negatives associated with it without external distraction - now is not that time.
- I believe the consultation document is inherently flawed and does not supply stakeholders with all the facts needed to make informed comment.
- The consultation has so many inaccuracies it cannot be relied on as a fair and unbiased document. The proposal is completely against the national policies on well-being, climate change and active travel. The proposal requires large borrowing which is unnecessary and not supported by the community.

- *This proposal is fundamentally flawed and far too narrow in its focus - possibly illegally so. It is heavily shaped by the councils dual obsessions of financial savings and educational outcomes only. What it fails to do is address the wider legal requirements under the Future Generations Act which shifts the focus on public bodies like NPT council away from gains in service output (like financial savings or educational results) to a much stronger link to outcomes that enhance the quality of life of citizens and communities both now and in the future.*
- *The council has a legal duty, under the Act, to carry out any developments in line with the 'sustainable development' principle - namely the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, in order to achieve ALL of the seven well-being goals set out within the Act, not just one or two as this consultation document clearly does.*
- *I strongly argue that this proposal, which would see the closure of several important community schools, fatally undermines the councils duty, under the act, to ensure "a Wales of cohesive communities" by ripping the very heart of the communities out from under them.*
- *The consultation is in no way fair and neutral which is expected and demanded by the Welsh Assembly. Throughout the report, every other option is discarded without fair process. Figures are adapted in order to make the councils desired outcome appear appealing and any other option impossible. There are instances within the report where this borders on fraudulent.*
- *I feel that a new, honest, transparent consultation is needed in order for anyone to make a clear suggestion.*
- *As a community we feel that these proposals are being put forward and it is being made difficult for us to oppose, by only giving us a very difficult PDF form to fill in. It feels as though this is being done as quietly as possible so that the minimum amount of people can object.*
- *It seems to be the choice either accept or reject the offer in its entirety. Shouldn't the case of each school be dealt with separately – by that the concerns and context for each school are different?*
- *What happens should the response be to reject this proposal?*
- *There is no option to review the re-opening of Godre'rgraig. Why is this not an option?*
- *Why haven't NPT written to local communities about such a significant proposal?*
- *The vast majority of the community already feel that the council have already made their minds up and our voices will not be heard.*
- *This is a money saving exercise. Please reconsider keeping our communities bursting with life by allowing these community schools to receive the money you will have for the super school.*

- *This clearly a financial decision but although economies may be made, there can be no doubt that this will have a hugely detrimental effect on the education of these young people. I urge you to reconsider a decision the only merit of which lies in saving money rather than a consideration of the needs and well-being of young children.*
- *There were inconsistencies in the number of projected future pupil numbers between the three separate schools and the Super School. This seemed to indicate an over capacity at the proposed Superschool that would not be cost effective.*

Governing Body Responses

The governing body of Alltwen Primary School have responded and state *‘There are too many questions currently unanswered as there is insufficient detailed information contained within the consultation report. As such, we cannot form an opinion to support or oppose the proposal at the current time.’*

The response comprises of concerns also raised by other consultees and also includes the results of surveys undertaken by the Governors on the views of staff and pupils at the school. Additionally concerns have been raised regarding Hoots childcare provision which operates from the Alltwen primary schools site.

Governors also request further clarification and assurance around the following:

- How would a large school manage with a pandemic such as COVID?
- The commitment to the delivery of a new pool for Pontardawe
- Will the pupils benefit from additional opportunities to utilise the new pool, particularly families from low-income backgrounds?

Responses were also received from the governing bodies of YGG Pontardawe and YGG Trebannws. Both responses focus on the impact this proposal may have on Welsh-medium schools in the area and on the development of the Welsh language as a whole.

Additionally the following specific points were raised

- Is there a consideration for all schools within the vicinity that are remaining open to have financial input in order to improve facilities for 21st century education?
- We believe it is important that every pupil in the area is treated equally. We would like you to consider a strategic plan to ensure that each school in the area is suitable for education in the 21st century.
- There are no Welsh-medium units within the authority and the proposal does not address this need which is growing rapidly within the sector.

- With the proposal of another two English medium additional units to those that NPT offer already, how can this possibly treat Welsh and English equally?

Trade Unions

A response has been received from Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC) stating

'We support the opportunity to improve educational provision within the area and welcome the associated opportunities for staff development and career progression. We as a union request that there be no compulsory staff redundancies as a result of these proposals.'

The response also outlines the following concerns,

- The perception among pupils, parents and the wider community of the greater importance placed on English medium provision, as opposed to Welsh medium provision.
- The impact of its close proximity on pupils accessing Welsh medium education at YGG Trebannws.
- There would follow a disparity in accommodation and facilities between Welsh and English medium facilities. The new school would be centrally located and close to community and leisure facilities of a high standard.
- The likely impact the new building and facilities at the new school would have on pupils accessing Welsh medium education at YGG Pontardawe.
- The possible long term impact on numbers at YG Ystalyfera Bro Dur.
- The impact of the development on Neath Port Talbot's targets in its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and the Welsh Assembly Government's Million Welsh speakers target and its commitment to the priorities within the Future Generations Act , namely 'a Wales of thriving culture and vibrant Welsh language'.

Community and Town Councils

Responses have been received from Cilybebyll Community Council and Ystalyfera Community Council and from Pontardawe Town Council,

Cilybebyll Community Council raised concerns around the impact of the proposed new school on the community of Rhos and Rhos Primary school. Clarification was also sought on the following points

- The potential size of the plot needed
- It was stated that there will be a significant investment in IT in the proposed new school - why this couldn't instead be invested into the 3 primary schools to bring them up to date.

Ystalyfera Community Council raised concerns on the impact on the community should Godre'rgraig close, along with concerns about distance to travel, deprivation in the area and concerns with the impact on the Welsh language. It was also noted that historically there had always been 1 Welsh-medium primary school and 1 English-medium primary school in the Ystalyfera community council area. Permanently closing Godre'r Graig Primary would result in local residents having less choice as to which school to send their children, which is discriminatory.

Pontardawe Town Council noted that while they understood there would be some benefits to the creation of a larger newer school with additional facilities, they felt the downside far outweighed benefits. Concerns were noted with the size of the proposed new school, potential job losses, how transport would be decided, the impact on community facilities including the playing fields at Parc Ynysderw, and the possible decrease in availability of the pool should it be used more by pupils.

The following query was also noted 'If the creation of a Super School was educationally superior, why had Rhyd y Fro and Rhos Primary school been removed from the proposals?'

Estyn

It is Estyn's view that that this proposal is likely to at the least maintain the present provision for English medium primary education in the area and that the proposal is 'likely to have a positive impact on provision for primary aged pupils in the area. New facilities will probably provide benefits for pupils' wellbeing and improve curriculum delivery. Additional provision through a learning support centre should benefit primary aged pupils with ASD. A new swimming pool is likely to enhance provision for health and wellbeing in the area.'

Estyn considers that 'The proposer has considered the continuing delivery of the curriculum for all pupils appropriately. It is predicted the proposal will benefit the delivery of the curriculum and provide pupils with better learning experiences that come with a larger pupil population and purpose built facilities.'

Estyn has also noted that 'the proposer has taken appropriate account of the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language'.

Estyn also comments that the proposal does not appear to consider the effect of increased traffic and accessibility issues or how the identified risks, namely resistance to change by pupils, increased travel time and less effective wellbeing support in a larger school will be mitigated against.

Estyn's comments are responded to in the Quality and Standards of Education, Proposed site and traffic management, and Transport and Travel, sections of the report.

The full response is included as Appendix B.

Local elected Members, Town Councillors and Members of the Senedd

Jeremy Miles, Member of the Senedd for Neath states '*I welcome the investment in English medium education in the Swansea Valley, as I welcomed the investment in Welsh medium provision*'.

The response also notes a commitment to summarise the views of attendees at an online meeting held by Jeremy Miles to discuss the proposal which include remedial work on the existing sites, school size, flood plain area, and mode, distance and safety of travel. It was also noted that '*Support was expressed by some participants for modern, purpose-built facilities on a larger campus. It was felt this offered flexible space, designed for the needs of contemporary education, rather than the expectations of school life and teaching in the era when the current three schools were constructed.*'

Queries were also submitted regarding the pupil numbers at the proposed school, clarity around transport provision and on site arrangements for traffic management, and further details on active travel.

The view was also put forward that the Council should have held an online public meeting to answer the range of questions and make the case for the proposal.

Dr Dai Lloyd, Member of the Senedd for South Wales West raised the following questions, following a virtual meeting to hear the views of the public. A number of questions were raised including

- Why was this option preferable to the others? -What work has been done in replacing Godre'r Graig Primary School in Godre'r Graig?
- How will the Authority safeguard vulnerable pupils, ensuring that they have access to Breakfast and After School Clubs?
- What assessments have been made regarding impact on neighbouring schools?
- Why was the location – at the southernmost point of the catchment area – chosen?

Allt-wen Councillor Christopher Jones submitted a response which echoed the views of Alltwen Primary Governing Body and noted there should be greater consideration of the following alternatives

- Reinvesting in the existing sites
- Building on one or more existing school sites
- Alternative sites in the area
- Alternative combinations of schools

Pontardawe Town Councillor Andrew Nicholson submitted a range of queries including the following

- What happens should the response be to reject this proposal?
- The proposal for a new build Swimming pool at this site does not state if it will be built attached to the existing Pontardawe Leisure Centre or will be **built within** part of the existing building?
- If the plan is to include it within part of the existing building what loss of existing facilities (i.e. Indoor Bowls area,) will this cause?

Report on NPTCBC Public Consultation

A report on the consultation document has also been submitted by a member of the community. The report comprises of 3 parts, the first pointing out the perceived flaws in the consultation document, the second suggesting alternative options and the third the results of a survey which has asked various questions broadly relating to the proposal and to schools more generally.

In response to part one – data is contained in this submission which has been gathered from an independent survey of households in the area (the survey was not provided with the submission, therefore officers have not had the opportunity to review the data referred to). It is not clear who has conducted the survey or which households were involved, neither is it clear how many responses were received, however this data has been used to justify and reinforce statements made in the submission. In contrast the consultation document contains Neath Port Talbot pupil data gathered from each school; all pupil data held by the Council is routinely checked and verified, and is also submitted to Welsh Government as required. As a result the submitted report with its limited data cannot be relied on to provide accurate information overall. It also contains a number of inaccurate and misleading statements, for example “the Council will ‘use funds raised from the sale of the old school sites to clear the prudential borrowing’ and ‘the transfer of a swimming facility from the public to the schools’. Both statements are incorrect and are responded to elsewhere in this report.

It has been noted elsewhere in this report that this consultation process has adhered to Welsh Government guidance and is comparable to other consultations under 21st Century school reorganisation proposals brought forward in Neath Port Talbot which as part of the processes involved have been scrutinised and accepted by Welsh Government .

