

Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Review

Consultation Report

Lewis Girls school and Lewis School Pengam



Proposal : **Close Lewis Girls school and make a regulated alteration to Lewis Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.**

The Lewis Girls School site would be retained as a provision to Lewis School Pengam to manage the transition over a number of years. (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe).

Formal Consultation Period : 3rd June 2024 – 15th July 2024

This report is published in line with the requirements of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018.



Richard Edmunds

Corporate Director for
Education and Corporate
Services

FOREWORD

Caerphilly County Borough Council has embarked upon an exciting but challenging journey of improvement and change. We have bold ambitions to provide every learner with the best life chances and we are committed to doing this through the provision of high quality teaching, learning and leadership across our school settings as part of our Education Strategy – Pursuing Excellence Together.

Caerphilly's Cabinet established a Board in 2019 to develop recommendations for change in relation to Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places across Caerphilly.

The Board consisted of a wide range of stakeholders including Head Teachers, College Representatives, Scrutiny Members, Governor Representatives, TU Representatives, EAS representatives and Local Education Authority Officers.

The Board, at its meeting of February 6th 2024, resolved unanimously to support the proposal to formally consult stakeholders with a view to:

- (1) moving from Single Sex provision to co-education in the Upper Rhymney Valley
- (2) locating Lewis catchment pupils at the Lewis School Pengam site, while retaining the Lewis Girls School site to manage the transition over a number of years (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe).

The Council's Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee then met to consider the report and the proposals on the 20th March 2024. The Committee noted the unanimous support from the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board and then commented and scrutinised proposals ahead of their onward consideration at Cabinet.

Cabinet, at its meeting on the 3rd April, then agreed the recommendation to move to consultation.

As part of this proposal a consultation exercise has been carried out in line with the requirements of the School Organisation Code 2018. All stakeholders have had the opportunity to participate and make comments.

This Consultation Report has been produced to summarise the emerging themes raised by consultees during the consultation period including Estyn's feedback. It aims to provide a balanced, transparent document to support Cabinet in deciding whether to progress with the proposal, make changes or not to progress.

I hope you find this document informative as a reflection of the activities undertaken to date and an insight into the journey we are on, shaping delivery and placing learning provision at the heart of our communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Executive Summary ➤ Statutory Obligations ➤ Purpose of the Consultation Report 	
Proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What are we proposing to do? ➤ What is driving this proposal? ➤ Options Appraisal ➤ Benefits and Disbenefits 	
The Consultation Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation Process ➤ Stakeholder Engagement ➤ Consultation Information ➤ Response Methods 	
Consultation Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation Responses ➤ Scrutiny Committee Response ➤ Estyn's Response (summary) 	
Learner Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School Council / Pupil Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schools directly affected by Proposal ○ Other schools identified as being affected 	
Other Considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation Clarification ➤ Reasonable Alternatives Identified 	
Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recommendation ➤ Decision Making ➤ Reporting, Notification and Publishing of Information 	
Supporting Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Annex 1: Key Consultation Documents ➤ Annex 2: Estyn's Response (Full version) 	

This document is available in Welsh and English. Information can also be made available in other formats, languages and in hard copy on request. Please contact us on 01443 864817 21stCenturySchools@caerphilly.gov.uk to arrange this.



INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

Schools in Wales need to be in good condition and suitable for the delivery of education. In some cases, schools can be modernised, repaired, refurbished, extended, or partially rebuilt to meet the standards needed for contemporary teaching and learning. However, some existing schools are no longer in the right place and in such cases, we might propose new schools or changes to existing schools.

Caerphilly County Borough Council aspires to continue to raise school standards and improve the quality of the learning environment to create fit-for-purpose 21st century schools and give every child in Caerphilly the best possible start in life.

For proposals relating to schools, the School Organisation Code 2018, provides clear statutory guidance as to the processes that need to be adhered to. Undertaking a consultation exercise is one of the initial stages of progressing any proposal and is subject to Welsh Government and Cabinet approval.

From the 3rd June 2024 to the 15th July 2024 a consultation exercise was undertaken.

The purpose of the consultation was to gain views on the proposal to close Lewis Girls school and make a regulated alteration to Lewis Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.

The Lewis Girls School site would be retained as a provision to Lewis School Pengam to manage the transition over a number of years. (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe).

This Consultation Report is the prescribed method as outlined by the School Organisation Code 2018 for reflection, review and assessment to provide Cabinet with the information to make an informed decision as to whether to proceed with the proposal to the next stage, amend the proposal taking into account further information that has come forward through the consultation process or to close this proposal with no further actions taken.

The Report is divided into several sections with the aim to:

- Outline the consultation processes undertaken
- Provide clarification in relation to the information provided and consultee engagement
- Summarise each of the issues raised by consultees
- Set out Estyn's response to the consultation in full
- Respond to issues raised by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons

Statutory Obligations

This report is published in line with the requirements of the [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) and the [School Organisation Code 2018](#).

The Consultation report will be published on the Caerphilly Sustainable Communities for Learning website with hardcopies available on request. All information is published in Welsh and English. In addition, a child friendly summary has also been produced to ensure information is provided in an accessible format for any children and young people affected by the proposals.

Purpose of the Consultation Report

The publication of this Consultation Report discharges the Council of its duty under the School Organisation Code 2018.

The consultation period represented an opportunity for people to learn about the proposal, ask questions and make comments. Any negative responses made during the consultation period were not counted as objections to the proposal but as adverse comments.

Objections to a proposal can only be registered after the publication of a statutory notice.

The Consultation Report outlines the processes followed, provides clarity on the issues and comments received from consultees, ensures that the views of children and young people affected by the proposal are expressed and ultimately, provides Cabinet with the necessary information to take one of the following decisions:

- Proceed with the proposal
- Make changes to the proposal
- Not to proceed with the proposal

Full details of the decision making process and the stages of the proposal as outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 have been published as part of the initial Consultation Document and is publicly available via the Council's website with hardcopies made available on request.

PROPOSAL

What are we proposing to do?

We are proposing to:

- **Close Lewis Girls school and make a regulated alteration to Lewis School Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.**

The Lewis Girls School site would be retained as a provision to Lewis School Pengam to manage the transition over a number of years. (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe).

