

## **Welsh Language Impact Assessment**

### **Strategic School Improvement Programme – future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley**

#### **Context**

1. This Welsh language impact assessment<sup>1</sup> has been carried out in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code.
2. Implementing the proposal will result in the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School with educational provision being made for the pupils at Ysgol Newydd Margam which will subsequently provide secondary education for the catchment of the upper Afan Valley.
3. Ysgol Newydd Margam is set to open in the autumn term 2018 and will provide secondary education for the area currently served by Dyffryn School. It is intended that pupils who would otherwise attend Cymer Afan Comprehensive School will transfer on closure in September 2019 to Ysgol Newydd Margam.
4. Both Cymer Afan Comprehensive School and Ysgol Newydd Margam are English-medium schools, as is Dyffryn School.
5. Neither the upper Afan Valley nor the area served by Ysgol Newydd Margam is an area designated by the Council in its local development plan, as Welsh language sensitive.

#### **The reasons for the proposal**

6. The Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. 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 in order to ensure future provision is sustainable.

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<sup>1</sup> First iteration: 31.10.17/rc/rvg

7. Secondary education in the upper Afan Valley is provided at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school as part of a federation of five schools, four primary and one secondary.
8. Cymer Afan Comprehensive is by any measure a small secondary school. A school with 600 pupils or fewer is generally regarded as a small secondary school. Currently, Cymer Afan Comprehensive School has 226 pupils on roll.
9. Pupil numbers are not forecasted to increase sufficiently to change its small secondary school status.
10. Cymer Afan Comprehensive school building has significant surplus places. It has capacity for approx. 640 pupils but with 226 pupils on roll it is carrying nearly 65% surplus capacity.
11. At £7,111, 'per pupil' funding at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is significantly higher (60%) than the average for the Council's schools; equal to c. £2,600 for each pupil or an additional c. £595k allocated to the schools budget share. The average for secondary sector school in Neath Port Talbot is £4,476 whilst the lowest is £3,910.
12. Cymer Afan Comprehensive School has backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to c. £3m. The site is assessed as overall condition C, with many of the building and mechanical elements are nearing the end of their life span and will require replacing within the next 2-4 years.
13. There is suitable, alternative English-medium provision available within the County Borough at Ysgol Newydd Margam, which offers a new build 21<sup>st</sup> Century school, and at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School. There is also suitable English-medium provision at Maesteg Comprehensive School.
14. The Council is proposing to make arrangements for pupils from the upper Afan Valley to receive their secondary education at Ysgol Newydd Margam, a £30m investment by the Council in a new build school with 21<sup>st</sup> century school facilities.
15. Teaching and learning opportunities are increased in new build state of the art facilities and an evaluation of a new, 21<sup>st</sup> century school build in Neath Port Talbot has shown high

levels of satisfaction and support from the pupils, their parents and stakeholders.

### **Welsh language impacts associated with the proposal**

16. The Council recognises that language and culture are essential parts of an individual's identity and is committed to promoting and celebrating the Welsh language and culture in a pro-active and inclusive way. The Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) details how it intends to support and further develop Welsh language education in schools.
17. For children from non-Welsh-speaking backgrounds whose initial and main contact with Welsh is through school, exposure to education through Welsh language provision improves understanding and fluency.
18. Primary education through the medium of Welsh is available at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Rhosafan, the Welsh-medium school serving the catchment area of the upper Afan Valley. Secondary Welsh-medium education will be available at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera –Bro Dur (Bro Dur campus) which opens in September 2018.
19. The commitment to the Welsh–medium schools is strong and the proposal should not impact upon the numbers seeking to be educated through the medium of Welsh.

### **Welsh language provision at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School**

20. At Cymer Afan Comprehensive School the Welsh dimension is strongly supported. There are many valuable opportunities provided to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the history, culture and industry of Wales.
21. Estyn report that 'Extra-curricular activities such as an exchange visit to a neighbouring Welsh-medium school and the introduction of the 'Dreigiau' group are positive features in developing pupils' use of Welsh outside of the Welsh classroom.'

22. In Welsh at key stage 3, performance has improved steadily over recent years and compares favourably with that in similar schools.
23. All pupils follow an appropriate course in Welsh in key stage 4, and a majority of pupils gain a qualification in Welsh at GCSE.
24. In a few lessons, other than Welsh, pupils use the language well to ask basic questions.
25. Estyn report that teachers have received valuable support in using Welsh during their lessons and around the school.
26. Ysgol Newydd Margam is set to open in the autumn term 2018 and will provide secondary English-medium education for the area served by Dyffryn School which will close in 2018. In this regard, although Ysgol Newydd Margam will be a new school it will serve an established pupil base and will build on the strengths of the school it is replacing, Dyffryn School.
27. Current provision for the Welsh language at Dyffryn School sees almost all Year 10 pupils follow the full GCSE course in Welsh second language, with many pupils following the course at the higher level. This was reported by Estyn to be strength of the school, who also noted that the school has been effective in promoting positive attitudes to the learning of Welsh.
28. Estyn also report the following
  - At Dyffryn School pupils' performance in Welsh second language at key stage 3 was better than that in similar schools (2013). At key stage 4 a majority of pupils followed the full-course GCSE Welsh second language and achieved a level 2 qualification (2013). This is well above the national average. Performance in the short course was close to the national average.
  - From 2013, almost all Year 10 pupils follow the full GCSE course in Welsh second language, with many pupils following the course at the higher level. This is a significant strength. With the help of Year 9 pupil 'Welsh ambassadors', the school has been effective in promoting positive attitudes to the learning of Welsh.

29. The school is working towards improving pupils' Welsh language skills beyond formal Welsh lessons, and to encourage greater pupil self-confidence when using the language.

### **Welsh language impact assessment**

30. Against this background and combined with the advantages of a larger pupil cohort where there will be more opportunities to develop Welsh language skills, transfer to Ysgol Newydd Margam should result in a positive impact on Welsh language development.
31. As such, the Council is satisfied that provision for Welsh language will be at least comparable with the provision currently offered at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School.