In response to part 2 – this section relates to the opinion that enhancing the three schools on their current sites would be preferable to a new build 21st century school. Again this section contains many inaccuracies and makes assumptions that do not appear to be based on any factual evidence. It should be noted that the example cited in this submission of Hen Ysgol in Carmarthenshire is unhelpful as it is an example of a redundant school building which has been extensively renovated and is now used as a residential dwelling and training centre. The relatively small cost of this project quoted ignores the fact that the developer spent 6 years of their own time and savings to convert the property, therefore the £600k quoted does not truly reflect the cost of their labour (including that of family and friends). The power and heating needs of a school are incompatible with that of Hen Ysgol (log burners, photovoltaics for power, etc.). It would also appear to be a much smaller footprint than any of the three schools in this proposal. It is perhaps also worth noting that this conversion took place because it was a school which was closed and sold on by Carmarthenshire Council with pupils from this village and neighbouring villages moving to a newly constructed school. Details on why enhancing the current schools is not the preferred option of officers are contained elsewhere in this report.

In response to Part 3 – this section contains the results of an independent survey ‘conducted of residents in the Pontardawe area on their thoughts of the proposed new school’, and is reported to have ‘reached approximately 300 households’, although it is not clear how many households responded, or whether the respondents were aware of the consultation document or were directly affected by the proposal, (as stated the survey was not provided for officers to scrutinise).

Officer responses

– Quality and Standards of Education

The consultation document contains detailed information on the quality and standards of education delivered at the three schools and it is recognised that all three have made progress in recent years and are judged as ‘Good’ in many areas by Estyn. The proposed new school will build on and develop the progress made by the individual schools, and there is no reason to believe that standards would be negatively impacted by this proposal. Estyn in their response to the proposal state that ***‘this proposal is likely to at the least***

maintain the present provision for English medium primary education in the area’.

This proposal offers the opportunity to deliver a stimulating teaching and learning environment in state of the art, 21st Century facilities that will impact positively on the self-esteem and well-being of pupils and will aim to further improve the learning outcomes for all children across the ability range. With a new school comes more choices and improved opportunities because there is more space and better facilities. In the Estyn report of 2007, ‘**An evaluation of performance of schools before and after moving into new buildings or significantly refurbished premises**’, it is reported that the attainment and achievement of pupils improves significantly when they move into new or significantly refurbished buildings.

The governing body and senior leadership team of the proposed school will look to build on the success of the three primaries and utilise the skills that the staff will bring to ensure a smooth transition and continue their success. In recent years a number of new schools have opened in Neath Port Talbot, to accommodate both primary and secondary pupils. Contrary to comments received during the consultation none of the new schools are ‘failing’, and it is the case that Estyn inspections, local authority monitoring visits and reviews have found that the additional facilities available and improved conditions for teaching and learning have had a positive impact on pupils, parents, staff and the community.

– ***Pupil wellbeing***

Comments have been received which suggest that the wellbeing of pupils will suffer should the proposal progress. There is no reason to assume that this would be the case either because of a move to the proposed new school or by the size of the school. It is noted that the current schools provide good levels of care and support, and there is nothing to suggest that the new school won’t at least offer the same.

Informal interviews conducted with members of the school communities within Neath Port Talbot where schools have amalgamated or where pupils have moved from a closed small school to a larger school have shown that pupils adapt to their new environments very quickly, that they make new friends and that their educational progress is not negatively affected.

Comments have been received which suggest that a new build will not have a positive impact on wellbeing, and that it is people who impact in this way. Whilst it is true that people can make a difference it is also true that effective

leadership in purpose built facilities and the school's environment and services can impact pupils' health and wellbeing. In a report by Estyn 'Healthy and happy - School impact on pupils' health and wellbeing' June 2019, it states that schools having an inclusive whole-school approach to supporting pupils' health and wellbeing aim to make sure that the everyday school experience of pupils is consistent with messages given about health and wellbeing in lessons, assemblies and in school policies. These schools develop pupils as healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society – one of the four purposes of the emerging new curriculum for Wales. Some of the factors that good schools had were: Policies and practices that ensure pupils make good progress in their learning; continuing professional learning for all staff that enables them to support pupils' health and wellbeing and an environment and facilities that promote good health and wellbeing, such as space to play, socialise and relax at break times. It is the case that the proposed new school will provide these important aspects far more effectively than the current schools are able to.

Other factors that support pupils' health and wellbeing can be transferred from the good practice in the current schools to the new school and these include: leaders who 'walk the talk' about supporting pupils' health and wellbeing; a nurturing culture, where positive relationships enable pupils to thrive ; an inclusive community and ethos; detailed knowledge about pupils' health and wellbeing that influences policies and actions and policy; a broad and balanced curriculum, that includes discrete, evidence-based learning experiences that promote health and wellbeing; supportive pastoral care and targeted interventions for pupils that need additional support; effective links with external agencies and close partnerships with parents and carers.

Concerns have been raised regarding the loss of pupil friendships should the proposal progress. It should be noted that if all pupils in the three schools at the point of closure transfer to the proposed new school then friendship groups can be maintained and extended. It has been the case that previous school reorganisation schemes have all made sure that pupils remain within their close friendship groups, with staff that they already know well to ensure that the transition process is as smooth as possible. It is to be expected that the leadership team at the proposed new school would also recognise the importance of this and ensure this is considered.

– ***Size of school***

Delivery of education can be more effective in larger schools. The Estyn report 'School Size and Education effectiveness' December 2013, states 'Curriculum provision is better in large schools' – this means larger schools can provide greater opportunities for teaching and learning. Full details including analysis of data gathered by Estyn is contained in the report.

Comments received which suggest that a larger pupil population will hinder children's social development are not supported by the evidence available. Social skills rely on the ability to communicate effectively. Estyn report again in 'School Size and Educational Effectiveness' that 'Foundation Phase assessment outcomes improve with school size for language, literacy and communication skills'.

Having a greater number of children of the same age group will provide more opportunities for socialisation, not less. Estyn also find that aspects of social development are found to be excellent in 15% of large primary schools, and in just 3% of small schools.

Creating a larger school community does not necessarily mean that the 'family' feel of the current schools will no longer exist, although it may need to be planned for more carefully. It is possible to create 'little schools' or communities within the larger school structure, either through year/phase groups, where activities and events are planned for children and parents of those particular classes, or through systems such as House Groups, where children and classes are sub divided into separate sections within every class for events usually of a competitive nature such as sports day or eisteddfods.

It may be more difficult for every member of staff to know every pupil by name as pupil population increases. It has been suggested that the Headteacher should know every pupil if standards of attainment are to improve. However whilst learning the names and faces of pupils is an admirable skill that many headteachers are able to do, it does not guarantee success for those pupils. There is a multitude of arrangements in place that leadership teams use to monitor the progress of individual pupils in all schools in Neath Port Talbot and this forms part of the school performance review that schools receive annually.

Some consultees have raised concerns with the relationships between staff and parents in a larger school, commenting that good relationships will be impossible with such a larger pupil population. There is no evidence available to suggest that this is a problem for larger schools. Despite the size of the overall school it is likely that classes within the school will remain at or below 30 pupils, and there is no reason to expect that teachers and support staff will not know the pupils in their class as well as they do in any other school. Equally it is to be expected that parental relationships would be as important to the staff in the proposed new school as they are in the three current schools.

It is expected that parental links with the proposed new school would not be of a lesser quality than they are now, and a larger number of parents can mean a more vibrant and varied school community available to support school activities and to form support groups. Good relationships that have been formed between the school, parents and the community should not be lost if the majority of staff from both schools transfer to the new school as anticipated, as this would mean the wealth of experience and local knowledge which currently exists will be retained and developed for the future.

Comments have been received which suggest that the proposed new school will prevent the new curriculum from being delivered effectively in relation to social influences based on their local area. However there will be opportunity to study the locality and community from where the pupils live under the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales, in particular within the 'ethically informed citizens' purpose. There will also be the opportunity to learn about the greater historical heritage and cultural values from the wider Swansea Valley area and to understand the subtle differences between communities within the area. The governors and senior team within the proposed school will ensure this is part of their learning programme.

Whilst there is currently much investment in ICT in all Neath Port Talbot schools, the age and condition of many school buildings make it difficult to get the quantity and quality of provision that would be desirable for the future. On new build projects the ICT team are involved from the planning phase to ensure that pupils have adaptable ICT facilities and integrated mobile technology suitable for learning in the 21st century, and appropriate hardware and software (electric and data points, Wi-Fi modems, etc.) to be included in the process to future proof the schools to ensure the best possible solutions for future teaching and learning needs.

Concerns have been noted around managing larger schools under current Covid restrictions. Experience to date has shown that the larger 21st century new build schools have in general found it easier to operate under current operational guidelines and regulations than older schools. This is due in part to having more space available to manage staff and pupils, including larger classroom spaces, wider corridors and more available and flexible circulation spaces. Outdoor facilities are purpose built in new schools and support outdoor learning, which is encouraged to help prevent infection. New schools generally have numerous pupil entry and exit points, including direct access to outdoors from classrooms so avoiding congestion at start and finish times. It is also the case that facilities are generally better with more toilets, appropriately positioned across the school building. Additionally almost all

primary classrooms in new builds are equipped with sinks making handwashing with younger pupils easier to manage.

— **Staffing**

As stated in the consultation document the proposal will mean changes that impact on the employment of school staff. All of the existing schools will close on 31st August 2024. Upon closure all staff will cease to be employed at their respective schools. The new school will set a new staffing structure appropriate to its needs and budget.

A temporary governing body will be established before the opening of the primary school. The temporary governing body will have the responsibility of appointing a head teacher.

Specifically in relation to the posts of head teacher and deputy head teacher, the Council's policy is for these to be advertised nationally. Once the head teacher has been appointed that person will, together with the temporary governing body, be responsible for determining the staffing structure for the new primary school.

All school staff are employed by Neath Port Talbot Council. As part of the process all school based staff will be supported by the relevant school policies and procedures which will include full consultation. Previous experience has shown that some staff wish to secure employment in the new school but others take the opportunity to take on new challenges elsewhere. Employees identified at risk of redundancy will be given access to the Council's prior consideration register. The Council is committed to supporting staff at risk of compulsory redundancy and has secured the support and goodwill of the teacher associations/trade unions and governing bodies across the Council, via an employers' pledge. The Council has a good track record for supporting staff in such situations.

The Council will seek to ring fence the current staff of Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig primary schools (with the exception of the Head and Deputy roles) to the staffing structure of the new school, therefore giving them priority in relation to appointments, however this is a decision of the temporary governing body

There are concerns that current staff at the school will leave due to the threat of closure and that pupils will have a poorer education as a result. The risk of significant numbers of staff leaving the school following a school reorganisation decision is small and there are no past trends to suggest this would occur. However, the Council respects the rights of staff to further their careers and this would be the case whether or not the council was proposing a school closure.