The proposed pupil transition will be phased as follows:

September 2025 pupils would attend settings as follows

Year 7 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis Girls School site

Year 8 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis Girls School site

Year 9 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis School Pengam site

Year 10 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis School Pengam site

Year 11 - retain single sex, pupils to remain either at Lewis Girls School or Lewis School Pengam

Year 12 - As now, pupils to attend Upper Rhymney Valley consortia lessons where they are offered

Year 13 - As now, pupils to attend Upper Rhymney Valley consortia lessons where they are offered

September 2026 pupils would attend settings as follows

Year 7 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis Girls School site

Year 8 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis Girls School site

Year 9 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis School Pengam site

Year 10 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis School Pengam site

Year 11 - all pupils (Girls and Boys) Lewis School Pengam site

Year 12 - As now, pupils to attend Upper Rhymney Valley consortia lessons where they are offered

Year 13 - As now, pupils to attend Upper Rhymney Valley consortia lessons where they are offered

September 2027 pupils would attend settings as follows

All pupils (Girls and Boys) 7-13 Lewis School Pengam site

This phased approach is intended to minimise disruption and any potentially negative impact on exam pupils, whilst enabling staff and pupils to be prepared for integration over an appropriate timeframe.



What is driving this proposal?

Proposals have been prioritised based on a number of factors including building condition, pupil projection and local and national drivers, however, the delivery of the curriculum and the Educational agenda remains at the core.

Through previous discussions in 2021, the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board had reached an informal consensus that co-education would be the way forward in the Upper Rhymney Valley (URV).

Having gained Board consensus at that time, Local Education Authority (LEA) officers engaged directly with the four URV Secondary Head Teachers as educational experts to consider this position further.

The URV Head Teachers agreed the following wording to reflect their position on Single Sex provision as well as the potential benefit of moving toward co-education across the Lewis Schools:

“We explore ways in which families can be brought together and re-united and avoid the division that some experience when, due to the current arrangement of schools, children from the same family are split apart at age 11”.

The Board acknowledged that Lewis School Pengam and Lewis Girls School are the last remaining local authority maintained single sex schools in Wales. Moving away from single sex toward co-education has been under consideration by the Local Authority and the Schools over many years.

Board Members also received information in relation to the levels of surplus places at the Lewis Schools with Lewis Girls School at circa 38% and Lewis School Pengam at circa 42%, as at January 2024. At its last LEA Inspection in 2012 Estyn concluded that the authority had not made enough progress in respect of the removal of surplus capacity from its secondary schools.

Options Appraisal

The planning and development of effective school organisation proposals is crucial to the Welsh Government's goal of transforming education in Wales and providing better educational outcomes with a commitment to increase school effectiveness, and narrow inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals.

An options appraisal provides the opportunity to help councils make an informed and evidence based decision on how to deliver services. It does this by considering the relative advantages and disadvantages of a number of different delivery model options (including the current way in which the service is delivered).

The methodology helps decision makers to consider the:

- Desirability - the degree to which each option meets the strategic objectives and priorities of stakeholders
- Viability - the degree to which each option is financially viable and sustainable
- Feasibility - the degree to which each option can be implemented

As part of outlining the current proposal, an options appraisal was undertaken.

The options appraisal stage allowed for a number of different delivery model options to be explored and evaluated against a set of agreed criteria, leading to the selection of the preferred option.

Each option was evaluated against the investment objectives outlined in the Consultation Document and the extent to which it met the Critical Success Factors. This stage was an important part of the process, to raise important questions at an early stage and assist in developing proposals.

This resulted in options either being discounted, carried forward for further consideration in the short list with an eventual option identified as a preferred way forward. It is the option identified as the preferred way forward upon which the consultation exercise was based as all other options have been discounted at this point.

The Board, at its meeting of February 6th 2024, resolved unanimously to support the proposal to formally consult stakeholders with a view to:

- (1) moving from Single Sex provision to co-education in the Upper Rhymney Valley
- (2) locating Lewis catchment pupils at the Lewis School Pengam site, while retaining the Lewis Girls School site to manage the transition over a number of years (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe).

The Council's Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee then met to consider the report and the proposals on the 20th March 2024. The Committee noted the unanimous support from the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board and then commented and scrutinised proposals ahead of their onward consideration at Cabinet.

Cabinet, at its meeting on the 3rd April, then agreed the recommendation to move to consultation.

Benefits and Disbenefits

There are common challenges faced by all Local Authorities when adopting new proposals. The vast majority of Council policies are delivered through projects and programmes of various forms. It is therefore vital that projects are delivered successfully in order to realise their intended benefits for citizens.

Evidence shows that the best way to ensure successful delivery is by setting up projects correctly in the first place. The most common causes of failure, among others are a lack of clear objectives, insufficient resources and over-ambitious cost and schedule that impact on the level and amount of benefit that can be realised and can be avoided if tackled in a project's early stages.

As part of the development of the proposal, a number of benefits and disbenefits were identified as outlined in the Consultation Document. The consultation process was an opportunity to consult with relevant stakeholders to understand what they see as positive outcomes and what negative consequences may be delivered.

The Council recognises that people have different needs, requirements and goals and we will work actively against all forms of discrimination by promoting good relations and mutual respect within and between our communities. An Integrated Impact Assessment was carried out to initiate discussion and invite comments as to whether the principles for the proposal are supported.

All comments have been recorded and Cabinet members will be provided with copies of all the responses received within the consultation period and in their original format as part of the decision making process.



CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultation Process

The consultation process has followed the Welsh Government guidelines as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018.

Stakeholder Engagement

Through [TeamCaerphilly - Better Together](#), the Council is committed to ensuring high quality, citizen focused services for the communities that comprise our county borough. In future-proofing public services, we recognise the need to ensure effective engagement which is central to our decision making - [Read more about our approach to Consultation and Engagement here](#)

For this proposal, our consultation process must follow the Welsh Government Statutory guidance as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018.

The following consultees were advised of our proposals by letter or email:

Table 2: Consultee List	
Pupils and Pupil Councils*	Welsh Ministers
Parents, prospective parents, guardians and carers*	Assembly Members and Members of Parliament representing the area served *
Headteacher, Staff and Governing bodies*	Local CCBC Members
Directors of Education for Neighbouring Authorities	Local Town and Community Councils
Teaching and Support Staff Associations	Estyn
Parent Network	Welsh Education Forum
Diocesan Directors / Boards of Education	South East Wales Consortium (EAS)
Gwent and South Wales Police and Crime Commissioners	South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA)
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership	Mudiad Meithrin, Menter Iaith and voluntary nursery providers

**of schools directly or likely to be affected by the proposal only*

Consultation Information

The School Organisation Code 2018 states that when undertaking a consultation process in connection with a school proposal, the Council must publish information to enable transparent, balanced and open decision making.

