

Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning Service

Strategic School Improvement Programme

**PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH SPECIALIST PROVISION FOR PRIMARY AGE PUPILS** **WITH**

**AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)**

**AT**

**BLAENHONDDAN PRIMARY SCHOOL,**

**MAIN ROAD, BRYNCOCH, SA10 7PE.**

**CONSULTATION REPORT**



Large print and alternative format or language versions of this document are available on request

**CONSULTATION REPORT**

**Responses from formal consultation on the proposal to establish a new specialist provision for primary age pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Blaenhonddan Primary School, Main Road, Bryncoch, SA10 7PE.**

**Introduction**

The Council has consulted with interested parties on its proposal to establish a new specialist provision for primary age pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Blaenhonddan Primary School. If implemented, this proposal will take effect during the spring term 2024.

The consultation period ran from 6th June 2023 to 18th July 2023. A list of consultees is included at Appendix 1. The consultation document was e-mailed to all consultees and was also available on the Council’s website.

**Legislative Process**

The consultation document invited views and opinions to be submitted in respect of the proposal. Under the Welsh Government Statutory Code for School Organisation the Council is required 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.

If approved, the next stage of the process is to publish a statutory notice outlining the proposal. This would need to be published for a period of 28 days and formal written objections would be invited during this time.

If objections are received, an objection report will be published summarising the objections and the Council’s response to those objections. The Council’s Cabinet will need to consider the proposal in light of objections received when making its decision on whether the proposal is to be implemented.

**Pupil responses**

Pupils were wholly supportive of the proposal and felt that children who were having difficulty in other schools would benefit from being at the proposed new LSC in Blaenhonddan Primary School. Comments from pupils are summarised below:

* Classrooms will help children to learn in a quieter area
* Classrooms will help children to calm down if they are upset
* Classrooms will help children learn better if it is too noisy
* Children will be more confident in our school
* Children will have a better area and more room – our classes are full, big and noisy
* We will understand children with autism better
* We can help the children to play

**Consultation Responses**

One written response from ESTYN was received.

The response received was in favour of the proposal. The queries included the existing building condition, staffing and training, and modes of transport.

**Estyn response to the proposal:**

Estyn overall response to the proposal states that the proposal is likely to have a positive impact on the standard of education provision, especially for pupils with ASD, in the area. Estyn note, ‘The proposal sets out clearly the rationale used in the initial scoping exercise to establish where to base any additional primary ASD provision. The council appears to have considered an appropriate range of criteria, prioritising educational benefits, when deciding to put forward the proposal to base the provision at Blaenhonddan Primary School’.

Additionally Estyn note ‘The council does appear to have identified appropriately the risks associated with the proposal. For example, the risk assessment considers the impact on the educational outcomes for pupils and the need for additional staff with the necessary skills and expertise. While the proposal highlights potential risks, there is a lack of detail in how the implementation of the proposal would mitigate these identified risks’.

In response, should the proposal not be implemented then there is a risk that the benefits for teaching and learning would not be realised, therefore the mitigating action would be to implement the proposal, thus ensuring all benefits can be realised.

Estyn also note the following ‘The proposal does require the construction of 2 new modular buildings to house the provision on the Blaenhonddan Primary School site. The proposal does not include sufficient information about the adaptations needed to the site overall and whether these new buildings will meet the specific needs of ASD pupils, for example their sensory needs. It is also unclear from the proposal what the impacts of these works will be on the current school population. The proposal states that the current school buildings have a maintenance backlog cost of £820,465 while the build cost of the project will be an estimated additional £745,000. It is unclear from the proposal whether the general condition of the school buildings will remain suitable in the short to medium term’.

In response, as the consultation notes, the site is graded category B for accessibility. The 2 new modular buildings will be standalone buildings within the school site therefore general condition of the existing schools buildings will not affect the suitability of the new provision. As with all new buildings and provisions, information about site adaptations will be included as part of the planning approval process.

Estyn notes ‘Learner travel has been explored appropriately in line with the council’s Home to School Transport Policy. However, the proposal does not identify the need to consider the most appropriate modes of transport for children with ASD who would be accessing the provision’.

In response, the modes of transport for individual pupils will be agreed upon on an individual case basis and the most suitable mode of transport for individual pupils attending the provision will be arranged following admission to the provision.