– ***Additional Learning Needs provision***

Data analysis suggests that a number of pupils within the Swansea Valley travel to gain additional learning support in specialist units elsewhere within Neath Port Talbot. Creating a new provision in the proposed new school would provide additional places in an area where need has been identified, potentially making transition easier and allowing the pupils to integrate with their friendship groups and peers within the mainstream classes whenever possible.

The proposed provision will be managed by the school and be under the school's governance. Staff will be employed by the school and form part of the school teaching team. Pupils at the proposed provision will benefit from being taught by specialist staff, experienced in working with pupils with ASD needs and also allow opportunities for children to access learning within their local community. There is also the possibility that mainstream pupils with ASD could also benefit from the expertise available from within the LSC to aid teaching and learning throughout the school, and in particular the well-being of those pupils that require extra support.

Comments have been received which state that the proposed LSC would not be big enough even to support ALN pupils in Alltwen. All schools are expected to manage pupils with ALN within their mainstream classes, it is only the pupils with higher level needs who are allocated a place in a specialist facility. Each LSC in Neath Port Talbot provides education for children with ALN from a variety of other schools, it is not the case that only children from the school where the LSC is located will attend. As such the LSC would not provide specific support for pupils in the current schools with ALN, unless a pupil has a statement for ASD which recommends a specialist facility placement. Data shows that as of PLASC 2020 there would be sufficient space for all Statemented ASD pupils, within the primary age, residing in the Swansea Valley to have a space in the new LSC planned within the proposal if appropriate. This includes pupils in Swansea Valley schools not currently in the proposal. However pupils from outside the area could also be placed at the LSC if the need arises.

It should be noted that the LSC located at YGG Trebannws is not a part of this proposal. ALN provision within the Welsh-medium sector is not addressed in this consultation as this is a proposal to establish a new English-medium primary school with an LSC. Should the need for a Welsh-medium LSC be identified then a separate process would need to be undertaken, including full consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Larger schools often have more capability of addressing specific learning needs. Estyn report that 'Large and medium sized primary schools are also better able to identify pupils' additional learning needs at an early stage and make the necessary adjustments in the provision for those pupils. This is because they often have teachers with specific additional needs knowledge and understanding either working with these pupils directly or providing guidance and support to other teachers and support staff.' - School Size and Educational Effectiveness, December 2013

– ***Proposed site and traffic management***

The proposal currently under consultation relates to establishing a new school. Should the proposal be approved it will be a pre-requisite of gaining planning consent that traffic management and safe routes for pupils and parents are thoroughly addressed.

Every new school build in Neath Port Talbot is subject to rigorous highways and planning scrutiny before planning approval is granted and in many cases, as part of the scheme, significant work has led to improved traffic management and access arrangements in the area. These processes are well established and have been tried and tested over many years. It is expected that sufficient staff and visitor parking as well as parent and bus drop off areas will be a requirement of planning consent. These elements would be developed as part of the scheme and would seek to improve the current arrangements on the Parc Ynysderw site.

In respect of the potential highway impact for the proposed school, a Transport Impact Assessment (TIA) would be required together with a rigorous Travel Plan.

The Transport Impact Assessment will be in accordance with the requirements under the Welsh Governments Technical Advice Note (TAN) 18. The aim of the TIA is to clearly communicate the highway and traffic impacts of this development, whilst demonstrating that this development location shall satisfy desired, and predicted traffic output in terms of traffic trips, delays and capacity. The assessment shall provide data via traffic surveys, to show levels of existing traffic, pedestrian and cyclist movements, together with the likely effects the new development will have on existing traffic movements and capacity.

Through analysis, the Council will evaluate the potential effects on existing and proposed movement patterns, and will endeavour to mitigate negative transport impacts through the process of detailed highway design, and planning conditions.

– ***Transport and Travel***

Local authorities are under a legal duty to assess the travel needs of learners who walk to school, as required by the Welsh Government *Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance, June 2014*. This assessment will involve the consideration of a range of aspects including traffic management, available footpaths, lighting and crossing points.

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

Neath Port Talbot Council's Road Safety team collect modes of transport data from all Neath Port Talbot schools on an annual basis. Based on data collected in 2019, Alltwen and Llangiwg primaries have a high percentage of pupils who travel to school by car or taxi, 56% of Alltwen Primary pupils and 70% of Llangiwg Primary pupils. The majority of Godre'rgraig pupils (85%) now travel by bus, as expected due to the increased distance to travel to the temporary site. However prior to moving to Parc Ynysderw the percentage of pupils travelling to school by car or taxi was 47%.

Overall, the data indicates that the number of pupils who walk, cycle or scooter to school is relatively small compared to the number who use cars or taxis, and this appears to have been the case over the last four years. All three of the schools have pupils from outside their catchment area – 44% of pupils attending Alltwen live outside the school catchment area, 37% of Llangiwg primary pupils live outside Llangiwg catchment area and 24% of Godre'rgraig pupils live outside of Godre'rgraig catchment area, suggesting that the current schools already contribute to the traffic in the area.

An estimate of the numbers of pupils who live further than 2 miles away from the proposed new school site at Parc Ynysderw, based on the numbers and addresses of the pupils currently in the three schools suggests that approx. 176 pupils could potentially be eligible for assistance with transport, which removes the need for parents to transport pupils to school by car. Support with home to school travel will be made available in line with the Council's Home to School Transport policy. Home to school journey times from within the catchment area are expected to fall within reasonable limits for primary age pupils. The remaining pupils live on routes that have been assessed as safe, although these routes will be reassessed should the proposal progress and when details of the pupils who will be attending the new school are known. At that time the Neath Port Talbot Road Safety Officers will be

available to assist and support schools, parents and pupils in planning safe routes in line with Welsh Government Learner Travel Guidance.

In terms of the length of journey times, guidance relating to school reorganisation suggests that journey times for primary aged pupils should not exceed 45mins, however, the guidance does not indicate how this journey is to be made i.e. walking, cycling, local bus service or contracted school vehicle.

When considering pupil travel, reference must always be made to guidance under the Learner Travel Measure, which refers to mileage and stipulates that pupils of primary age are entitled to home to school travel assistance if they reside 2 or more miles away from their nearest suitable education provision or where there is no suitable walking route.

Nursery education is classified as non-statutory provision under the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Measure. The Council's current Home to School Travel Assistance Policy reflects this and there is no entitlement to transport assistance for nursery children. In some circumstances and where opportunities present, under temporary discretionary arrangements, parents of nursery age pupils are able to request the use of a vacant seat on a vehicle which travels along a relevant route and which is suitable for nursery aged pupils.

These arrangements are no less favourable than those applying to other parents of nursery age children across the County Borough.

Comments have been received which state that by not providing transport assistance for nursery pupils these children will be denied access to a nursery education, deemed particularly important in this case due to the deprivation in the area. Previous reorganisation schemes have also raised these concerns, however data indicates that pupils attending full time school in reception classes have also accessed nursery provision either at the school they currently attend or at another school. This has included schools where full time pupils have transport assistance, and includes schools in areas of high deprivation. It would therefore seem unlikely that this proposal would impact on nursery pupils any more than previous school reorganisation schemes have done.

Extra transport for pupils to access breakfast club and after school activities will not be provided. It is expected that arrangements will be made by the head teacher and Governing Body of the new school should the proposal go

ahead, with the aim of ensuring that all pupils attending the school regardless of where they live have equal opportunities

Arrangements for extra-curricular activities are not an uncommon challenge for schools that have pupils attending from outside the immediate area. There are a range of solutions to this problem found by other schools that include: arrangements with transport companies, arranging activities at lunchtime or other times during the school day or facilitating car shares with parents.

The same active management arrangements will apply where pupils become unwell or need to leave school during the day. Contingency arrangements are made and schools manage the situation in the best and most appropriate way possible, always with the pupil's well-being foremost in mind.

There is no evidence to suggest that travelling a further distance to school will have a detrimental effect on attendance rates, and in fact the provision of school transport can have a positive impact on punctuality.

Pupil safety and well-being on school transport are given high priority by the Council. Many schools in Neath Port Talbot and across Wales admit pupils from outside of the immediate vicinity of the school and very many children and young people are transported to school every day from all parts of the County Borough.

In line with the Council transport policy, an escort will be provided.

Pupils from across the primary age range are likely to travel in the same vehicle as they do across the county borough; this is not perceived to be problematic as these children attend the same school and are likely to mix at other times during the school day.

This proposal recognises that for some children walking or cycling to school will not be possible, as is also the case now for some pupils on roll at the three schools. However opportunities will still exist through curricular and extra-curricular arrangements for pupils to learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, and the enhanced leisure facilities available on the proposed site will enable them to take part in activities which further promote this.

– ***Backlog Maintenance***

The Council has followed strict WG guidance and methodology in assessing condition grades, backlog maintenance and accessibility costs of the schools involved in this proposal thus ensuring a consistency of approach across

Welsh schools and have appointed an independent external consultant to undertake a review on the condition of Pontardawe Swimming Pool.

All schools will have access to their condition surveys and are supported by a multi-disciplinary team of technical staff to manage maintenance issues. A dedicated building surveyor is assigned to the school to monitor and respond to building maintenance matters.

It is important to clarify that the backlog maintenance and accessibility costs derived from the condition reports are estimates. The backlog costs are for putting the building back into repair, and don't allow for improving or upgrading which would provide schools with better facilities for teaching and learning.

Maintaining the three schools at their present sites is not considered to be the best use of resources or facilities as that would lead to cost inefficiency and would mean that the potential benefits afforded by a new build would not be realised.

Increasing pupil numbers on one site by combining the three schools in a brand new purpose built facility would provide a far more effective use of public money, address surplus places and provide a 'state of the art' 21st Century teaching and learning environment delivering a positive impact on pupil outcomes.

– ***Impact on other Schools***

Comments have been received which state that this proposal will negatively impact on other schools, both English and Welsh- medium.

It has been suggested that Rhydyfro Primary School would have been a more suitable choice for inclusion as it is located in Pontardawe, and should be substituted for Godre'rgraig Primary which is stated to not be part of Pontardawe, but part of the Ystalyfera community council area.

While it is correct to state that geographically Rhydyfro Primary could be considered to be a better choice, other important factors have ruled out the inclusion of the school in this proposal. In summary Rhydyfro Primary was built in the early 1980s so is relatively modern and the newest English-medium school in the area. It has suitable sized, flexible classrooms, a multipurpose hall, shared resource areas, dedicated playing field and sufficient external hard play areas, along with on-site parking and parental drop off area. This school will find delivery of the new curriculum considerably easier than the three schools named in the proposal.

