



Consultation Report:

Proposal to Increase the planned places at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn

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1. BACKGROUND

Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn is one of two special schools in Swansea. Special school places in Swansea are running at maximum capacity, and increasing demand for places is projected for the future. The significant demand for places is leading the local authority to have no other option than to place pupils into independent and out-of-county schools. In mainstream schools, there are a number of specialist teaching facilities (STFs) which support pupils with moderate/severe learning difficulties, and STFs to support pupils with moderate/severe autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). There are very few surplus places across the ASD STFs.

Increasing planned places at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn would alleviate pressure on the moderate autistic spectrum disorder Specialist Teaching Facilities (ASD STFs). The pupils with the more severe needs (i.e. high ASD symptomatology) would transfer to Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn, allowing the authority to place pupils with moderate ASD into the appropriate STFs. It would also alleviate pressure on secondary mainstream schools and STFs who are struggling to cope with the demands of managing pupils with more severe learning difficulties

The local authority has consulted on a proposal to increase the number of places at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn by 31 places from the 1 January 2022.

2. METHODOLOGY

Consultation took place with the prescribed consultees contained within the School Organisation Code <https://gov.wales/school-organisation-code> via email with a link to the consultation document on the Swansea Council website <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/penybrynproposal2021>

The consultation period ran between 24 March 2021 and 10 May 2021.

Due to Covid-19 health and safety considerations, the local authority did not carry out consultation meetings for this proposal or issue printed documentation.

The publication of a consultation document is central to the consultation process prescribed by the Welsh Government for school reorganisation. The consultation document outlined the changes being considered, the rationale for these, details of the consultation process, including ways consultees could send in their views. Consultees were advised of the availability of an online response form, and contact addresses to send in comments via post or e-mail.

3. CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

A consultation document was shared with all learners at the school and discussed with staff during lessons. The paper explained the proposal and included a reply slip for learners to respond. 28 learners responded (19% of learners at the school).

The majority of pupils supported the proposal and gave positive comments around welcoming new pupils and having more friends. Six pupils stated they did not know how they would feel having more pupils attend the school. One stated that they felt

nervous about meeting new people, and one commented they felt the school already had enough pupils. This is an understandable response from learners with complex needs, which include severe and complex learning difficulties and associated social anxieties. However, school staff are skilled in managing transitions and change, and understand learners' concerns. Also the additional places will not change routines that are already well established.

No letters/emails were received.

A summary of the pupil responses collated by the school council can be found at Appendix 1.

4. CONSULTATION WITH STAFF, GOVERNORS, PARENTS and INTERESTED PARTIES

During the consultation period 10 responses were received to the online survey. A summary of the survey responses is as follows:

Support Proposal/Happy	10
Against Proposal/Unhappy	0
<i>Responses from:</i>	0
Pupil	0
Parent/Carer	3
Member of Staff	4
Governor	0
Community Member	1
Other	2

Support Proposal	100%	Against Proposal	0%
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The main comments raised on the survey were:

- Support for the proposal and an acknowledgment of the need to increase special school places due to increasing demand
- Support for the increase in local provision rather than out of county, which is also a more efficient use of the education budget in Swansea
- The need for the school to be funded for the additional places and staffing (with no increase to existing class sizes, as this would disadvantage existing pupils)
- Highlighting the need for the local authority to continue to review all special school provision (including STFs) in order to meet future demands

A full summary of the issues raised and the local authority response to each is attached at Appendix 2.

5. ESTYN RESPONSE

Estyn, the schools' inspectorate for Wales, were also required to comment on the proposal, as per the School Organisation Code. Their response is as follows:

Estyn response to the proposal to increase the planned places at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn special school

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 proposal is by Swansea council. It is to increase the number of planned places at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn by 31 places for young people with moderate/severe autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) aged 3-18 with effect from 1 January 2022.

It is Estyn's view that this proposal is likely to have a positive impact on the standard of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The council has provided a clear rationale for the proposal. It is to increase the overall number of special school places available to help to meet the increased demand for places for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The council intends that pupils requiring special school ASD places could be offered places at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn, as opposed to provision in the independent sector or out of county. The council also suggests that this would alleviate pressure on mainstream schools and specialist teaching facilities (STF) to support pupils with more severe learning difficulties.

The council asserts that no capital funding is being sought and that the additional places can be accommodated across the existing school sites (the main site at Glasbury Road, and the annexe at Arfryn, which is approximately one mile away from the main site). In addition, the council has provided a sufficiently detailed timetable that includes key dates for following statutory procedures and for implementation of the proposal.

The council has included suitably the expected benefits of the proposal within the main text of the document. The additional 31 places would increase the overall number of special school places available to meet the increased demand. It would also alleviate pressure on secondary mainstream schools and STFs in Swansea and will reduce the need for learners to be educated in out of county provision or in independent schools. However, no disadvantages to the proposal appear to have been identified.

The council does not appear to have identified any risks associated with the proposal, however it has recognised suitably that there could be some additional associated transport costs for learners to attend the school but asserts that these will be lower than providing out of county placements in other specialist provision.

The council has not provided any evidence to demonstrate whether any alternatives have been considered and reasons as to why these have been discounted.

The council has stated that transportation for learners will be in accordance with the council's policy for home-to-school transport. In addition, the council has asserted reasonably that if provision is not increased, learners with special needs may have to travel out of county or be placed in independent schools in order to receive the specialist provision they require.

