

## **Estyn's response to the proposal to establish a new Primary School through the amalgamation of Llancaeath Junior School and Llanfabon Infants School, Caerphilly.**

### **Introduction**

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.

### **Summary/ Conclusion**

The proposals are likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area.

### **Description and benefits**

The proposer has given a clear rationale for the proposal, which includes a detailed description of the project and a projected timetable for completion. The proposal is that the council will work with the contractor to ensure there would be minimal disruption to the daily operations of the existing school cohort, on the Llanfabon Infant School site. There are no interim arrangements proposed for the Llancaeath Junior School as the project will have no impact on the existing provision.

The proposer appears to have set out clearly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo. The two schools concerned currently work closely together. The proposer has identified suitable risks associated with the proposal, for example the impact on other neighbouring schools, and has identified possible ways to manage the risk, for example by phasing in an admission number of 40.

The proposer has considered using the Llancaeath Junior School site, in place of the Llanfabon Infant School site, but has discounted this alternative because of the likely limited vehicular access, and the apparent worthwhile opportunities for extended school provision (community use and wraparound childcare) at the larger of the two sites. Using the Llanfabon Infant School site appears to be a sensible solution.

The proposer has considered the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements and on the accessibility of provision. The proposer has identified limited impact on travel as the two sites are within 0.5 miles of each other, and a likely reduction in traffic in the locality between the two sites as siblings will be on the same site. The new build is proposed to be DDA compliant, which will improve access for children and adults with a disability. In addition, the proposer has undertaken initial discussions to determine the viability of using adjacent redundant community land to provide increased drop off and parking provision, which is currently unavailable on the junior school site. This seems a pragmatic consideration.

The proposal appears to address suitably the need to reduce the current surplus places, especially in the junior school, while catering for enough headroom overall to provide for the predicted housing development and likely increased pupil numbers in the locality over the foreseeable future.

The proposal appears to take enough account of the likely impact on Welsh medium provision within the local authority. It is likely that the proposal would have minimal impact on the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

Llancaeath Junior School and Llanfabon Infants School have been identified as one of the priority projects in the 21st Century Schools Band B programme. However, the proposer has not identified the specific, likely financial costs of the proposal or any potential savings.

### **Educational aspects of the proposal**

The proposer has considered the impact of the proposals on the quality and standards in education, including the likely positive impact of a new building and amalgamated school on pupil wellbeing and the systems for care, support and guidance. The proposal takes account of the likely positive benefits of increased capacity for support and improvement due to a wider pool of staff in a bigger school. The proposal identifies the likely increased opportunities for staff to progress their careers in a larger school setting. The proposal also considers the likely benefits of wrap around childcare on site and the transition from an onsite nursery and childcare setting into the school. These proposals seem realistic and worthwhile.

The proposal takes suitable account of the most recent Estyn reports for each of the two schools, including recent improvements since the core inspection at Llanfabon Infants School. It identifies a likely positive impact to ensure delivery of the full curriculum provision at the foundation phase and key stage 2. However, the proposal does not appear to take account of the LA/consortium view on the quality of leadership and management at the schools.

It is not clear from the proposal whether the intention is for the governing body to become a single entity, or whether a federation arrangement would continue. It may be pragmatic to set out intentions to support a smooth transition and to ensure that everyone understands how the governance arrangement will work in practice, for example with reference to staffing decisions and potential communications with parents.

The proposal does not consider the impact of the proposals on children with Special Educational Needs, although it does broadly consider the likely positive impact of the new and improved provision on pupils' wellbeing, including for vulnerable pupils.