Rhos Primary and was the only one of the five schools that wasn't included in the Strategic Outline Plan submitted to Welsh Government in 2017 and has

continued to be excluded from this proposal. Similarly to Rhydyfro Primary, other factors have been considered for Rhos Primary besides its location. Rhos Primary has a number of pupils who attend from outside of its immediate catchment, many from the Swansea Valley but also pupils who travel from the Bryncoch area. Additionally a significant new housing development has commenced directly opposite the school which could add to the number of pupils in the village who will need to be accommodated in the future. If these pupil numbers materialise it could be the case that extra accommodation will need to be provided for them at Rhos, it is not anticipated that pupils will need to travel to Pontardawe.

Comments have also been received which state that a new English-medium school will negatively impact on the Welsh-medium schools in the locality, and comparisons have been made with the impact on Ysgol Gyfyn Ystalyfera when Cwmtawe Community School opened in 1996. It has been stated that at this time greater numbers were attracted to Cwmtawe Community School due to it being a new building and subsequently pupil numbers dropped at Ysgol Gyfyn Ystalyfera.

The suggestion that the condition of the building and available facilities are a more important factor than the language medium of education when parents are choosing a school for their children is debatable. Data reveals that new build English-medium schools in Neath Port Talbot which have opened in the last 10 years have had no significant impact on nearby Welsh-medium schools. Awel-y-Mor Primary opened in 2013 and despite significantly more pupils attending than predicted, it is evident that these pupils did not migrate from YGG Rhosafan, the nearest Welsh-medium school. In fact numbers at YGG Rhosafan have steadily increased, from 336 in 2021 to 381 in 2020. If it were the case that new English-medium schools significantly attract pupils who would otherwise have attended a Welsh-medium school then YGG Rhosafan should be hugely impacted as the catchment area of the school has also seen the opening of Ysgol Bae Baglan and Ysgol Cwm Brombil in recent years but the school has still continued to grow year on year. Similarly Ysgol Tyle'r Ynn is a short distance away from the newly opened Ysgol Carreg Hir and again pupil numbers have risen not declined over 10 years, from 197 in 2010 to 230 in 2020, and there does not appear to be significant movement of pupils from this school to the new build Ysgol Carreg Hir.

Conversely Welsh –medium education is already being provided in a 21st century school build in the Swansea Valley at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera –Bro Dur, which opened in 2017 , a 3-19 Welsh-medium middle school established in place of YGG Y Wern and Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera, across two sites in Ystalyfera and Port Talbot. The primary phase of the school has not yet seen significant growth despite being in a new purpose built 21st Century building.

It is also the case that transition data indicates that pupils continue to transfer from the Welsh-medium primary schools to Cwmtawe Community School rather than to Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera, despite Cwmtawe Community School now being over 20 years old. This would suggest that more than condition of buildings is being considered by parents/carers when decisions are made about which school children will attend.

Neath Port Talbot Council does not have an unlimited source of funding and as such it is inevitable that across the school estate, including all Welsh and English- medium schools, difficult decisions have to be made when identifying which schools are most suitable for inclusion in new build schemes.

It is also the case that where possible the Council will utilise any source of funding available in order to improve and enhance current schools, not just 21st century schools grants for new build projects.

In the last 2 years significant funding has been secured for YGG Pontardawe, with the aim of increasing the school capacity and providing enhanced teaching and learning environments across the school. The £1.62m Welsh Government funded grant has provided the school with remodelled and extended childcare and nursery facilities along with 2 new build Foundation Phase classrooms, a new entrance way, staffroom, meeting room and office and additional play areas, fencing and pathways, along with medium refurbishment of the hall. It will provide space for an additional 60 pupils, and the extended childcare facilities will allow the current provision to increase to 28 places. It is estimated that additional works identified as the scheme has progressed will bring the final cost of the scheme to circa. £2m. The scheme aims to strengthen Welsh-medium education in the Pontardawe area, enabling the school to further develop as a thriving and sustainable provision.

– ***Impact on the community***

A Community Impact Assessment (CIA) has been undertaken for the purpose of providing information on the impact of the proposal on the local community's access to facilities and services currently available at the three schools. It has been prepared in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code. The CIA has been prepared using a range of sources and evidence, including discussion with various partner organisations in the Swansea Valley and the schools and provides further information all of which enables decision makers to have a fuller understanding of the possible consequences on communities as a result of school closure.

The CIA recognises the importance of Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary School in providing a venue for school based events, extracurricular

activity and community use. Following evaluation, it has been demonstrated that under this proposal the existing community/ school interaction is either retained, preserved, relocated or enhanced as appropriate with no adverse effect or loss of amenity to the wider community. It is recommended that the community use developed over an extended period should not be lost.

The CIA contains a comprehensive assessment of the facilities and services in the Swansea Valley and while the need to understand and mitigate the impact of a school closure proposal on a community is a right and proper consideration, the deciding factor in determining school organisation proposals should be one of securing the best educational offer for pupils.

It is not necessarily the case that by closing a school the community in which it is situated automatically declines. The report of the Institute of Welsh affairs - Small School Closure in Wales: New Evidence David Reynolds and Meriel Jones, 2007 states "There are many examples within Wales of strong, vital, connected communities that have no local school at all. It is the people, not a school building, who surely create a community. "

There is no reason to suggest that by attending school outside of the village children and young people will no longer 'belong' to the community where they live. The Community Impact Assessment (CIA) highlights the fact that many community based activities and events are not reliant on the schools and so it is not apparent why it is held that these activities would not continue, or why children and young people who currently enjoy participating in them would not want to do so should they attend school elsewhere. Schools are open to pupils for 190 days of the year. Outside of the school day; that is, before and after school, weekends and during school holidays, pupils will be in the areas where they live and available to make use of local facilities.

It is already the case that pupils across the Swansea Valley attend schools other than their local school, and that pupils attending the three schools named in this proposal do not all live in the location of the school they attend. Pupils from the area attend schools across Neath Port Talbot and other local authorities for a variety of reasons. Children and young people do not only mix socially through their schooling, as many will attend local after school groups or be part of wider community events. There is no reason why this wouldn't continue to be an important part of their lives should the proposal go forward. In other communities where school closures have taken place and where fears have existed that pupils would lose their sense of identity, it appears that this that this has not happened and that pupils continue to take part in community events.

Estyn states in its report, 'Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life', July 2020, that the most effective community schools place families, communities and their wellbeing at the heart of the school. The proposed new school will look to build on the strengths of the individual schools and provide leadership that has a strong community vision and sense of civic responsibility; and that their school has an important role to play by working in close partnership with families, parents and the wider community. The school will look to provide opportunities for parents to play a full part in the life of the school and on the wider education of their children.

– ***Leisure Amenities***

The Council hold freehold title to the land required for the proposed new school and swimming pool part of which is leased to Parc Ynysderw Sports Association.

The Sports Association has agreed to enter into an Option agreement allowing for the surrender of the land required and consent for the drainage improvement works to the retained underutilised pitch if and when the proposal proceeds, legal formalities for which should be completed shortly.

The Council title to the land is subject to a deed of dedication in favour of the National Playing Fields Association (as the duly appointed Trustees of the King George V Foundation) so the prior approval of the Fields in Trust is required to the proposal. Fields in Trust have advised the Council that it is happy to consider releasing the land required and positive discussions are ongoing to agree the location and extent of replacement land to be provided in exchange in line with its aims and objectives. It is anticipated that the Council will submit its formal application shortly and it is hoped that formal approval will be forthcoming as soon as possible

Funding for drainage works, if required, has been identified within the budget for the proposed new build school and pool, along with enhancing the children's playground adjacent to the leisure centre, which may also be affected by the proposed works, to ensure no loss of amenities in the area. The trustees are in full agreement with the proposal.

Consultation on the proposed new pool is not a requirement of the School Organisation Code, however as it is part of the overall proposal to create a health and well-being community campus it has been considered appropriate to include information about it in the consultation document. Further details on the construction of the proposed pool will form part of the planning process should this proposal progress. It should be noted however that the funding for the pool and the school has been secured as part of the 21st Century schools

capital grant as one scheme. If the proposal for the new school is not approved then the funding for a new pool will also not be available. Pontardawe Swimming Pool was built in 1974. The latest condition survey from August 2014 indicated that while the building was in reasonable condition, the core building services have exceeded their recommended anticipated lifecycle. Backlog maintenance costs for the current pool are estimated at £1,221,783.

It is anticipated that the proposed new pool will be housed in a new build adjoining the current leisure centre, meaning that some remodelling of the leisure centre will be required. However current facilities, including the bowls hall will not be affected or lost as a result of this proposal.

The pool and leisure centre will continue to be managed separately to the school and decisions on how the pool will be managed will not be taken by school staff or governors. However it is expected that there would be increased use by pupils due to the close proximity of the pool and leisure centre and that opportunities will exist both in the school day and for extracurricular activities. It is not expected that this would limit the use of the pool by members of the public, and that the improved facilities along with the co-location adjoining the leisure centre would enhance the experience for members of the community as well as for pupils.

– ***Childcare***

Comments have been received regarding childcare provision, and concerns raised that parents will not be able to access wraparound provision as there is no facility planned within the proposed new school. As a result of considering the current sufficiency of childcare within and around the catchment area of the proposed new build primary at Parc Ynysderw, the need for a childcare setting within the school was not accepted due to the fact that the area is already well served with childcare provision, with a number of settings offering full day and sessional care, and approx. 8 childminders with the capacity to take 65 children, all within reasonable distance of the proposed school site. It is expected that existing childcare provisions could easily adapt their transportation of children plans to enable children from the new school location to access/continue to access their provision. It was also felt that should the proposed new school include extra childcare provision then the required tender for any new childcare services within schools would unsettle and disrupt the successful and established childcare in place in and around the area.

Comments have been received which state that should Alltwen primary school close as a result of this proposal then the childcare provision based on site at

the school would also close. It is not clear why this would need to be the case. It may be possible to retain the provision on the Alltwen Primary site, or for the provision to relocate elsewhere if appropriate

– ***Impact on Welsh Language Development***

A Welsh Language Impact Assessment has been carried out by an independent consultant which recognises concerns that while this proposal relates to the establishment of an English-medium school there may be direct or indirect impacts on the development of the Welsh language in the area.

Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig primaries teach Welsh as a second language and this will also be the case for the new school. Currently 25% of staff across the three schools are fluent or fairly fluent Welsh speakers. By combining the three schools Welsh language provision could be improved as there could be greater impact on having a more concentrated group of Welsh speakers able to support pupil and staff language development skills through the medium of Welsh.

The WESP objective 'To ensure that second language provision across all schools provides pupils with the skills and ability to become confident and sustained speakers of Welsh and that the provision develops a meaningful relationship between the language and the learner' is of particular relevance to this proposal.