The consultation document must be published on a school day and consultees must be given at least 42 days to respond to the document, with at least 20 of these being school days as defined by Section 579 of the Education Act 1996. The consultation period opened on Monday 3rd June 2024 (a school day) and concluded at midnight on Monday 15th July 2024

As part of this proposal, the following documentation was produced:

- Consultation Notification Letter
- Consultation Document
- Child Friendly Summary Presentation
- Consultation Response Form
- Integrated Impact Assessment

All documentation was published in Welsh and English, complying with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. Information was also available in other languages and formats on request, however, no such requests were received as part of this process.

Hardcopies of the documentation were issued to the schools directly affected by the proposal including the child friendly summary for discussion with the pupils.

In addition to notifying the consultees in writing of the proposal, distribution of information was supported via the school text messaging service direct to parents and staff.

A child friendly consultation summary was also produced to support the consultation process with pupils of the affected schools to present information in a manner relevant to their likely understanding, allowing them to participate in the consultation process and reach an informed opinion. In addition to this documentation, local teaching staff provided assistance to children and young people who wished to submit a consultation response in their preferred format and language.

The Council's Social media channels were also utilised.

Response Methods

As outlined in the Consultation Document, anyone wishing to comment in relation to the proposal could do so in writing by:

- Completing the online response form on the Council's website
- Completing a response pro forma and posting it to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team at Caerphilly
- Emailing comments to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team at Caerphilly

Pupils of the schools directly affected by the proposal were also given the opportunity to engage in the process through focused 'Pupil Voice' sessions.

The response forms were designed in such a way as to capture the relevant information required to discharge the Council's obligations required under the School Organisation Code for undertaking a consultation linked to the regulated alteration of a maintained school.

This consultation was undertaken to capture the views of consultees in relation to the proposal. These views have been incorporated into this document, which will be published and considered by Cabinet when determining whether to proceed to Statutory notice stage.



CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultation Responses

Overall a total of 591 responses were received during the consultation process.

Please note: The figure above and the data reported on for Questions 1 to 7 does not include the responses received by Estyn, Scrutiny or captured as part of any pupil engagement sessions. These are outlined in more detail later in this document.

Of the prescribed methods for providing a response during the consultation period:

- 576 responses received via Online Survey
- 15 responses received via email
- 0 responses received via post

0 responses of the 591 (0%) were returned in the medium of Welsh.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Team received no requests for the documentation to be provided in any additional format or languages to those already available.

QUESTION 1

The consultees were provided an overview of the proposal and asked to confirm the proposal they were responding to as part of the process.

QUESTION 2

The consultees were asked to identify a category that best described them in relation to the proposal for the school affected. The options provided were selected to demonstrate that the key consultee groups as outlined in the School Organisation Code had been engaged with. These included, Parent, Staff Member, School Governor, Elected Member, Local Resident, Group and Other.

Of those who responded, the following categories were selected:

48% (282) Pupil	27% (159) Parents	13% (77) Staff Members	2% (11) School Governor / Elected Members	5% (29) Local Resident	1% (6) Groups	5% (27) Other
-----------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------------	--	---------------------------------	---------------------	---------------------

For those selecting 'other', the opportunity was given to elaborate further as they felt appropriate.

All comments have been recorded and Cabinet members will be provided with copies of all the responses received within the consultation period and in their original format as part of the decision making process.

QUESTIONS 3 TO 7

As part of the consultation process, consultees were asked to provide basic contact information, including their name, address and email. This psychographic data was collected in order to help

paint a picture of the consultee and enable the Sustainable Communities for Learning team to understand trends in response data and response groupings that would assist in compiling this Consultation Report.

As information can be collected for many purposes, the Caerphilly County Borough Council's privacy notice for consultations/surveys was referenced, which outlined the purpose and legal basis for collecting the information, data usage and data retention periods.

For the purposes of this Consultation Report, Cabinet will be provided with a separate digest of all the consultation comments received. Please note that comments that are considered to be offensive or compromise anonymity have been edited or removed.

QUESTION 8

As part of our duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, consultees must be given the option to request notification as to the publication of this Consultation Report. Contact information has been collected to this end and the preferred method for communication will be notification via email if this information has been made available by the respondent.



463 out of the 591 respondents have requested notification. These individuals have been added to the notification list and will be contacted concurrently with stakeholders when this document is made publicly available through the Council's website. Hardcopies of the documentation will be made available on request.

QUESTION 9

Consultees can submit their views either in favour of or against the proposals.

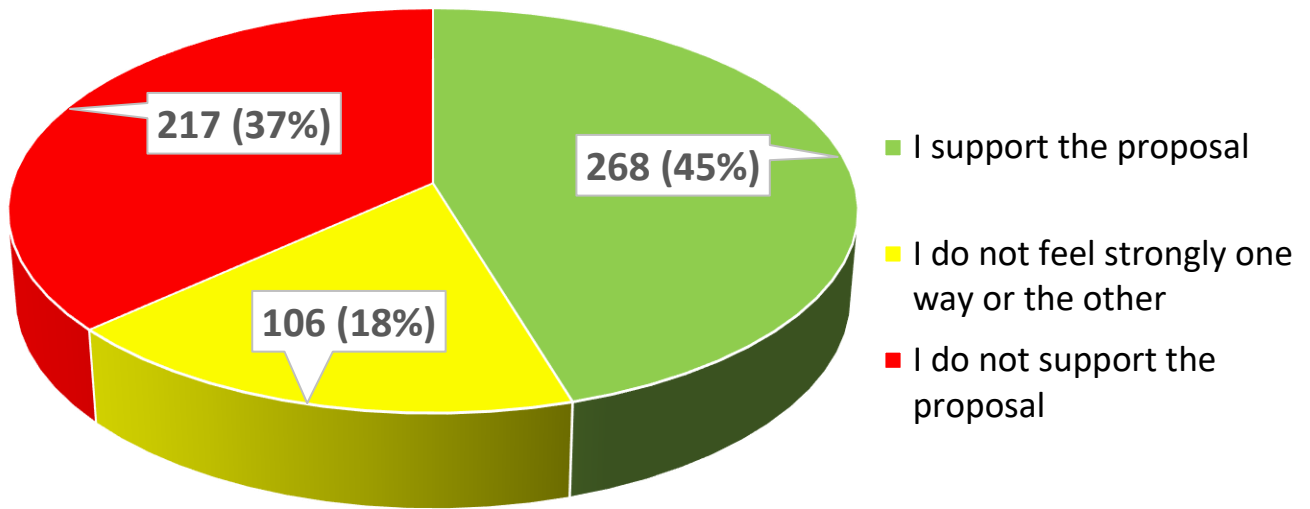
Consultees were asked to indicate which of the following statements most accurately reflected their views about the proposal. Consultees were reminded to read the consultation documentation prior to providing any responses during this consultation exercise and that unfavourable comments made during the consultation period will not be treated as objections at this stage.

