

## **Response 1**

I would like to support the application for a new school in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley area.

I am originally from Blackwood and am proud to have my roots in the Sirhowy Valley. I am a member of Rossett and 'Sirhowy' is part of my name.

I was a pupil at Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw before going to Aberystwyth University to study a combined Welsh and Mathematics degree. I am now a teacher in a Welsh-medium school and it is heartening to see growth in the language in the valley.

I very much hope that your plans will go ahead – if we reach the goal of a million Welsh speakers, Blaenau Gwent will have a leading role in that development.

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## **Response 2**

To whom it may concern,

May I take this opportunity to say what an amazing idea that this is to expand Welsh Medium Education in our Borough of Blaenau Gwent.

It has been a concern over many years that Bro Helyg is the only Welsh Medium school in the county compared with other local authorities who have quite a few.

I applaud the decision of the authority to put this out for consultation to the public and relative bodies as this is a big step for the local area 2021 and beyond.

This initiative will not only respond to the interest from members of the public for a Welsh medium School, but it could open up further options in the future for a Welsh Medium Secondary School along with having a positive outlook with regards to the Welsh language and culture in the local area- Remember Ebbw Vale hosted the National Eisteddfod in 2010.

This new school will not only be a positive initiative for the people of Tredegar but will have amazing support from the Headteacher and Staff at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.

Well done Blaenau Gwent- a positive move forward and I look forward to hearing your future plans.

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## **Response 3**

Hello there,

I am very happy to hear that Blaenau Gwent council are proposing a new welsh medium school in Tredegar.

I'm from Tredegar, but currently living in London and working as a Freelance Graphic Designer and Marketing Designer. My family live just around the corner from the preferred site at Chartist Way.

I know the project is not yet signed off and is a long way off completion, but I would like to offer my design services.

I imagine that the school will need a name and logo. Also, a website and documents for all prospective parents and staff.

I'd be very proud to work on a project close to my heart and for my hometown. When the time comes, please do think of me.

Kind Regards and best of luck,

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## Response 4

As a cluster we are supportive of the proposed new Welsh medium school in the Tredegar area. We recognise the need to increase Welsh medium provision in Blaenau Gwent and are pleased that this will give more parents the opportunity to access this provision in their local area.

We are concerned about the potential displacement of pupils from local English medium schools especially in the area close to the proposed new school and the long term impact this may have on their pupil numbers and therefore sustainability of these schools.

We are pleased to hear that the LA is working with neighbouring local authorities to address secondary Welsh medium provision. We feel that the current distance of the secondary provision and the schools current situation is impacting negatively on pupils starting and continuing with primary Welsh medium education in Blaenau Gwent. For the new Welsh medium provision to be highly successful this needs to be addressed so parents have suitable 3-16 pathway for their children's education.

Carys Llewellyn on behalf on the Ebbw Fawr Cluster Headteachers Group

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## Response 5

### **Estyn's response to the proposal by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to develop a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley.**

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 and other additional information such as data from Welsh Government and the views of the Regional Consortia which deliver school improvement services to the schools within the proposal.

### **Summary/ Conclusion**

The proposal by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is to develop a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley.

The proposer has made it clear that a second Welsh-medium primary school is needed in Blaenau Gwent. Currently, there is only one Welsh-medium primary school in the county (Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg), and the length of the journey from the Tredegar / Sirhowy valley to the current school has a negative impact upon parental choice. The proposal is also directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language strategic frameworks.

The proposer has consulted widely, including with children and young people, parents/carers, school staff, a wide range of interested parties and members of the general public.

Estyn is of the opinion that the current proposal will improve the accessibility of Welsh medium provision for pupils in the area.

### **Description and benefits**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has set out a clear rationale for the proposal around the need for expanding Welsh medium education provision in the area. It also explains the 'seedling model' in detail and how this model works as it grows from a school with only a nursery and a reception class to a 210 place primary school.

The proposal sets out fairly the benefits and disadvantages of the seedling model, and the benefits and disadvantages when compared to the status quo. The benefits include the equality of opportunity and choice for families in accessing and considering the option of Welsh-medium education, which is in line with the Welsh Government vision for 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. The seedling model will ensure that there is minimal disruption to the existing school estate and allows sufficient time for the school to grow. Disadvantages identified include the fact that in-year transfer opportunities will be limited until such time that the school is fully developed.

The council considers five risks and identifies mitigating factors for all. The risks include destabilisation of the existing school estate, the project being delivered late and/or over budget and planning approval being denied so that a site is not secured. The council have considered suitable alternative arrangements including co-locating the seedling school in English-medium schools and setting up the school under its own governance or as a federation with another Welsh-medium school. They considered all options and came to the reasonable conclusion that the proposed model was the preferred model in terms of sustainability, impact on other schools and financial impact from a revenue perspective.

The council have taken account of learner travel arrangements by stating that free home to school transport will be provided for all statutory school age pupils who attend their designated school and who qualify under their distance limits. It is reasonable to assume that as the proposal involves increasing capacity for Welsh medium education that journey times and accessibility will improve. The proposal takes into account the need for expansion in the Welsh medium sector to meet current and future demand. In the short to medium term, there should be relatively little impact on the primary provision in the Tredegar/Sirhowy and Ebbw Fawr North areas. The proposal could impact upon Tredegar Comprehensive school if 24 pupils opt for Welsh medium secondary education as a result of them attending the Welsh-medium seedling. However, birth rates, migration into Blaenau Gwent, pupil projections and housing developments are likely to increase the need for places in existing schools.