The impact assessment states 'A common theme in the consultation comments was that a new English-medium school would negatively impact on the Welsh-medium schools in the locality. However, data/evidence held by the Council indicates that new build English-medium schools in Neath Port Talbot, that have opened in the last 10 years, have had no significant impact on nearby Welsh-medium schools which suggests there is low if any impact on Welsh Medium schools in the locality with the proposal.'

As a result of the consultation and consideration of existing data and evidence the following mitigating actions are recommended for consideration and implementation should the proposal be approved.

- Longer term monitoring is required to ascertain any impact on wider community Welsh language issues; this could be planned for as part of the updated WESP actions (See Section 5.1)
- Monitor parental choice of school i.e. Welsh/English medium

– **Finance**

This proposal is being brought forward for consultation based on the four principles of the Strategic School Improvement Programme, as stated in the consultation document. It is the case that one of the four principles of the SSIP programme is the need for effective financial management and this proposal will result in revenue efficiency savings which will be re-invested in the education budget. In this regard, the proposal supports the Council's effective management of its education budget.

Following the submission of a detailed business case, Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme capital grant funding has been approved. The Council is required to meet 35% of the cost, with the remaining 65% funded by Welsh Government. The Council's contribution will be funded from efficiencies within the delegated schools budgets, and the reduction in running costs as a result of closing the three schools, detailed within the report. These cost efficiencies will enable the Council to prudentially borrow to fund its 35% element of the capital bill.

Any capital receipt resulting from future sale of the current school or pool sites has not been included in the business case approved by Welsh Government for the proposal, although the Council has previously resolved to re-invest any monies received from the sale of school premises that become surplus to operational requirements as a result of its Strategic School Improvement Programme into the Education budget.

– **Consultation Process**

Consultation on the proposal to establish an English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig primary schools has followed the procedures required under the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code which specifies the type of school organisation activity on which the Council is required to consult and the process to be followed in conducting consultation.

The Code also specifies the persons with whom the Council must consult and how the consultation document will be made available to them. In this regard, a school organisation proposal has an identified audience and that audience has been appropriately targeted in line with the Code.

Throughout the consultation period the consultation document and associated papers were available on the Council's website located on the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme webpage.

Information about the consultation has appeared on the Council's website, and on the Council's Facebook page and Twitter account, both at the start of

the consultation and at points throughout, and local media publications have also reported on the proposal at various times through the consultation period.

Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary schools ensured that parents, staff and Governors were informed, giving both the online link to the documents as well as making paper copies available if needed and displaying information on each of their websites.

The consultation document contained clear information on how to respond, and this information was repeated on the Council's website, Twitter and Facebook pages. Consultees were able to respond via the online 'have your say' portal, by email or by post. A response form was available for downloading if required, although there was no obligation to use this. Additionally officers have been available throughout the consultation period to respond to telephone or email queries regarding any aspect of the proposal and consultation document. Responses have been received in many formats including email, by post and via the portal.

Comments have been received which express the view that this consultation process has not provided consultees with sufficient information to enable an intelligent consideration and response, and that it is an unlawful process in that it has not followed proper policies and procedures, and has not complied with fairness and equality rules. This consultation has followed the procedures set down by the Welsh Government under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and School Organisation Code. All requests for extra information have been met by officers and queries received have been responded to.

Despite Covid 19 this consultation has been conducted following Welsh Government guidelines and has adhered fully to the Code. In some aspects this consultation process has given consultees greater opportunities to engage as the option to respond online has not been used previously.

It is recognised that the current restrictions in place have prevented face to face meetings, however this has been mitigated by officers being available to answer queries and concerns by email or phone, enabling consultees with individual concerns to have specific answers. The Code specifies that there is no requirement to hold consultation meetings. Meetings are not a substitute for written responses – where meetings have been held in the past attendees have still been urged to respond in writing to the consultation, as notes taken at meetings do not constitute formal responses.

Comments have been received which suggest only the preferred option has been considered. This is not the case, a range of options were presented in the consultation document, giving sufficient reasons to allow consultees to give intelligent consideration and response.

It is recognised the consultation process should be undertaken when proposals are still at a formative stage. This is the case with this consultation as the Council will conscientiously take into account the responses before finalising its decision. As such the views of consultees are able to influence the decision making process.

Alternative proposals brought forward as part of the consultation process will be explored and will help elected Members take a reasoned and rational decision as to how the proposal is to be progressed. It will be for elected Members to decide on the most appropriate proposal, if any, to take forward. Should the proposal be rejected then this process stops, and any new proposal will need to be developed and brought forward for consideration. In line with the Code, this report discusses below alternatives suggested or supported in consultation.

– ***Well-being of Future generations***

It has been stated that this proposal is in breach of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, specifically in relation to the impact of school closures on the local communities. It is not clear why this is considered to be the case. Neath Port Talbot Council produces a corporate plan which includes well-being objectives. The three well-being objectives enable the Council to maximise its contribution to the seven well-being goals that Welsh Ministers have set for the whole of Wales in their Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The first of the three objectives specifically relates to children and young people - 'To improve the well-being of children and young people', and the plan sets out in detail how this objective contributes to the seven well-being goals. It is the view of officers that this proposal can enable the Council to meet many aspects of this objective including through providing 21st century teaching and learning experiences, supporting the implementation of new statutory duties to benefit pupils with ALN and to increase the opportunities for pupils to participate in activities that promote health and well-being.

It is the case that a new 21st century school will greatly enhance teaching and learning experiences, which in turn can positively impact on pupil outcomes. The increased skills and knowledge will provide greater life chances for pupils, enabling them to become as adults more prosperous, more resilient and more equal. By providing access to improved facilities and by broadening social and cultural experiences the proposal contributes to healthier individuals and more cohesive communities.

– ***Pupil Numbers***

Concerns have been raised regarding the pupil numbers contained in the consultation document. The proposed new school will be built to

accommodate 630 full time and 140 part time pupils. These forecasted numbers determine the size of the building and the number of classrooms and additional rooms that will need to be included in the proposed new school. This information has been included in the Business Case submitted to Welsh Government to secure the funding to build the proposed new school and has been scrutinised and approved.

The document contains actual pupil numbers in the three schools, a five year forecast of the combined pupil numbers in the schools and a prediction of the pupil numbers which the new build school size is based upon.

The figures in the five year forecast in the consultation document are derived from a combination of current numbers in the Foundation Phase of the three schools, and a 3 year average of early years pupils multiplied by the number of years to the school opening. It is not the combined total of the number of pupils who are in the 3 schools currently; many of these pupils will have left for secondary school by the time the proposed new school would open.

However while the method used to calculate this figure shows a decline, knowledge and experience of the pupil numbers in the area demonstrate that pupil numbers are actually increasing. Over the last 10 years the number of pupils in Swansea Valley schools has increased by over 160 extra pupils, and it is expected that these numbers will continue to rise as the population continues to grow. It is also the case that a significant number of new housing developments are planned for the area which could potentially increase numbers further.

The following table indicates where the pupil numbers have been derived from, as of January 2021. Pupils attending Welsh-medium schools in this authority or neighbouring authorities have **not** been included in calculations.

Table 3

	Pupil Numbers
Pupils living in the catchment area of Alltwen, Llangiwg or Godre'rgraig attending an EM school elsewhere in NPT	117
Pupils attending neighbouring EM schools outside NPT (Swansea and Powys)	107 (updated Jan 2021)
Total number of pupils	224

Officers are not suggesting that every child who is attending a school elsewhere will automatically return to claim a place in the proposed new school, neither is there a suggestion that every new build home will house

primary aged children who will wish to attend the new school. However it is important to make sure that any new school is able to accommodate those children who live within the catchment area both at the time of opening and for the future as it is not acceptable to plan to open a new school which will not allow local pupils to access their education in their nearest suitable school. Combining all the above factors indicated that building a school to solely accommodate the numbers that are currently in the three named schools would not be sufficient.

It is also important to take into account experiences from past new school projects. Pupil data gathered from other new build schools in Neath Port Talbot indicates that pupil numbers rise in the first two years of opening, on average by 15%, as pupils who have left the original schools return to claim a place. In schools where the population is already known to be growing that percentage can be higher, for example data indicates that prior to opening Awel y Mor Primary in 2013, 252 children were on roll at Tirmorfa Primary and Glan y Mor Primary. By 2015 331 pupils were on roll at the new school, an increase of 79 pupils.

The estimated number of pupils who would need to be accommodated in the proposed new build school combines all of the above factors to reach the figure of 630 full time pupils.

As the proposed school isn't expected to open until 2024 predicting nursery/reception class pupils is even more difficult as children who will be 3 or 4 in 2024 have not yet been born. However a nursery admission number of 140 part time pupils allows for both first year and second year nursery pupils to attend, ensuring that every child is able to access at least three terms of nursery education before entering full time school.

An additional estimate of 30 pupils (based on the maximum number of pupils in a class) has been added to the calculation to allow for unknowns including increased number of preschool pupils and additional housing, which provides the 725 figure contained in the document.

Data for pupils who reside in Neath Port Talbot but attend schools elsewhere is not held by this authority. The latest information received (January 2021) indicates that an additional 15 pupils are attending Ysgol Bryntawe and a further 55 are attending Ysgol Golwg –y Cwm which were not accounted for in the initial calculations. If these pupils are added to the calculations then the predicted numbers would rise to 795 and should all pupils wish to attend then the proposed new school would be over capacity.

There is no intention to include any other school in the proposed scheme despite comments received that other schools are to be added at a later date. Any school reorganisation plan would be subject to exactly the same

procedures as the current proposal. Current legislation does not permit the ad-hoc addition or removal of schools not already named in the consultation without commencing a new statutory process.

– ***Godre’rgraig Primary, Graig Road Site***

Numerous consultees have made reference to Godre’rgraig Primary School’s temporary relocation from Graig Road, Godre’rgraig to land adjacent to Cwmtawe Community School.

Comments have been received which state that detailed information about the reasons for the relocation have not been included in the consultation document and that ‘essential details’ are missing which are needed to allow for an informed decision to be made.

Further comments suggest that the relocation of the school to the temporary site was a deliberate act to facilitate permanent closure.

It is important to note that this consultation is not about whether Godre’rgraig Primary should remain in its temporary location, or whether remedial works should be undertaken to allow for a return, but instead is about a proposal to establish a new 3-11 English –medium primary school in new build premises to replace three existing primary schools, of which Godre’rgraig Primary is one. Whether the location of the school remained at Graig Road, Godre’rgraig or in its temporary location at Parc Ynysderw the current consultation would still be undertaken in the same way and the same principles for embarking on consultation would still apply.