The options available were:

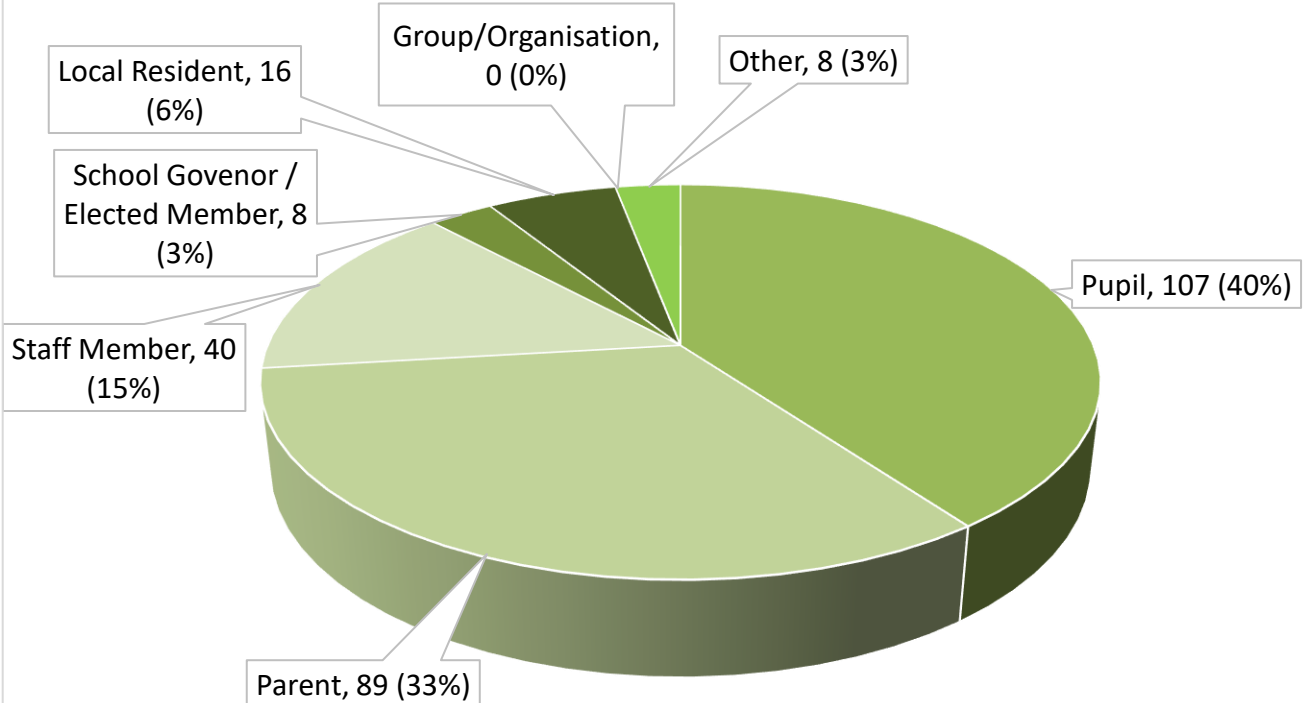
- I support the proposal
- I do not feel strongly one way or the other
- I do not support the proposal

Of the 591 responses returned, 268 (45%) support the proposal, 217 (37%) do not support it, 106 (18%) either didn't feel strongly either way or failed to select an option.

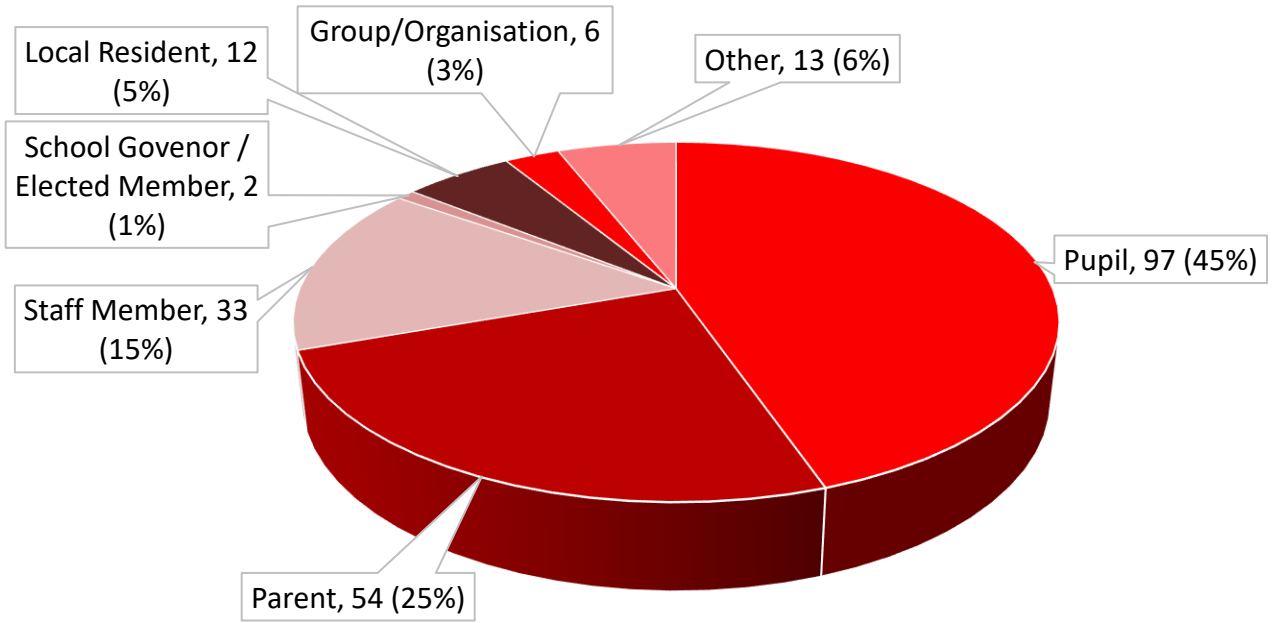
Overall Consultee Responses (%)



