

Estyn response to the proposal to reorganise special education provision in Meirionnydd and Dwyfor.

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

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

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

Introduction

This consultation proposal is from Gwynedd County Council.

The proposal is that Gwynedd County Council:

- relocate Ysgol Hafod Lon (near Pwllheli) and Uned Tŷ Aran (primary aged provision in Dolgellau) to a new site in Penrhyndeudraeth on 1 September 2016;
- retain Uned Tŷ Meirion (secondary aged provision in Dolgellau); and
- increase the capacity of the proposed new school to 100 from the current joint budgeted numbers of 49 pupils.

Summary/ Conclusion

Are the proposals likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area?

It is Estyn's opinion that this proposal is likely to improve the present standards of special educational needs provision in this area of Gwynedd. However, this may not be the case for Tŷ Meirion pupils as they will not benefit from the new provision.

What effect do the proposals have on other schools and educational institutions in the area?

The proposals are likely to have a limited impact on other schools in the area as the development solely involves the two special schools. The other special school in Gwynedd is located too far away to be effected. However it may influence the long

term viability of Tŷ Meirion as the preferred option is to retain this provision at its current location on the secondary school site in Dolgellau. The possibility of the primary aged pupils who transfer to the new school deciding they wish to stay there rather than be separated from peers is not discussed. Should pupils decide not to move to Tŷ Meirion this could significantly impact on pupil numbers there and make the provision unviable. Furthermore, a very brief reference is made to another provision called Uned y Traeth but no reasons are given for not including this unit in the relocation.

Description and benefits

How well has the proposer:

- **Given a clear rationale for the proposal?**

The proposer has set out a clear rationale for the proposal. This is mainly focused on the local authority's responsibility for the planning and management of school places along with securing sufficient resources on improving education outcomes. The proposer clearly shows that the current location, suitability of the buildings, the facilities and the lack of residential provision significantly contribute to the rationale behind the proposal. However some of the reasons for retaining Tŷ Meirion, such as integration with mainstream pupils and difficulties with travelling, could also be applied to Tŷ Aran.

- **Set out clearly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo?**

The expected benefits and shortcomings of the current proposal are put forward clearly and in a balanced way. They include the following:

- a more central location to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs;
- increased capacity as the current schools are significantly above the numbers they were constructed for;
- the opportunity to invest in providing high quality, modern facilities which would be able to support the needs of these pupils better;
- residential provision available,
- reduced travelling time for the majority of pupils;
- better working environment for staff; and
- reduced running costs.

The proposal does identify a potential disadvantage within the same section:

- higher revenue costs as a result of retaining Uned Tŷ Meirion and the restricted use of modern specialist SEN resources for those pupils; however,

the Council has given detailed reasons for retaining Uned Tŷ Meirion, all of which are based on the specific needs of the pupils.

The proposal identifies the following disadvantages should the proposal not go ahead:

- insufficient SEN school places;
- resources that are unfit for purpose;
- no short break provision for families;
- costly out of county provision which is not available in pupils' first language; and
- a location that is not central for both Meirionnydd and Dwyfor.

Managed any risks associated with the proposals?

The proposer has identified 10 possible risks which are mainly focussed on the planning, building and cost of the project. All of these risks are evaluated for possible impact and the proposer clearly shows how they plan to control these risks successfully.

Considered suitable alternatives and given good reasons as to why these have been discounted?

The proposer has considered suitable alternatives which include the combinations of relocating and retaining the current school and units. It has given valid reasons for the preferred option of relocating Ysgol Hafod Lon and Tŷ Aran and for retaining Tŷ Meirion. **However, the proposal does not include past or projected pupil numbers for either Tŷ Aran or Tŷ Meirion or mention whether these were taken into consideration.**

The proposed site was chosen due to its central location and the fact that the majority of pupils would travel shorter distances to the new provision. **Other sites were considered in the Porthmadog and Penrhyndeudraeth areas but no reasons are given for choosing this specific site over any others.**

- **Considered the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements and on accessibility of provision?**

The proposer notes that based on present transport contracts the majority of pupils would travel shorter distances to school.

The complex medical needs of some of the pupils currently at Tŷ Meirion have contributed to the decision to retain this provision. **However, the proposer has not**

included information to show that they have researched whether prospective pupils at Tŷ Aran would have similar needs.

- **Effectively shown how surplus places will be affected? If surplus places will be increased, has the proposer give adequate reasons for this?**

The proposal is thorough in its use of data with regard to past and current pupil numbers at Ysgol Hafod Lon. This data clearly shows that the school, which was constructed to accommodate 28 pupils, is presently at overcapacity with 54 pupils. The proposal would increase capacity in order to meet the rising pupil numbers. However, the proposal does not include past or projected pupil numbers for either Tŷ Aran or Tŷ Meirion.

Where relevant, taken sufficient account of the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium provision within the local authority?

The proposal is not likely to change the Welsh medium provision for the pupils involved. However, it is likely to improve the Welsh medium provision within the local authority. The proposal enables the authority to offer children, who currently have to travel out-of-county to generally non-Welsh provision, an education through the medium of Welsh and to communicate in Welsh with peers and adults.

Educational aspects of the proposal

How well has the proposer:

- **Considered the impact of the proposals on the quality of the outcomes, provision and leadership and management?**

It is envisaged that the current leadership team will be retained in the new provision. The proposal is likely to have a significant impact on improving provision and the learning environment for pupils. The proposer predicts that the specialist resources installed in the new school will substantially add to the experiences and provision available to the pupils and staff. This has the potential to improve the quality of education for the pupils

- **Considered the likely impact of the proposals to ensure delivery of the full curriculum at the foundation phase and at key stage 2?**

As the proposal is based on a relocation of experienced staff it is unlikely to impact negatively on the delivery of the curriculum which is based on the national curriculum and tailored to meet the need of each individual pupil. The proposer has considered that the specialist resources installed in the new school will substantially add to the experiences and provision available to the pupils.

Considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs?

The proposer has fully considered the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

It is Estyn's view that the impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs have been sufficiently considered and that the provision is likely to improve.

- **Ensured that the disruption to learners is minimised?**

The proposer has not included clear specific reference to how it will ensure that the disruption to learners is minimised. This is especially important as any change is likely to disrupt pupils with Special Educational Needs.