The consultation document clearly outlines the reasons for the proposal; the expected benefits that a new school, along with the creation of a health and wellbeing community campus, can deliver are as relevant to pupils of Godre’rgraig as for pupils of Alltwen and Llangiwig.

The proposal which has been consulted upon is therefore in the opinion of officers considered to be the best option for all of the schools, including for pupils currently attending Godre’rgraig Primary.

At this point in time it is correct to say that Godre’rgraig Primary school staff and pupils cannot return to their original location. The most recent report on the quarry spoil tip investigation above the school has found that the medium level risk remains, and it is therefore deemed unsafe for pupils and staff to return to the site at the current time. A feasibility study to investigate design options and produce budget estimates for works associated with the remediation of has been commissioned. However, even if mitigation work is possible and staff and pupils are able to safely return to the Graig Road site,

the case remains that substantial work to address both backlog maintenance issues and remodelling to deliver 21st century school provision for the future will still be required. A new purpose built school with state of the art facilities will provide better opportunities for teaching and learning than the Graig Road site, even if remodelling of the buildings is affordable and achievable within the confines of the site.

If Godre'rgrraig staff and pupils are not able to safely return to the Graig Road site then the school will continue to operate from the temporary location adjacent to Cwmtawe Community School until either the proposed new school opens in 2024 and pupils transfer there, or until a different solution is found if the proposal is dismissed.

The proposal if approved would still provide English-medium education for the children who reside in the Godre'rgrraig and Ystalyfera area, albeit at a location outside of the immediate area, a distance of 3.6 miles from the Graig Road site at Godre'rgrraig. Parents who choose not to send their children to the proposed new school will still have English-medium schools within a reasonable distance to choose from, both in Neath Port Talbot at Rhydyfro Primary and Rhos Primary, and also across the county border in Powys. Data indicates that over 60 pupils from Neath Port Talbot already attend English-medium schools in Powys, at Ysgol Bro Tawe and further afield at Ysgol Golwg y Cwm. Additionally parents have the choice of a number of Welsh-medium schools, the nearest being YG Ystalyfera-Bro Dur at Ystalyfera, but also YGG Pontardawe, YGG Cwmllynfell and YGG Trebannws in Neath Port Talbot and YGG Dyffryn Y Glowyr in Powys. It is clear therefore that there is a wide choice of English and Welsh-medium schools all within a radius of 5 miles from the Godre'rgrraig Primary Graig Road site.

It has been suggested by consultees that non Welsh speaking families would have no choice but to opt for an English-medium school, thus meaning they have to travel out of their immediate area for primary education. However a number of Neath Port Talbot Welsh-medium primary schools exist in areas where families do not speak Welsh and additionally where high levels of deprivation are evident. There is no evidence to suggest that Welsh language acquisition is unsuccessful in these areas, and in fact data suggests some of the greatest increases in primary pupil numbers, and the highest transition rates from primary to secondary school are shown in these localities. It is therefore not clear why this is felt to be a challenge, particularly in an area where the Welsh language is already recognised to be strong.

- *The proposed site – Parc Ynysderw*

Parc Ynysderw has been identified as the preferred site for the proposed new build school for a number of reasons. A new build primary school at this

location will provide opportunities for enhanced health and wellbeing activities, with the leisure centre and the proposed new pool in close proximity and the numerous playing fields readily available for use. The collocation of the primary with the secondary school will also aid transition for pupils from one phase to another, will provide opportunities for primary pupils to benefit from more specialised secondary school teaching resources (e.g. science labs, DT rooms, food technology rooms) and will make cross phase working easier to facilitate. This is the only site in the area which is owned by the Council and offers these collective benefits.

The amount of land required for the proposed new school is circa. 19,884m². Additional land would be required of circa. 14, 320m² to accommodate sufficient playing fields, however this can be omitted as playing fields already exist at Parc Ynysderw. A different site without such provision would need 34,204m² to accommodate the proposed new school.

Land for a project of this magnitude is not readily available in the Swansea Valley area, and it is the case that while this site has some construction challenges these are believed to be less problematic than any of the other suggested alternative sites. Officers are aware that this land is Zone B flood risk area as identified in **Welsh Government Planning Policy and Guidance Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15: Development and Flood Risk**. It is also the case that land at the site may be contaminated, as is the case for some of the alternative sites suggested by consultees, and funding for potential mitigation works has been identified within the budget for the proposed new build school and pool. These aspects will be further explored should the proposal progress when the planning application and detailed ground investigations will be undertaken.

Alternative Options

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

A. Maintain each of the schools on their current site

Comments have been received which suggest a better use of public money would be to address the backlog maintenance issues at the existing schools and swimming pool. Total backlog maintenance and accessibility costs for all three schools and the swimming pool amounts to amount to some £3.274m.

It is important to clarify that the backlog maintenance and accessibility costs derived from the condition reports are estimates for putting the building back into repair, and do not account for improving or upgrading (internally or externally).

Developing a scheme to undertake this type of improvement work would prove to cost considerably more than the figures outlined in the condition report. The backlog maintenance and accessibility estimates do not take account of costs associated with design, supervision or any statutory fees nor do they provide for any remodelling works internally or externally to improve the suitability and layouts of the existing premises. The condition report has not considered needs beyond 5-10 years (mainly 1-5 years in accordance with Welsh Government backlog maintenance returns); other works, required after 10 years, may be of a substantial and significant cost that would need to be undertaken during any future refurbishment and fall outside the scope of the current condition survey.

Taking the above into account and with the passage of time and fluctuating market conditions, costs are likely to increase appreciably and in reality, it is the case that the costs identified within the condition reports would not be sufficient to deliver fully designed and tendered, meaningful improvement schemes, for each of the premises.

Additionally, no costs have been identified for the hire of temporary buildings to house pupils during any programming of works. Alltwn and Llangiwg Primaries would need to vacate for an extended period of time (possibly a full academic year) whilst Godre'rgraig would need to extend their occupation of the temporary accommodation at Parc Ynysderw until works were completed.

There are major financial and logistical implications associated with the hire of temporary accommodation and pupil transportation all of which would be "lost" money that undermines any notion that public funds would be better spent by simply addressing the backlog maintenance and accessibility work identified on each premises.

It is also the case that if Godre'rgraig Primary were to return to the Graig Road site additional remediation work would need to be considered to mitigate the landslip risk and thus ensure staff and pupil safety. This work is currently estimated at circa £4m. A feasibility study to investigate design options and produce budget estimates for works associated with the remediation of has been commissioned.

As far as the Swimming pool is concerned then business continuity would be compromised for however long works would take resulting in the suspension of all swimming activities for the duration.

Welsh Government have a strict business case process that must be satisfied that includes scrutiny of the strategic, economic and financial case of any proposal. It is considered highly unlikely that Welsh Government would financially support the 'patch and mend' status quo approach that is being

suggested by some consultees advocating that it would be a better use of public funds to simply undertake backlog maintenance works.

It is also the case that all three existing schools are compromised in terms of their building suitability for 21st Century teaching and learning and fall short of many of the internal and external space standards and requirements as set out within Building Bulletin 99 that one would ordinarily expect to see in a brand new 21st Century school.

The existing shortcomings of each building would remain as is and to all intents and purposes the opportunity of creating 21st Century facilities would be missed.

Despite investing over £120m during Band A of Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools' Programme the Council still has an ageing school building stock. Latest estimates suggest that there is still a backlog of maintenance and accessibility costs across the school portfolio of circa £76m (this is not a situation unique to Neath Port Talbot and is reflected across many Welsh Councils).

The Council currently spends circa £1.2m each year of its own capital funding to address maintenance needs on schools and there are many competing priorities each and every year. Given the current financial situation it is not realistic to expect a huge influx or redistribution of finances in the foreseeable future.

Without Welsh Government's 65% contribution to the costs of construction of a new school,, any alternative proposal that revolved around maintaining all three existing schools and the pool in their current locations would mean that the Council would have to meet 100% of any associated capital costs.

With this in mind and even if as suggested the Council only addressed the notional £3.274m of backlog maintenance costs at Alltwen, Godre'rgraig, Llangiwg Primary schools and Pontardawe Swimming Pool then that alone would exhaust all of the capital resources currently allocated to cover repairs and backlog maintenance pressures across the whole of the school portfolio for almost three years.

Such a situation would be untenable and to the detriment of all schools in Neath Port Talbot and not a direction the Council would choose to embark upon, therefore meaning that if this proposal does not progress then the backlog maintenance for each of the buildings will remain and in all probability only be addressed on a phased basis as and when elements deteriorate to such an extent that interruptions to teaching and learning becomes imminent.

B. Alternative New Build Options for Alltwen, Llangiwg and Godre'rgraig Primary schools

It has been suggested that each of the schools should have their own 21st century build either on or very near to their current site.

The Council has the responsibility for ensuring that it is making the best use of resources and facilities in order to deliver the very best educational and recreational opportunities for children, young people and adults in the wider community.

Maintaining the three schools at their present sites is not considered to be the best use of resources or facilities as that would lead to cost inefficiency and would mean that the potential benefits afforded by a new build would not be realised. In the same way new builds on one or all of the current sites would not be the most efficient use of available resources. Separate business cases for each scheme would need to demonstrate to Welsh Government that they individually offer the best option strategically, economically and financially before securing grant support. The Council would also need to fund its share of each new build and without realising any efficiency savings it is questionable whether this approach would be affordable on the Council's part. Three separate builds would not produce the added benefits of the health and well-being campus or of increased cross phase working between the secondary and primary phases as co-location would not be a possibility if the schools were to remain in their current locations.

If only one of the schools were to go forward for a new build proposal then the English-medium pupils in the remaining two schools who would otherwise have been part of this proposal would no longer have the opportunity to benefit from the proposal. Community benefits of the health and wellbeing campus with the new build pool adjacent to the leisure centre would also not be realised.

Increasing pupil numbers on one site by combining the three schools in a brand new purpose built facility would provide a far more effective use of public money and provide a 'state of the art' 21st Century teaching and learning environment.

Each alternative new build option that has been suggested during the consultation has been further explored and reported on below.

In order to evaluate these suggestions a new primary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed for each of the schools named in this proposal. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and

accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build primary school.

Guidance on accommodation and external area specifications for mainstream schools are set out in Building Bulletin 99. The key components of a primary school comprise: teaching areas (general classrooms, practical lesson areas etc.); halls (multi-purpose main hall used for PE, performance, dining etc.); learning resource areas (library, learning support, SEN small group room, nurture space etc.); staff and administration (staff room, reception, admin & reprographics, etc.); dining (full production kitchen; dining area in multi-purpose hall, etc.), toilets and personal care (accessible pupil, staff, visitor toilet areas, hygiene rooms etc.) and storage (cloaks, materials preparation, equipment, consumables, etc.). The assessments that follow are based on Building Bulletin 99 with the space allocation for primary schools adopted by the Welsh Government for grant funding purposes. This is a basic space standard which is less than Neath Port Talbot Council would ordinarily seek to build. The specifications in the Building Bulletin only allow for the accommodation needs of a school and not for the requirements of other services e.g. Learning Support Centre, health and wellbeing aspirations etc.