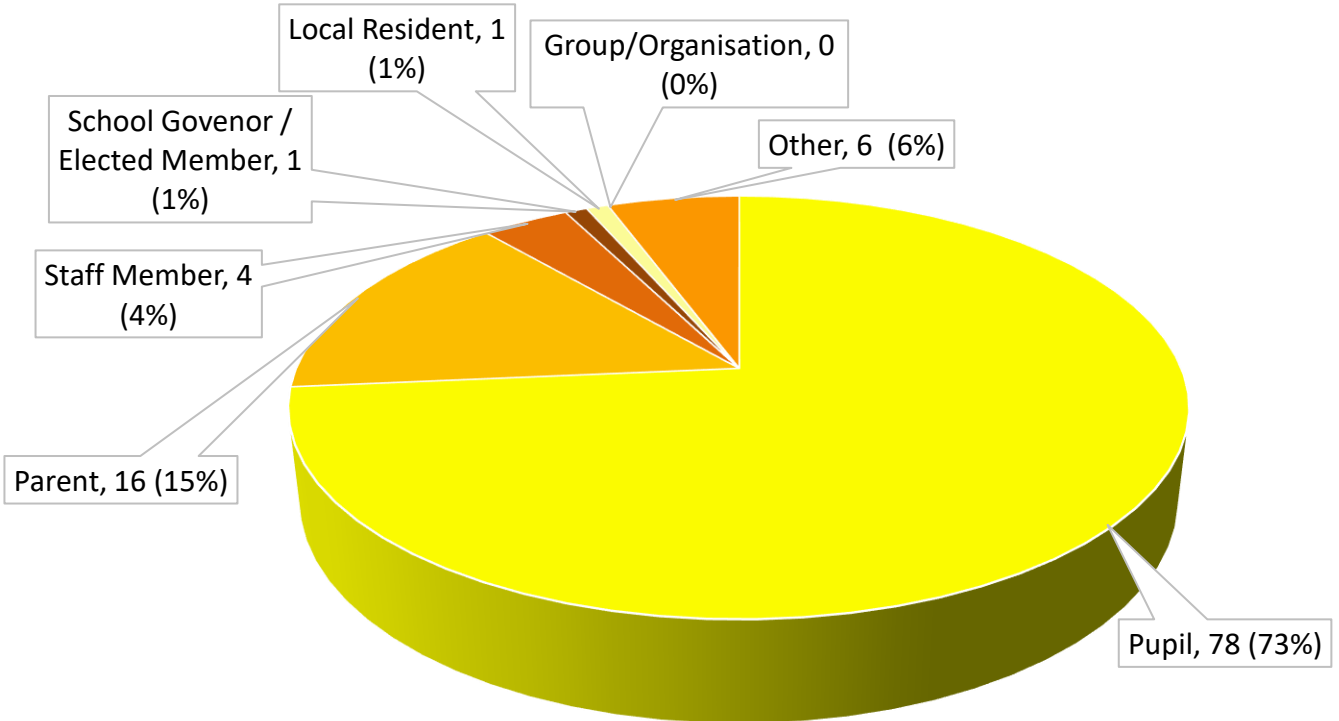
"I support the proposal" 45% (268) of overall responses broken down by category



"I do not support the proposal"
37% (217) of overall responses broken down by category



"I do not feel strongly one way or the other"
18% (106) of overall responses broken down by category



It is prudent to bring to the attention of readers that the commentary provided as part of Questions 10 to 12 may offer additional insight into the views of the consultees and that the response provided to Question 9 should not be considered in isolation, for example where there are duplicate responses or multiple responses from a single household.

QUESTIONS 10 to 12

This was a free text box, enabling consultees to provide additional comments as to why they supported or did not support the proposal as outlined in the Consultation Document, or to suggest changes or alternative options that could improve the proposal.

All comments received have been read and analysed.

General themes that emerged from the consultation, including those raised at Scrutiny Committee:

- Co-Education versus Tradition of Single Sex
- Educational Attainment, Pupil Transition, Equalities, Diversity and wellbeing
- Staffing Implications and Impact
- Community Impact on Ystrad Mynach Town, Traffic, Travel and Transportation
- Building Condition/Suitability, Surplus Places, Value for Money and Disposal
- Phased Approach and Timelines

These themes are outlined in more detail in the section on 'Consultation Clarification'.

QUESTIONS 13 to 18

In line with the Caerphilly County Borough Council's Strategic Equality Plan and the Consultation and Monitoring Guidance 2016 document, a reduced version of the Equalities and Monitoring questionnaire was included as part of the consultation response to support effective planning and to ensure that a representative sample was achieved to identify any equality issues.

From the responses received, of those that completed the Equalities monitoring section:

I am ...			
Female	439	Prefer to self describe	4
Male	121	Prefer not to say	27

Age			
Under 16	285	40-65	125
16-25	13	Over 65	5
26-39	73	Prefer not to say	90

Disability			
Yes	33	No	501
Prefer not to say	57		

Preferred Language			
English	556	Other	3
Welsh	4	Prefer not to say	28

QUESTIONS 19 to 20

We have to make sure that the Welsh Language is treated in the same way as the English language.

Respondents were given the opportunity to make suggestions on how we can increase opportunities for people to use or access services in Welsh. In addition, respondents were able to comment on how the proposal could be changed to have (more of) a positive impact on the Welsh language.

Responses included:

- More Welsh lessons and Welsh after school activities
- More translations from English to Welsh around schools
- Teachers using more Welsh
- Start courses at a younger age and make them more 'fun'
- Welsh days about Language and Culture
- Adult Welsh lessons and Free courses
- Rename schools with a Welsh Language name

QUESTION 21

In relation to equalities implications that respondents highlighted the following areas were included:

- Gender
- Sexuality
- Disability
- Mental health

Scrutiny Response

The Council's Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee is a consultee for any policy or service developments in relation to Education within the Borough.

A Multi-Locational meeting (Penallta House & MS Teams) took place on Tuesday 4th June 2024 at 5.30pm.

As part of this meeting, the consultation in respect of the proposal was discussed as agenda item 5.

All consultation documentation was made available to members as part of the agenda reports pack and officers linked to the proposal were available to take questions. Any queries raised have been acknowledged and included as part of the themes analysis.

A recording of the session is available to view:

[Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting](#)

Estyn's Response

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018, the Council, as the proposers, is required to send a notification with regards to the consultation to Estyn.

