



## **DECISION NOTICE FOR THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE RHIGOS PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS TRANSFERRING TO HIRWAUN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

In accordance with the Welsh Government's (WG's) School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018), Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's (RCTCBC's) Cabinet, at their meeting held on the [29<sup>th</sup> April 2024](#), resolved to approve the proposal to close Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary School. The proposal is to be implemented no later than September 2024.

The rationale behind the proposal and the reasons underpinning the decision to implement it were fully outlined and explained within the Consultation Document that was widely circulated last year and is still available on the Council's website. A summary of the reasons for the decision to implement these proposals is given below:

It is RCTCBC's view that closing Rhigos Primary School with pupils transferring to a new, purpose-built school fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century at Hirwaun Primary School would have a positive impact on all five Estyn inspection areas, such as:

1. Standards (Learning) – More pupils will have access to a new school building fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that provides enhanced teaching spaces, dedicated resource areas, stimulating learning environments and state-of-the-art ICT equipment, all of which will support to continue to raise standards, and make progress against Estyn's recommendations.
2. Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning – Moving pupils from Rhigos Primary School to Hirwaun Primary School, a site with brand new facilities should have a positive impact on pupil wellbeing. Flexible internal spaces are available to deliver additional support to pupils. Extensive outdoor space will provide a diverse and engaging environment for pupils to learn and play in.
3. Teaching and Learning Experiences – Moving pupils of Rhigos Primary School, a small school, to the larger Hirwaun Primary School will increase opportunities for interaction, coordination and the sharing of expertise and experience. Pupils of Rhigos Primary School, who are currently in small classes of two and three year groups, will be able to benefit from being taught in classes of their own age group.
4. Care, Support and Guidance – The 21<sup>st</sup> century environment at Hirwaun Primary School will provide additional opportunities for the school to extend its good practice and facilitate further interventions and engagement with families and the local community. The new school site has been designed to ensure that safeguarding is not compromised, with the school achieving 'secure by design' accreditation.
5. Leadership (and Management) – It is important that leadership in schools is supported by fit for purpose resources that are appropriate for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new resources and facilities at Hirwaun Primary School provide

effective and supportive learning environments for pupils. A larger school will provide more professional and progression opportunities for the teaching and support staff and greater scope for distributed models of leadership.

All Councils have a statutory duty through its approach to the organisation and leadership arrangements of schools to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to ensure that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of the community and makes best use of public funding.

Rhigos Primary School is RCTCBC's smallest school and the number of pupils joining Rhigos Primary School has been in steady decline, with pupil numbers forecast to continue to fall in the next five years. Since the commencement of the consultation period in relation to the proposal, the number of statutory school aged pupils at Rhigos Primary School has further reduced from 51 to 44. Allowing surplus places to remain high through inaction would directly and negatively affect the future financial viability of Rhigos Primary School and impact children's education in the future. Rhigos Primary School's budget, with a diminishing income, would have less money for staff salaries, curriculum activities, equipment, running costs and maintenance of the school estate and would struggle to maintain their current good education offer.

Estyn have confirmed that the proposal is likely to, at least, maintain the standard of education provision and outcomes for pupils in the area. The response further states that the:

*'Local Authority has set out a clear rationale for its proposal. It outlines strongly the many advantages of closing Rhigos Primary School, with all pupils transferring to Hirwaun Primary school'.*

In addition, the proposal also seeks to provide the opportunity for more pupils to benefit from the significant investment delivered via the WG's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme in the Cynon Valley.

Cabinet fully considered all comments received following the consultation process and all objections received following the publication of the statutory notice, together with the information contained within the Equality, Welsh and Community Impact Assessment documents that were prepared to inform the consultation process.

The conclusion therefore reached by Cabinet when making their final decision is that the benefits that can be achieved in respect of improved educational outcomes, delivering 21st Century School environments for school pupils in this area, and creating financially sustainable provisions, are valid reasons for implementing these proposals.

Yours sincerely,



**Director of Education and Inclusion Services**