Accurate calculations of the number of pupils in the catchment area of each school who may attend a new school in the future have not been carried out at this stage, but in order to allow for the predicted increase in pupil numbers across the area as a whole an additional 50 pupils have been added to each school.

The table below indicates the current school site area, alongside the required site area needed for a new build school following Building Bulletin 99 for the estimated number of pupils.

Table4

EXISTING SCHOOLS	SITE AREA m2	BB99 M2	PUPIL FTE (incl N)
ALLTWEN PRIMARY	11629	14,536	269
GODRE'RGRAIG PRIMARY	4397	11,236	194
LLANGIWG PRIMARY	3262	12,556	224
	1345		

Alltwen Primary School

- New Build on current site

As shown above it is clear that an alternative site for Alltwen Primary would be required to accommodate a new build school that meets Welsh Government 21st century standards as the existing site is undersized.

- New build on alternative site

There is no suitable land in Alltwen in Council ownership to accommodate a site area of the required 14,536m².

- Retain school and add LSC

Adding an LSC to the current school would mean another building added to the site. Any addition would mean compromise both for the LSC and for the school, further restricting the space available on the site and would not be an option that officers would recommend.

- Merge schools on Alltwen site

The current school does not have sufficient available space to accommodate pupils from either Godre'rgraig Primary or Llangiwg Primary, and only has limited space to expand should its own catchment pupil numbers increase as predicted.

Godre'rgraig Primary School

- New build on Graig Road site

As shown in Table 4 the Graig Road site is significantly undersized to accommodate a new build school that meets Welsh Government 21st century standards for Godre'rgraig pupils.

- New build on alternative site (as identified during consultation)

Tareni

Land at Tareni identified by consultees is outside settlement limits and is identified as being within a high risk area for flooding and as such planning approval to build a school is not assured, as detailed in Welsh Government Planning Policy and Guidance Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15: Development and Flood Risk. Additionally, this area is classified in the Coal Authority register as low risk for development.

Due to the industrial legacy of the proposed development area, the site would require the full breadth of contaminated land condition surveys to be undertaken.

Gnoll Road

Much of the land available adjacent to Gnoll Road is on a steep gradient and is identified as being within a high risk flood plain area and as such planning approval to build a school is not assured as detailed in Welsh Government

Planning Policy and Guidance Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15: Development and Flood Risk. Additionally this area is classified in the Coal Authority register as a mix of low and high risk development. The land is also outside settlement limits.

However, subject to further site investigations sufficient space could be available to build a new school at the highest part of the land adjacent to Gnoll for Godre'rgrraig pupils.

This suggestion has been made to ensure that an English-medium primary school is retained in the north of the Swansea valley and would mean that Godre'rgrraig and Ystalyfera pupils would be able to remain in their immediate local area. It could also address the perceived disadvantages for Godre'rgrraig pupils having to travel to the proposed site at Parc Ynysderw.

However if a new school was to be considered for Godre'rgrraig pupils it is unclear what is suggested for pupils at Llangiwg and Alltwen who would not be included in the scheme.

If an alternative proposal is to be considered then it must be noted that the identified benefits of creating a health and well-being campus for pupils of all three schools at Parc Ynysderw would be lost. This would also mean that funding would not be available for a stand-alone new pool at another location. Additionally the backlog maintenance costs at the other sites would all remain.

Welsh Government would still expect the Council to fund its 35% of the capital construction costs under such a proposal and as there would be no significant efficiency savings from this scheme the additional cost would need to be met from elsewhere in the Council's budget which in the current climate may not be affordable.

Llangiwg Primary School

– New Build on current site

As indicated in Table 4 neither of the current Llangiwg Primary school sites would be sufficient in size to accommodate a new build school to 21st century standards.

– New build on alternative site

Officers have not been able to locate any suitable alternative site within Council ownership in the Llangiwg area, and no suggested sites have been brought forward. The possible suitability of Glanrhyd is highlighted below.

C. Alternative sites for the current proposal

- Glanrhyd – Riverside Industrial Estate

The Glanrhyd (Riverside Industrial estate) site is currently outside settlement limits and it will need detailed ecological survey work and a compensation site of at least double the area where the habitats lost / species affected can be mitigated for, due to it being a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). This land is also a high risk flood area and is classed as an area where highly vulnerable development (such as a school) should not be considered. This area has also been deemed a high risk area for development by the Coal Authority.

- Pontardawe Recreation Fields

Even though the area has difficult access these fields are currently used by Pontardawe RFC, Pontardawe Athletic FC and Pontardawe Cricket Club and leased to other local sports sides and is a local green open space. It is currently outside settlement limits and is bordered by a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). This land is also a high risk flood area and is classed as an area where highly vulnerable development should not be considered.

D. Other Options

In order to keep Godre'rgraig pupils in the Godre'rgraig area it has been suggested that the school should be split and that pupils who reside nearer to Ystalyfera should attend schools in this area while others attend Llangiwg or one of the other Pontardawe schools.

This would not provide Godre'rgraig pupils with a 21st Century school educational provision, and would mean that the pupils and families of the current school would be divided and as such this option would not be recommended by officers. Should the proposal succeed then parental choice will mean that those pupils who wish to transfer to a school nearer Ystalyfera would be able to do so subject to the Admission Policy, while still providing them with the opportunity to access the proposed new school with its enhanced facilities if preferred.

It has also been suggested that two new builds should be considered, one at the north to accommodate children living in Godre'rgraig and Ystalyfera, and another in the south to accommodate, pupils from Alltwen and Llangiwg, possibly on the Parc Ynysderw site so that a new build pool could then also be included.

The cost of two new builds in separate, reasonably close locations in the Swansea Valley, both to accommodate pupils of the same age range and the same language medium would be difficult to justify in a business case, as

build costs and ongoing revenue costs would both be increased if this were to be delivered. It is also the case that this scheme when compared to the proposal being consulted upon would reduce the efficiency savings generated and so it is questionable whether this suggestion would be affordable on the Council's part.

This option is not recommended by officers and it is still the case that the proposal which has been consulted upon offers the most effective use of public money and will deliver better educational and recreation facilities.

Conclusion

Having considered all the information gathered to date, it is the view of officers that closing Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg Primary schools and establishing a new community school for 630 pupils and 140 nursery pupils in a 21st century new build will deliver the greatest benefits to pupils, staff and the wider community as a whole.

The inclusion of an LSC for primary aged pupils with ASD gives an opportunity to provide pupils with a purpose built facility with the aim of ensuring best possible outcomes for pupils,

Additionally establishing the school on the identified site of Parc Ynysderw and creating enhanced learning, health and wellbeing facilities to include the leisure centre, new swimming pool and Cwmtawe Community Comprehensive, will provide opportunities to develop and improve primary education in the area.

The next step

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

Consultees are advised that, unfavourable comments made during the consultation period will not be treated as objections. Anyone wishing to object will need to do so in writing during the statutory objection period. Comments submitted as part of this consultation process will need to be re-submitted in writing during the statutory objection period if they are to be considered as objections.

Appendices

Appendix A

List of Consultees	
Alltwn, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwig Primary Schools: Pupils Parents / carers Staff Governing Body Wider School Community	NAASH (Secondary Schools Forum)
	LLAN (Primary Schools Forum)
	Bordering authorities – Swansea/ Bridgend/ Carmarthenshire/ Powys/ RCT
All other NPT schools	Pontardawe Town Council Cilybebyll Community Council Cwmllynfell Community Council Gwaun Cae Gurwen Community Council Ystalyfera Community Council
NPT Elected Members	WG Schools Management Division
Diocesan Directors of Education - Diocese of Menevia, Swansea - Diocese of Llandaff, Vale of Glamorgan	MP (for Neath) – Christina Rees
	Member of the Senedd for Neath – Jeremy Miles
Trade Unions	Regional Assembly Members
Estyn	SEN Partners
Regional Education Consortium (ERW)	Children and Young Person Partnership (inc. Early Years Development and Childcare)

NPTCBC Integrated Transport Unit	Police and Crime Commissioner
Communities First Partnership	NPTCBC Officers

In addition to the statutory consultees, notice of the consultation was also sent to the following:

Child care settings and registered childminders in the area
Tegwch Community group
Welsh Language Commissioner

Summary of Pupil Consultations – Alltwen Primary School, Llangiwg primary School and Godre’rgraig Primary school

Neath Port Talbot Council met with the pupils (20) from Alltwen Primary school on 2nd December 2020, the pupils (24) from Llangiwg Primary school on the 3rd December 2020 and the pupils (13) from Godre’rgraig Primary School on the 4th December 2020. A selection of pupils from each year group from each school, along with their Headteacher, was present on each occasion when pupils were consulted, to ensure their voice was heard and all pupils had an equal opportunity to speak.

It should be recognised that the notes of the meetings reflect the officers’ understanding of the views expressed and, as such, may not wholly capture the substance of individual comments made and queries raised. In this respect and to support the consultation process, at each meeting pupils were also reminded to submit their comments in writing if they so wished.

This is a summary of the information that the pupils from all three primary schools gave.

57 pupils were consulted in total.

Each group were given a summary of the proposal as outlined in the pupil consultation form and were asked to comment.

- **Is there anything that you would like to know about the proposal?**
- **Is there anything that you would look forward to or have concerns about the proposal?**
- **What else would you like to say?**

Children in each group had similar concerns and questions. A summary of the joint views with some responses are below.

The Consultation Process

The process was explained to the children and they were pleased to note that their responses and questions would form part of the consultation report. It was explained that every one’s opinion was important but that just ‘saying no’ to the proposal would not mean that it would not happen – there would need to be good reasons given to suggest it is a bad idea and these would be recorded and passed on. They were keen that officers were aware of their thoughts.

What will it be like in the new school?

Some children stated they looked forward to having new facilities and new activities to take part in, while others were concerned that the building could be too large, especially the nursery, and that they would get lost and that it would be too crowded, loud and busy. Some children felt that as the school would be larger

than their current school it would be harder to organise for teachers and that making new friends may be difficult, or that they would be mixed with pupils they would not know, or in big classes. One or two pupils did say it would be a chance to make new friends and have a new play yard with lots of space. Other children stated they wanted to know how the school day would be managed for such a large school, e.g. start and finish times, breakfast club, lunchtimes, break-times, etc. They were also concerned that there would be bullying at the school and more opportunities for boys and girls to be nasty and it would go unnoticed. Some pupils were worried that they might not get the chance to represent their school as lots of children would be going for school council, eco-committee, football side, etc. or be able to take part in musical events or shows as there would be too many children. They were also keen to ensure that they had a hall big enough for concerts and lunches.