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales and their vision is to improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for all learners in Wales. 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. The full response from Estyn is included as Annex 2 at the end of this document. However, in summary:

“Overall, the proposals are likely to maintain the standard of education provision in the area. This is because the current arrangements are inefficient, with more than 900 surplus places between the two schools and combining the two schools could allow the local authority to target resources more effectively. However, the consultation document does not contain sufficient detail about a number of important aspects of the proposal.”

The Council acknowledges Estyn’s response.



LEARNER VOICE

Young people have a right to act to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be heard and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

School Council / Pupil Engagement

The Council acknowledged that the voice of young people is about involving them as active participants in the development, delivery, management and improvement of their educational and student experience and needs to be at the heart of planning, provision and evaluation.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Team in Caerphilly ensure that when bringing forward any proposal, suitable arrangements are made to consult and involve pupils throughout the process with the support of the local teaching teams.

Due to the nature of the proposal, a mixture of methods was utilised:

- 1) A child friendly consultation summary was produced to support the consultation process with pupils
- 2) Supported interactive sessions between classes and teachers were undertaken at Secondary and Primary level to present information in a manner relevant to their likely understanding, allowing them to participate in the consultation process and reach an informed opinion
- 3) Special School Council sessions were undertaken with Lewis Girls School and Lewis School Pengam and formal responses submitted
- 4) Pupils were encouraged to respond individually, as demonstrated by the pupil category accounting for 48% (282 respondents) of the overall responses received via the online proforma, email or letter route.

➤ Schools directly affected by the proposal

The proposal directly impacts on pupils at Lewis Girls School and Lewis School Pengam. The School Councils, Eco Councils and wider pupil cohorts were encouraged to participate in the

consultation process through a series of supported interactive sessions and submission of individual response.

The pupils were asked:

- Do you agree with what we are looking to do?
- Do you have any alternative options that could improve this proposal?
- Do you have any thoughts on how this proposal can be changed to have (more of) a positive impact on the Welsh Language?
- Do you have any other ideas you'd like us to think about?

In both schools, there was a mixture of feeling towards the proposal.

It should be noted that the full responses will be provided to Cabinet.

A sample of the responses received is shown below.

Lewis Girls School - School Council

"It is our belief that the proposal would have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the students of both schools, but in particular for the pupils of Lewis Girls, as they will feel like they do not belong in the school, as well as being faced with many new challenges of co-education school. As a result, there will need to be a large emphasis placed on wellbeing, and support put in place to effectively help every single student, making sure that no student feels like they are not able to speak out when something is wrong, and that everyone has support."

Lewis Girls School – Year 9 Pupil

"Feel like it is time to merge, however I feel bad for the people who's school experience has been interfered with."

Lewis Girls School – Year 7 Pupil

"New changes, new people, new sites, new experiences."

Lewis School Pengam – School Council

"There was a unanimous view that a discussion of the future of the schools was overdue and it was vitally important that the views of the pupils attending the school were heard and acknowledged...three council members had a neutral opinion, (neither in favour nor opposed) as older pupils they felt the proposal would have minimal impact on them. All other pupils from lower and middle school year group councils were in unanimous support."

Lewis School Pengam -Year 7 Pupil

"I'm ok with the idea because it will be like primary school."

Lewis School Pengam -Year 7 Pupil

"Because it will be easy for the parents to buy uniform for two kids and easy to do transport"

Other Schools identified as being affected

The Head Teachers of other local schools in the area were contacted during the consultation period whereby the schools were invited to provide their responses as part of the consultation process. These being Coedybrain Primary, Derwendeg Primary, Glyngaer Primary, Greenhill Primary, Hengoed Primary, Llancaeath Junior Junior School, Llanfabon Infant School, Maescywmmmer Primary, Tiryberth Primary, Ystrad Mynach Primary.

Sample Response:

Pupil Voice

Proposal to close Lewis Girls School and change Lewis School Pengam to co-education from September 2025

I think it would be a good do to us being in the same school for seven years and it would be hard to split us

They should agree by making it mixed

In my opinion, Lewis girls should not shut down because I like the way Lewis girls are run now.

I think its fair to stick with the same teachers around Lewis Boys through the years

It is better if they drop their children at the same time so it does not take long to drop both of them off

i think its a good idea because everybody can stay together in one school.

I would no like to change the schools because I already know my way around the school and I know all the teachers.

We think its fair because if we shut down Lewis Girls then we can be with the boys and if we dont maybe we will feel lonely if you are only friends with boys!

In my opinion, Lewis Girls should not shut down because us having a different schools makes us unique. I

I think that it is a good idea because if you have friends that are boys you will be split do to the separate school

We don't its fair that they separate us because what if we have a boy thats our friend!

I think it is a good idea because we have been a mixed school all of our lives and its not fair if we split up!

I think that if they make us move schools it would be very chaotic because the girls would have already been in Lewis girls for 2 years and all of us wouldnt know where to go.

I this is a good idea because most children might want to see there brothers and sisters in school time.

In my opinion I think that Lewis Girls and Lewis Boys should not merge because it would be easier for Boys to be in 1 school and Girls to be in another school

In my opinion, I think that this is a good idea because most children would rather be in a mixed gender school than an all girls or all boys school and we have been together for years.

I think it's a good idea because it is better for parents if they have a boy and a girl to drop them off at the same time

I think that this is a good idea because most children want to be in a mixed gender school and not an all girls or boys school. We have also been together for years now.

In my opinion I think that Lewis girls and Lewis boys should just stay as separated schools because it would be easier than all the Lewis girls pupils going to the Lewis boys school

I think its fair because we have all been together our whole lives.

I think in my opinion we should merge Lewis boys and Lewis earlier so we can get to know each other more:

I agree with the proposal because I can see my friends again

I think it is a good idea because if we merge previously separated family's can reunite. In addition we will have a larger group of people we already know.

I would not like because I think it is good enough with just only the boys.

I think that it is ok because we have been in a mixed school since we was little.

Where information has been submitted, responses are included in full as part of the separate annex available to Cabinet.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Consultation Clarification

When analysing all consultation response comments received as part of the consultation period, a number of emerging themes became evident.

To assist Cabinet in the decision making process, the following information is provided by Council Officers involved in the formulation of the proposal by means of response for clarification with supporting reasons.

➤ **Co-Education versus Tradition of Single Sex**

There was a mixed response from consultees around the benefits of Co-Education versus the traditional Single Sex approach. Whilst there was a general consensus that consulting on Coeducation was long overdue and of how it would bring us line with all the other schools in Wales, some felt the current single sex arrangement was working well, held historic significance and therefore should remain offering a unique element of choice to parents and pupils in the Borough, whilst others felt it was outdated and needed to change as this is how we live and work in society and also not reflecting the arrangement at Primary level.