Estyn continues ‘The proposal appears to have no significant impact on any surplus places within the local authority. Indeed, the proposal will help the authority meet the increasing demand for pupils with ASD. The proposal usefully includes projected numbers for Blaenhonddan Primary School which demonstrate that there will be capacity to house the provision on the school site, while still retaining the mainstream places required.’

It is noted in the Estyn response that ‘The council’s Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) includes an objective to ensure that pupils with ALN receive linguistic equality of opportunity. While the proposal refers to the WESP, it makes no reference to how it will impact on this WESP objective.’

In response, as outlined in the Consultation Document, provision in the LSC will mainly reflect the provision on offer to mainstream pupils. As Blaenhonddan Primary School is an English medium school, pupils attending the ASD provision who come from English medium schools will find that teaching and learning experiences would be fully equitable. For pupils who have transitioned from Welsh medium schools and /or who speak Welsh as their first language extra provision will be made to ensure staff are available who can support them through the medium of Welsh.

Estyn note ‘All 5 inspection areas were judged as good by Estyn at the time of the last inspection of Blaenhonddan Primary School in 2017. This proposal makes specific reference to the inspection report, quoting purposefully Estyn’s positive findings on the progress made by pupils with ALN at the school. However, considering that the school’s last inspection was 6 years ago, it is a concern that the proposal has no up-to-date information on the quality of provision or current standards, as identified by the local authority. While it is understandable that there is a lack of national verified data since 2020, the proposal does not provide any analysis of current pupil progress. For example, how well pupils with ALN at the school progress in relation to starting points’.

In response, following visits from Education Support Officers, the current standards at Blaenhonddan Primary School continue to be good with pupils, including ALN pupils, making good progress.

Estyn conclude, ‘The proposal appears to ensure that children with ASD will be able to access the full primary school curriculum appropriately. The proposal states the benefit of basing the provision in a mainstream setting, allowing pupils to access an appropriate mix of specialist and mainstream provision. The proposal does not consider how the school will manage how pupils with ASD will interact with their peers’.

In response, as noted in the consultation, the school currently hosts a specialist Key Stage 2 MLD provision for 9 pupils and therefore are experienced in ensuring that ALN pupils in provisions interact effectively with their peers.

The full Estyn response is included as Appendix 2.

**APPENDIX 1**

**List of Consultees:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **List of Consultees** | |
| Blaenhonddan Primary 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 | Neath Town Council  Blaenhonddan Community Council  Cilybebyll Community Council |
| NPT Elected Members | WG Schools Management Division |
| Diocesan Directors of Education   * Diocese of Menevia, Swansa * Diocese of Llandaff, Vale of Glamorgan | MP and MS  For Neath |
| Trade Unions | Regional Members of the Senedd |
| Estyn | ALN Partners- SNAP, Action for Children, Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Consultant Community Paediatrician, The Children’s Centre NPT Hospital (Therapeutic Services), National Autistic Society, NPT Special Needs Support Group |
| 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 | NPTC Officers |

**APPENDIX 2**

**Estyn Consultation Response**

**Introduction**

This report has been prepared by His Majesty’s Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales. Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals. Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer.

**Summary/ Conclusion**

The proposal is by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. It is to establish a specialist provision for a maximum of 16 primary age pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) at Blaenhonddan Primary School. If successful, the proposal would come into effect during the spring term of 2024.

It is Estyn’s view that this proposal is likely to have a positive impact on the standard of education provision, especially for pupils with ASD, in the area.

**Description and Benefits**

The council has provided a clear rationale for the proposal. The proposal is framed suitably within the context of the local authority’s Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP). The council has experienced a rise in the demand for provision for children with additional learning needs (ALN). The council has recently developed a worthwhile continuum of support for pupils with ASD and has increased capacity, both at primary and secondary level, at other schools in the authority. Despite this increase in provision, the high demand has led to current places being oversubscribed. This has resulted in the council funding more costly out-of-county provision for pupils with ASD.

The proposal includes an appropriate timetable outlining key dates from the consultation phase to the proposed implementation date. The proposal appears to provide effective opportunities for stakeholders, organisations and members of the public to respond. This includes meeting with the pupils, staff and governors who might be directly affected. However, it is not clear in the proposal if there will be an opportunity for parents to meet with representatives of the council to discuss the proposal.