They were told that although it would be bigger than their current school it would not be so large that they wouldn't be able to find their way around after a little while of getting used to it and that it would be well set out with plenty of space. It was also made clear that the school would be built to WG standards for size of rooms, halls and toilets and that they would probably spend time in the building before the school opens so that it would not be totally unfamiliar to them. The new school would be a safe environment and that their well-being and safety is always a school's top priority and that there would be policies and procedures within the new school to make sure that children feel safe and secure. The new head teacher and staff would organise class size and plan activities as they do now. It is expected that work will take place with all three schools, should the proposal be approved, so that the children have plenty of time to get to know each other before the new school opens.

There would be potentially new opportunities for them with extra-curricular clubs depending on the interests and skillset of the staff. They would also have some input into the facilities as work progresses.

There would be a new kitchen for the cooks so it was unlikely things would be any different in the new school to their current school regarding the quality of breakfast and lunches.

What will the outdoor Space look like and how will we use it?

Many of the children were keen to ask what would be included as part of the outside space, playgrounds, and yards. They were keen to have a 'Learning Garden' and 'Trim-Trail' as part of any new school as it is an important part of their school. They also asked about the playing fields, paths and wildlife areas and would people be allowed to walk dogs, use the fields and if the park would still be there?

The pupils were told the WG set minimum standards for schools when they are now built and the children were reassured that there would be lots of new opportunities for them to use the outdoor space and the proposed new school

could possibly have a MUGA, key stage play-yards and a 'wild area' and that the leisure centre and new pool would also be next door for extra space. The public play area and park would hopefully be built into the new Parc Ynysderw complex.

What will happen to all the Staff?

While some children generally welcomed the possibility of having new teachers, they also felt that it was important that their current teachers, TA's and cook moved to the new school with them and not lose their jobs. It was important to them that new staff were not too strict and that there were adults who knew them in the new school when it opens. Children all wanted their current head teacher to be the head teacher of the new school.

Pupils were pleased to hear that every effort would be made to ensure that current staff could transfer to the new school should the proposal progress and that all the staff would be spoken to ask what they would like to do and how the council could help them.

What will happen to our old school buildings?

The children wanted to know what would happen to their old school buildings, suggesting that they should not be knocked down and still be used by people in the village. Many pupils stated how they liked a small school and the safety, security and comfort that it brings. It was mentioned by many that their parents and grandparents do not want a new school because of the history of the village schools.

It was explained that there were no plans at the moment for their current schools and that the community would be asked about what they wanted to happen to the buildings before any decision would be made.

How will this affect where we live?

All the children stated how they like coming to their school and did not know how they would feel if the school closed and they would like their younger brothers and sisters to go there. It was also mentioned that they felt that closing their school could affect the community with less people going to the local shop and less people feeling part of their village – one pupil did say that a new community would be started at the new school. They also asked about after school clubs and what would happen if too many children wanted to join them and there was a limit and concerns around getting home if they attend after-school clubs were raised. A number of pupils asked about the playing fields and what would happen to these as they play football and rugby there and Cwmtawe need it for their sport and PE lessons.

The children were told that their communities would still be there and it would be important the teachers reflected on the rich heritage and culture of each village when teaching at the proposed school. Any extra-curricular sessions would be organised by the school and would be offered to all pupils who were interested.

The sports fields would be redesigned so that there was no loss of playing fields at Parc Ynysderw for Cwmtawe or the local sports clubs.

The roads will be busy so how will we get to school safely?

Busy roads and traffic was a concern for every group spoken to in all schools. Some of the children said it would be nearer their home, whilst others expressed the opposite view and would find it difficult to walk because the new school would be much further away than their current school and would have to be driven. Children accepted that this would be the case regardless of where a new school was sited. They were concerned about the amount of traffic near Cwmtawe School and the road near the shops and how little children like nursery would get to school and some children were concerned about the amount of traffic and strangers using the leisure centre close to their school.

It was explained that they would not have a bus to take them to school unless any of the children would need to travel further than two miles to the new school, although this would become clearer as the proposal progresses. They were also told that the walking or cycling route to the school would be checked to make sure it was safe to use and that there would be emphasis on making sure all routes would be safe for pupils. It was explained to the pupils that a traffic plan would have to be made that would include leisure centre users, parent drop-off points and safe parking, again to ensure their safety.

Estyn response to the proposal

Estyn’s response to proposal by Neath Port Talbot Council to establish an English –medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen Primary School, Godre’r graig Primary School and Llangiwig Primary School, all of which will close.

This report has been prepared by Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer.

Introduction

This consultation proposal is from Neath Port Talbot Council.

The proposal is:

- To establish a new build, 21st century English-medium 3-11 school to replace Alltwen Primary, Godre’r graig Primary and Llangiwig Primary, all of which will close on 31st August 2024.
- To include a new Learning Support Centre (LSC) for up to 16 primary aged pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- To build a new 25m pool and teaching pool on the site to replace the existing Pontardawe Swimming Pool.
- That the combined new build school, specialist ASD provision and leisure facilities will form part of a learning, health and wellbeing community campus at the Parc Ynysderw site.

Summary/ Conclusion

It is Estyn’s opinion that this proposal is likely to at the least maintain the present provision for English medium primary education in the area.

Description and benefits

The proposals are likely to have a positive impact on provision for primary aged pupils in the area. New facilities will probably provide benefits for pupils' wellbeing and improve curriculum delivery. Additional provision through a learning support centre should benefit primary aged pupils with ASD. A new swimming pool is likely to enhance provision for health and wellbeing in the area.

The proposer has outlined a clear rationale for the proposal. The report details how a learning, health and wellbeing community campus will be developed on one site at Parc Ynysderw. This includes a secondary school, leisure centre and the proposed new build primary campus with learning support centre. The need for a new build is explained clearly in the proposal for replacing ageing school buildings, of which one site is deemed unsafe. It can also lead to increased benefits for staff and pupils as well as enabling more efficient and effective use of resources.

The expected benefits of the proposal compared to the status quo, as outlined in the report, include the following:

- improved educational and health and wellbeing facilities
- more efficient and effective use of resources, resulting in revenue savings for reinvestment in the education budget
- enable more effective delivery of the whole curriculum
- prevent the need for mixed age classes over more than 2 year groups
- provide greater opportunities for peer interaction and the development of social skills
- reduce teacher workload through the wider sharing of responsibilities
- provide more opportunities for extra-curricular activities
- provide more targeted support for children with additional learning needs through wider expertise and greater numbers of support staff
- allow for better staff development, greater opportunity for curriculum development and career opportunities through broader experience and enhanced continuing professional development options
- enable more efficient and effective use of resources, including saving money through economies of scale
- give the head teacher and governing body greater flexibility in the organisation of classes and deployment of staff
- The potential risk areas identified clearly being:
 - resistance to change leading to lack of pupil, parent and staff support
 - educational standards not maintained

- less effective support for pupil well-being in a larger school and in a different location
- increased home to school travel time for some pupils
- staff anxiety about job security and new management arrangements
- loss of school identity from closure of existing establishments
- forecasted pupil numbers do not materialise
- budget allocation insufficient to meet needs
- 21st Century School capital funding opportunity not realised
- Welsh language not developed further
- discrimination against protected characteristics
- loss of community facilities
- increased governance and staff responsibilities

It seems that the benefits outlined previously will mitigate the effects of these risks.

The proposer has considered a range of alternative options to the recommended proposal that include different permutations:

- Option 1: Maintaining the current situation
- Option 2: Establishing a federation, maintain the pool and not to establish a new ASD provision
- Option 3: Close two schools and transfer all pupils to one remaining school.
- Option 4: Close one school and transfer remaining pupils to the other two
- Option 5: Close all three schools and build on one of the existing school sites.
- Option 6: Close all three schools, build a school on new site and establish an LSC with a new swimming pool
- Option 7: Close all three schools, build a school on new site and establish an LSC but without a new swimming pool
- Option 8: Build three new replacement primary schools on the existing sites and establish ASD provision on one of the sites

Option 6 is the proposal recommended. No other option would provide the whole package of a large new build, a learning support centre and new pool.

The proposer has considered carefully the impact of the proposal on travel arrangements. Pupils living beyond the two-mile limit to the campus will be considered for travel assistance. The proposer does not appear to consider the effect of increased traffic and accessibility issues to the site if over 600 pupils were to attend the new school. However, it does state that a more

detailed community impact assessment will be undertaken during the consultation period.

The report pays due attention to pupil numbers and places. It shows clearly that surplus places in the new school at 7%, would be significantly lower than the three schools combined, currently at 17.1%

The proposer has taken appropriate account of the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language. It is believed that the new provision could impact positively on Welsh language provision through having a more concentrated group of Welsh speaking staff able to support development of the language. A Welsh language impact assessment will be undertaken during the consultation.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposer has considered the outcomes of recent Estyn inspection reports and provided its view on current performance of each school. The focus of the proposal is primarily on improved provision because of greater sharing of expertise. The local authority notes that pupils' learning will benefit from a more stimulating environment and having greater access to wider range of staff expertise.

The three schools were judged good for standards in their last Estyn inspection. For Alltwen Primary school, last inspected in 2018, the local authority judges standards in the foundation phase as adequate over three years. At key stage 2, pupil outcomes are adequate in all three core subjects over three years. Godre'r graig Primary school was last inspected in 2017 under Estyn's previous framework. The local authority judges standards at the Foundation phase as adequate over the last three years and the same for standards at key stage 2. Llangiwg Primary School was last inspected in 2019 where standards were judged as good. Again, the local authority judges standards at foundation phase and key stage 2 as being adequate.

The proposer has provided an evaluation of the current quality of teaching in each school based on their last Estyn inspection. This was judged good overall in each school.

In their evaluation of leadership and management, the proposer notes the judgement of Estyn in their last inspection reports. It also provides its own judgement based on core visits in 2019. The authority believes that headteachers provide generally strong leadership and set clear strategic direction for their schools.

The proposer has considered the continuing delivery of the curriculum for all pupils appropriately. It is predicted the proposal will benefit the delivery of the curriculum and provide pupils with better learning experiences that come with a larger pupil population and purpose built facilities.

The proposer has considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups well. The report notes that the level of support for pupils with special educational needs will continue. Pupils attending the proposed learning support centre within the new school will benefit from being taught by specialist staff.

The plan involves the transfer of pupils to a new single site. It is noted that pupils will benefit from a stimulating teaching and learning environment in a state of the art building. This should impact positively on the self-esteem and wellbeing of pupils. However, the risks identified by the proposer include a resistance to change by pupils, increased travel time and less effective wellbeing support in a larger school. The proposer will need to demonstrate how they plan to mitigate against these risks.