The Council welcomed the range of responses and fully acknowledges that there are benefits and disadvantages to both retaining the status quo and moving to a new coeducational arrangement. It should however be noted that this recommendation has come because of extensive analysis and consideration of a number of critical factors over a number of years by the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board. As outlined in the Consultation Document, this Board consists of a wide range of stakeholders, including those fully immersed in delivering the curriculum directly at the schools.

➤ **Educational Attainment, Pupil Transition, Equalities, Diversity and Wellbeing**

A selection of consultees noted the perception that girls are the high achievers and that amalgamating with the boys school would jeopardise this. Other consultees felt this proposal may help increase attainment across the board and increase opportunities for all pupils, especially across the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines.

As outlined in the Consultation Document, both schools have strengths that complement each other and there is already effective collaboration in regard to post 16 provision and the sharing of professional learning. Estyn also supports the view that *“the proposals are likely to maintain the standard of education provision in the area. This is because the current arrangements are inefficient, with more than 900 surplus places between the two schools and combining the two schools could allow the local authority to target resources more effectively.”*

The transition of pupils as outlined in the Consultation Document did raise a number of responses. There were comments made that pupils are mixed in primary but are expected to split at Secondary, which is a logistical nightmare for parents and also required significant teacher support at the relevant keystone to prepare the pupils. Many pupils expressed their desire to remain with their siblings/peers/friendship groups throughout their educational journey.

The council accepts that should this proposal be implemented as outlined, subject to Cabinet approval, it would result in the removal of single sex education in the Authority and bring Caerphilly in line with the rest of Wales. It would also result in the closure of the current Lewis Girls School site (over a managed period), with a regulated alteration being made to the Lewis School Pengam, a route which has been carefully considered with the guidance of Welsh Government Officers.

Concerns were raised in relation to a higher level of disruption to the Lewis Girls School site and community.

As outlined in the Consultation Documentation and identified in the Integrated Impact Assessment which considered the potential impact on the schools and wider community, subject to approval, this will be carefully managed. Ensuring the principles of Equality and Diversity are upheld and Pupil Wellbeing are of the utmost priority. Mitigations will be put in place should the proposal progress to support a smooth transition and meet the needs of the combined pupil population, keeping all informed about the process and addressing any emerging issues.

➤ **Staffing Implications and Impact**

A selection of consultees raised concerns with regards to the implications and impact on staff, with concerns for job security, integration of teams and maintaining professional standards at the forefront, especially for those currently operating out of the Lewis Girls School site.

The Council recognises that a proposal of this nature will naturally raise a number of questions as to the future staffing structure and vacancy management, however would highlight that this consultation has been undertaken to gather 'views' at this stage and the proposal is still subject to conscientious consideration by both the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee and approval by Cabinet prior to any implementation.

As outlined in the Consultation Document, subject to approvals, the staffing structure at Lewis School Pengam will change and it is anticipated that the staff at Lewis Girls School will be accommodated at Lewis School Pengam where possible and we will also support staff to be employed at other schools where there are vacancies. The Council fully understand that there will be a lot of anxiety but want to give assurance that all staff will be supported through the process and initial discussions with Unions have been undertaken to explain the process, however this does not in any way pre-determine any outcome.

➤ **Community Impact on Ystrad Mynach Town, Traffic, Travel and Transportation**

A small number of consultees expressed concerns with regards to taking Lewis Girls School out of centre of Ystrad Mynach Town and its potential impact to local businesses and community groups.

The Council is committed to supporting regeneration whilst balancing educational requirements as part of this proposal. Should the proposal receive Cabinet approval, once the phased transition has concluded, through the Asset Disposal workflow, the Property Services Team would explore other opportunities for the site, which would include take up from other service areas or external marketing, with a view to minimising any impact on local businesses.

We would also stress that this proposal does not impact the current provision at Sue Noake Leisure Centre.

Community usage and accessibility of alternative provision for groups using the existing Lewis Girls School site will be support to transition to the Lewis School Pengam site or other suitable alternatives.

Consultees also commented on the Lewis School Pengam location and how this would effect those that currently walk to school at Lewis Girls School, any resultant transportation implications and impact on local traffic flow.

The distance between both schools is circa 2.8 miles. It is always the intention of the Council to provide a system of transport that seeks to ensure pupils can safely and comfortably access their education. As outlined in the Consultation Document, it is anticipated that travel times may change for a minority of pupils dependent on their proximity to Lewis School Pengam, but this can also be conversely applicable for those who find themselves closer who were previously attending Lewis Girls School. Those eligible for school transportation who are not currently taking up the service will be offered the opportunity to do so, with minimal impact on existing traffic flow in the area.

➤ **Building Condition/Suitability, Surplus Places, Value for Money and Disposal**

Several queries were raised in relation to the rationale relating to why Lewis Girls School could not remain open as a split co-educational site. Conversely, several consultees agreed that through combining the pupils onto one site, the surplus places issues would be resolved and there were efficiency savings to be made through shared resources and reduced maintenance costs.

As part of the formation of their recommendations for both schools to move to co-education, the Post 16, Single Sex and Surplus Places Board Members also received information in relation to the high levels of surplus places at the Lewis Schools with Lewis Girls School at circa 38% and Lewis School Pengam at circa 42%, as at January 2024. In addition they considered the condition and suitability of school sites, backlog maintenance and a number of other factors which determined that the proposal under consultation was and remains the preferred way forward.

A few general queries were also recorded as to the potential future usage and disposal process of the Lewis Girls School site should the proposal proceed as outlined.

As outlined previously, should the proposal receive Cabinet approval, once the phased transition has concluded, through the Asset Disposal workflow, the Property Services Team would explore other opportunities for the site, which would include take up from other service areas or external marketing, with a view to minimising any impact on local businesses.

➤ **Phased Approach and Timelines**

Concerns were raised and have been noted around the phased approach outlined in the Consultation Document and the timeline for transition. Comments were also received as to the timeliness in relation to the introduction of new GCSE's curriculum and felt it may be beneficial to delay with proposal until this was fully implemented in both schools.

The phased approach outlined in the Consultation Document, which was recommended by the Head Teachers of both schools, intends to minimise disruption and any potentially negative impact on exam pupils, whilst enabling staff and pupils to be prepared for integration over an appropriate timeframe. It would also allow time for any adaptations to the Lewis School Pengam site, for example to comply with washroom facilities regulations having regard to the new gender arrangements.