The proposal sets out clearly the rationale used in the initial scoping exercise to establish where to base any additional primary ASD provision. The council appears to have considered an appropriate range of criteria, prioritising educational benefits, when deciding to put forward the proposal to base the provision at Blaenhonddan Primary School.

The proposal highlights suitably two key benefits, those being to increase the resource available within the local authority to meet the high demand for places for pupils with ASD and to reduce the need for pupils to access an ASD provision outside of the county borough. The proposal does not identify any foreseen disadvantages. The proposal does consider alternatives such as the status quo and basing the provision at another local school. However, there is no detailed analysis of these alternatives to explain why they have been discounted.

The council does appear to have identified appropriately the risks associated with the proposal. For example, the risk assessment considers the impact on the educational outcomes for pupils and the need for additional staff with the necessary skills and expertise. While the proposal highlights potential risks, there is a lack of detail in how the implementation of the proposal would mitigate these identified risks.

The proposal does require the construction of 2 new modular buildings to house the provision on the Blaenhonddan Primary School site. The proposal does not include sufficient information about the adaptations needed to the site overall and whether these new buildings will meet the specific needs of ASD pupils, for example their sensory needs. It is also unclear from the proposal what the impacts of these works will be on the current school population. The proposal states that the current school buildings have a maintenance backlog cost of £820,465 while the build cost of the project will be an estimated additional £745,000. It is unclear from the proposal whether the general condition of the school buildings will remain suitable in the short to medium term.

The council appears to have allocated the appropriate funds needed for the initial set-up costs from the capital programme. The proposal sets out clearly the ongoing funding arrangements from the delegated schools budget and the savings that will be made by not using out-of-county provision. The proposal would benefit from more detailed information on future funding arrangements for the school, for example whether the budget allocation for pupils admitted to the specialist provision will be greater than those in the mainstream school due to their additional learning needs and the need for additional support and resources.

Learner travel has been explored appropriately in line with the council’s Home to School Transport Policy. However, the proposal does not identify the need to consider the most appropriate modes of transport for children with ASD who would be accessing the provision.

The proposal appears to have no significant impact on any surplus places within the local authority. Indeed, the proposal will help the authority meet the increasing demand for pupils with ASD. The proposal usefully includes projected numbers for Blaenhonddan Primary School which demonstrate that there will be capacity to house the provision on the school site, while still retaining the mainstream places required.

The council’s Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) includes an objective to ensure that pupils with ALN receive linguistic equality of opportunity. While the proposal refers to the WESP, it makes no reference to how it will impact on this WESP objective. The proposal states that if a pupil’s first language is Welsh, it will ensure that the pupil has access to staff that can support them through the medium of Welsh. The proposal would benefit from more clarity on how they will enact this and whether it is a bilingual provision. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this proposal and suggests that it will not have a negative impact on any groups of people with protected characteristics. It appears that housing the specialist ASD provision in a mainstream primary school will help promote inclusion.

All 5 inspection areas were judged as good by Estyn at the time of the last inspection of Blaenhonddan Primary School in 2017. This proposal makes specific reference to the inspection report, quoting purposefully Estyn’s positive findings on the progress made by pupils with ALN at the school. However, considering that the school’s last inspection was 6 years ago, it is a concern that the proposal has no up-to-date information on the quality of provision or current standards, as identified by the local authority. While it is understandable that there is a lack of national verified data since 2020, the proposal does not provide any analysis of current pupil progress. For example, how well pupils with ALN at the school progress in relation to starting points.

The proposal suggests that there is likely to be no negative impact on staff and pupils currently based at the school and the quality of leadership is strong. The proposal outlines clearly the benefits specialist staff based at the school will bring to the wider school community. However, the proposal does not appear to have considered closely enough the staffing needs, how any additional staff will be recruited and how the impact of the increase in teaching and support staff will impact the leadership and management of the school.

The proposal appears to ensure that children with ASD will be able to access the full primary school curriculum appropriately. The proposal states the benefit of basing the provision in a mainstream setting, allowing pupils to access an appropriate mix of specialist and mainstream provision. The proposal does not consider how the school will manage how pupils with ASD will interact with their peers.