It is not fully clear from the consultation paper exactly how many surplus places are likely to be affected by the proposal. In the introduction to the proposal, the council states that special school places in Swansea are running at maximum capacity, and increasing demand for places is projected for the future. In appendix A, the data provided in graphical form appears to show that currently there are 150 pupils in the school in 2021 and that projected numbers from 2022 onwards will be just under 200 pupils. The council has also provided data for the numbers on roll and planned places for ASD STFs in Swansea. This data appears to show that there are surplus places in some of these STFs. However, there is no commentary provided specifically on this data which appears to contradict the statement made in the introduction.

The consultation paper makes no reference to the impact of the proposal on Welsh medium provision within the local authority or the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The only consideration is in the equality impact assessment report which states that Pen-y-Bryn, like all other schools in Swansea provides Welsh as part of its curriculum offer. It is unclear therefore how this proposal will impact on Welsh speaking pupils with ASD.

The council has identified suitably the financial costs to the proposal which is £501,104 per annum. The council suggests that this should be considered in the context that a single pupil placed into the independent/out-of-county sector is costing the local authority in excess of £100,000 per annum. However, it does not provide further details as to exactly how much of the financial costs would be offset by savings made through educating pupils within Swansea instead of in the independent/out-of-county sector.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The council has included a summary of the last Estyn inspection report which judged that Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn's performance and prospects for improvement were both good. The council states that an increase in planned places is unlikely to affect the school's performance as staff are already working with learners with similar difficulties successfully. In addition, the council states that increasing staffing will bring more flexibility and increase the pool of skills and knowledge in the school. These appear to be fair and reasonable assertions.

The council has included impact assessments for equality, the community and sustainable development as part of the proposal. All these seem to be appropriate.

There does not appear to be any reference in the proposal to how any potential disruption to learners would be minimised.

This proposal addresses specifically the shortage in the amount of provision available for children with SEN and so is likely to have a positive impact on provision for these pupils.

The council appears to have appropriately included the relevant additional factors to be taken into account in preparing, publishing, approving or determining proposals for the reorganisation of SEN provision.

Local Authority Response to Estyn

The local authority had considered a range of alternatives when considering this proposal before going to consultation.

STF pupil numbers will increase further when 2021 statistical returns are available. The continuing pressure on STF places is being considered as part of a separate review which will compliment the additional special school places, as we need both types of provision, as part of our coherent longer term review of Additional Learning Needs places. This review will include Welsh-medium provision and inform the future WESP.

The local authority has no further comment to make on Estyn's response, which is broadly supportive of the proposal.

Pupil Consultation

Number of consultation responses received:				
28				
		Support Proposal/Happy	22	
		Against Proposal/Unhappy	0	
		Don't know	6	
	Point Raised	Local Authority Response	Number of Written Responses Raising Point	% of Responses Raising Point
1	Positive comments about being happy to make more friends	Agreed	17	61%
2	Comments about being unsure about how the proposal will affect them, being unsure about the additional numbers or being nervous about new children coming to the school.	This is an understandable response from learners with complex needs which include severe and complex learning difficulties and associated social anxieties. However, school staff are skilled in managing transitions and change, and understand learners' concerns. Also the additional places will not change routines that are already well established.	4	14%

Consultation Responses

Number of consultation responses received:			
10			
Support Proposal/Happy		10	
Against Proposal/Unhappy		0	
Responses from:		0	
Pupil		0	
Parent/Carer		3	
Member of Staff		4	
Governor		0	
Community Member		1	
Other		2	
Point Raised	Local Authority Response	Number of Written Responses Raising Point	% of Responses Raising Point
1 There is a huge need for more spaces in the newly proposed school, The population of ALN pupils is increasing	Agree	3	30%
2 Increasing the planned places for children in most need is vital in order to provide them with the best support possible locally.	Agree	1	10%
3 This would ensure that the children get the best, local support whilst making most efficient use of the authority's education budget	Agree	1	10%
4 Fully endorse the proposal for more pupil placements at the school.	Agree	1	10%
5 With the increase in numbers is there an increase in length of time a pupil can stay in the sixth form e.g. past 19 looking to 16 to 25 opportunities	No, the age range of the school will not be extended as part of this proposal.	1	10%
6 Will you offer those that have missed out on a whole year of education due to Covid, which spans across two school years an opportunity to stay on an extra year. Especially now as you have space?	Schools have been given grants to assist with learner catch up following Covid-related school closure, so there will not be an offer to stay an extra year.	1	10%
7 If in the future we see further increases in ASD statements, could we look towards making increases to planned places in the current settings e.g. Primary Schools that have settings based at the school? I would be keen to explore this	This proposal is in regard to increasing special school places on the existing sites; however there will be a continuing review of all additional learning need (ALN) places at STF's and special schools in the coming years, and statutory consultation will take place as is required.	1	10%
8 Regarding alternative options - more STF classes in mainstream schools across Swansea they are such a huge benefit to each school community.		1	10%
9 There is clearly a need for additional provision at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn. This must come with sufficient funding - pupils needing additional support in an STF will still need a higher level of staffing in a special school.	The extra places would be fully funded as per the council's funding formula for schools. It is the responsibility of the headteacher and governing body to ensure class sizes are appropriate and staffed according to the learner's Statement of Special Educational Needs.	1	10%
10 The additional places must be where the school actually has spaces as even with this increase, some Key Stages are at their capacity and this must be looked at, ensuring that existing pupils do not see their class sizes increase and so be disadvantaged by any expansion.		1	10%
11 The building of a new school must be a priority as even with this expansion, there are still pupils who need to be at a special school for whom there will not be places even after this expansion.	This proposal is only concerned with the additional places at the existing school. Any further proposals will require a separate statutory process.	1	10%