Reasonable Alternatives Identified

Through the responses received, the following were highlighted,

- Retain the Status Quo (no change to existing arrangements)
- Keep both school sites open and mix classes/year groups at certain times/keystages
- Move to one site but have separate buildings for the Girls and Boys
- Close both schools and build a new one.

Whilst the Council acknowledges the responses, and has reviewed each option in turn, they are deemed unviable. None of the alternatives identified above would achieve the critical success factors that are driving this process. Therefore, the current proposal is still the preferred option for consideration by Cabinet.



NEXT STEPS

Recommendation

In reviewing the proposal to take account of further information that has come forward through the consultation and in consideration of the likely impact on quality and standards in education, the community and travelling arrangements, it is the recommendation of this report that the proposal is progressed as outlined in the Consultation Document, namely:

- **Close Lewis Girls school and make a regulated alteration to Lewis Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.**

The Lewis Girls School site would be retained as a provision to Lewis School Pengam to manage the transition over a number of years. (minimising impact on exam pupils and enabling staff and pupils to be integrated over an appropriate timeframe).

Decision Making

To deliver our reforms across the entire system, we will need a bold commitment to effective collaboration along with integration of services where appropriate. This will include Welsh Government, the teaching profession and the wider education workforce, our key partners in local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional services, Estyn and others. Successful implementation of any proposal will require effective and honest engagement between all facets of the education system and our local communities and we are committed to providing the conditions to enable this to happen.

Cabinet Members are asked to:

- a) Consider the information contained in the Consultation Report
- b) Approve the recommendation, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal to close Lewis Girls school and make a regulated alteration to Lewis Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.

Reporting, Notification and Publishing of Information

Should Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposal, a Statutory Notice will be published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal has the opportunity to do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections must be made in writing and sent to the Council within the 28-day period.

Cabinet will then consider the outcome of the Statutory Notice at a future meeting and determine whether to implement the proposal having given due consideration to all the information provided.

In the event of objections, the Council will publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and Cabinet's response to those objections within 7 days or the day of the determination of the proposal. This report will be available for all persons to view on the Council website and paper copies will be available on request.

Should Cabinet approve the proposal, a full Business Case will be submitted to the Welsh Minister for final approval and the works will commence.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Annex 1 :

[Consultation Notification Letter](#)

[Consultation Document](#)

[Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

Annex 2:

Estyn's Full Response

Estyn's response to the proposal by Caerphilly Borough County Council to close Lewis Girls School and make a regulated alteration to Lewis School Pengam to change from single sex to co-education with effect from September 2025.

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

Overall, the proposals are likely to maintain the standard of education provision in the area. This is because the current arrangements are inefficient, with more than 900 surplus places between the two schools and combining the two schools could allow the local authority to target resources more effectively. However, the consultation document does not contain sufficient detail about a number of important aspects of the proposal.

Description and benefits

The local authority gives a clear and detailed rationale for the proposal to close Lewis Girls School and make Lewis School Pengam co-educational so that the pupils from both schools can be accommodated there. The timetable for the changes is clear and allows an interim period of two years, from September 2025-September 2027 for transitional arrangements to be implemented.

The local authority sets out the main advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. However, it does not consider or address the possible negative impacts on pupils starting at Lewis Girls

School in September 2025 and September 2026, who will have to change schools twice in a short period.

Three main risks are identified as low or medium and relevant mitigations stated. However, there is no discussion in the consultation document about the possible benefits or disbenefits of single sex education, which are likely to be of concern to some parents. The document does not present any suitable alternatives to the proposal, such as decreasing surplus places by reducing the size and capacity of both schools.

The local authority considers the impact on learner travel arrangements. There will be pupils who have to travel further than they do now or would have to in the future if they live closer to Lewis Girls School than Lewis School Pengham. However, there is likely to be a similar number who will have to travel a shorter distance. In addition, Lewis School Pengham is in better condition than Lewis Girls School and is more accessible for pupils with mobility difficulties.

The most important reason for the proposal is the overall reduction in surplus places. Currently, there are more than 900 surplus places across the two schools, and these will be eliminated entirely by the proposal, which could lead to greater efficiency in the use of the local authority's resources. However, Lewis School Pengham currently only has capacity for 1,140 pupils and during the period from September 2027 to 2029 the capacity will be exceeded, even without including the sixth form. If you include the sixth form, the numbers exceed capacity until 2031. The consultation document states that the total number of pupils can be accommodated at Lewis School Pengham if the classrooms are reconfigured. However, the document does not explain what that means in practice, what disruption there may be to pupils, the costs that will be incurred, or what arrangements will be made for other facilities, such as toilets and canteen space.

The local authority considers that there will be no impact on Welsh medium provision from combining the two schools. It considers the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards in its integrated impact assessment.

The consultation document gives very little information about the financial implications of the proposal. There could be efficiency savings, although these have not been estimated. In the interim period while the transition is taking place, there may be increased costs, but again these have not been estimated.

The local authority has not included a community impact assessment as part of the proposal. It is unclear what will happen to the leisure centre at Lewis Girls School which is used by the community outside of school hours. The document states that no impact 'is anticipated' even though the major user of the facilities will no longer be there from September 2027.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The local authority has considered the likely impact of the proposal on the quality and standards in education. For example, it is aware that there may be some disruption to learning and well-being in bringing the two schools together and will take steps to mitigate this risk. The local authority has also considered recent Estyn inspection reports and notes that Lewis School Pengham was removed from Estyn monitoring in November 2019.

There are likely to be benefits to the curriculum in having a single larger school. This may provide scope for providing a wider range of courses, particularly for 14–19-year-old pupils. The consultation document identifies that the process is a closure of Lewis Girls School with steps taken to employ staff there at Lewis School Pengham, where possible, and to seek to redeploy staff elsewhere in the county if not. This will be unsettling for the staff at Lewis Girls School and

there is a risk that some of the teachers and other staff may be lost to the school and the county as a result.

The proposal considers the needs of vulnerable pupils and seeks to minimise the overall disruption to learners. It is particularly helpful that there is a full academic year following the consultation process before the interim period begins as this should provide the time needed to ensure that the changes take place as smoothly as possible.

Report prepared by:

Sustainable Communities for Learning Team
Directorate of Education and Corporate Services
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Penallta House
Tredomen Park
Ystrad Mynach
CF82 7PG

01443 864817

21stCenturySchools@caerphilly.gov.uk