The proposal considers fully the extent to which it supports the targets in the WESP (2017-20) and the draft WESP for the next three years. It involves the development of additional Welsh-medium education and childcare provision; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that it will have a positive impact on Welsh language, access to and the provision of Welsh-medium education and childcare, along with parent and community engagement opportunities.

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

The council proposes that Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg (the other Welsh-medium school in Blaenau Gwent), which will be responsible for the governance, and leadership of the new school.

It has explained how the childcare facility, nursery and reception year groups would come in effect from September 2023. The school would grow thereafter year on year, and by 2029 the school would be fully established. The proposal explains that the school governance and leadership structure would be an extension of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg. This would mean that there would be one Governing Body and amendments to the staffing structure, i.e. the creation of a Head of Campus/Leadership Role, which would secure long-term leadership of the seedling school whilst it grows.

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### **Response 6**

Sent from my iPad. In response to your proposal for a new Welsh medium primary school located on Chartist Way I would like you to consider give the following points.

My main concern is the negative effects it will have on the existing primary schools in the Tredegar area. These schools are among the best providers of primary education in Wales. Most are categorised as Green and none are in Special Measures. Pupils will be lost to the new school and thus there will be issues of a drop in funding for the existing schools. This of course will be particularly relevant for

Glanhowy primary in which the new school's catchment will be located. The worst case scenario would be the loss of a primary school in Tredegar. There is also the knock-on effect for Tredegar Comprehensive School as in the long-term pupils would travel to the nearest Welsh secondary school which is in the Torfaen authority. There is also the issues of redundancies being made in all the schools in Tredegar as total numbers of pupils fall.

I am aware that consultation has taken place and that traditionally the responses to such exercises can be limited. However was it made clear in the consultations what the full impact of the new school could have on the quality of education in Tredegar.

Other sites in the western section of the borough also have more to offer. There is plenty of space at the Learning Campus at Ebbw Vale and this site already has the necessary transport infrastructure. Why does green space need to be taken away in the Sirhowy area? It does seem strange that three educational establishments have been demolished which could have been used. If the sites have been earmarked for other developments why can't this be changed?

The target set for an increase in Welsh speakers is indeed commendable but by your own admission too ambitious. We already have a Welsh medium primary in the borough. It seems odd that Newport with a population of 145,000 has three Welsh Medium primary schools while Blaenau Gwent with a population of 69,713 needs two. Newport also has a Welsh Medium Comprehensive school within its authority which we don't.

Immigration may be happening in some areas of south-east Wales, however very little in our area. It remains to be important in the more southerly places like Pontypool, Newbridge and Crosskeys. The argument that there will be an increase for education through the medium of Welsh due to immigration because of the dropping of tolls on the bridge is thus weak.

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## **Response 7**

### **Response to the proposal to establish a new Welsh Medium Primary School in Tredegar / Sirhowy Valley through the seedling Model. January 2021.**

#### **RhAG's Background**

RhAG work is about supporting parents and guardians as they go on the journey with their children through Welsh Education and beyond. The period begins before the birth of the child, with promotional work within the antenatal and early years sector, and we work with stakeholders positively and proactively to ensure that access to Welsh Education is available to all who desire it.

Through this work we also want to ensure that more Welsh-medium schools open across Wales so that demand rises and this in itself creates demand. We work closely with a wide range of stakeholders - in schools, Local Authorities, Mentrau Iaith, education consortia, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Mudiad Meithrin, private care providers to name but a few. We are also part of Celebrating Welsh Organizations.

We also work with parents directly to support them when specific cases arise. We do this through direct advice and representation.

We have a network of volunteers across Wales, parents, carers and friends of Welsh Medium Education, represent the organization through a variety of committees and forums and feeds back to a national management committee.

Anyone is welcome to join us as an organization and we are grateful to any volunteers who are willing to assist us with specific causes in areas across Wales.

#### **Our response**

- RhAG (Parents for Welsh Medium Education) welcomes the consistent and thorough work that has gone into planning to reach this significant stage in Blaenau Gwent.

- We as an organization have experienced purposeful and co-ordinated co-operation on the Welsh Education Forum and in the promotion sub-committee, which has led to effective co-operation between all Welsh Medium stakeholders in the County.
  - The county's geographical challenges mean that the county's residents tend to travel from south to north within the three valleys, rather than across, which confirms the findings of our 2013 questionnaire to measure the demand for Welsh-medium provision in the Tredegar area and the need of an additional location to the west of the county.
  - Establishing a second provision in the County, in the Tredegar area, will offer equality and parity of choice to parents who want a Welsh-medium education for their children within a reasonable distance of the home.
  - Such a development will respond to the wishes of parents in accordance with the objectives of the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy and contribute to the Welsh Government's 2050 Welsh Million Speakers strategy.
  - It will ensure effective early linguistic immersion as the school is the only language transmission environment that can adequately achieve this in areas where the percentage of Welsh speakers is lower and without Welsh at home.
  - It will offer fair conditions to those pupils from the Tredegar area who transfer from nursery to statutory education sector.
  - It will strengthen and increase existing nursery - primary transfer numbers and percentages and also primary to secondary.
  - This new school will also increase access to Welsh-medium statutory education within the child's local community
  - Socially it will create more pride and confidence in the young people and their families to use the language in other parts of the county and give the residents of Tredegar and surrounding areas the opportunity to recapture and revive the language from within their communities.
  - The school will also create a central community focus for the prosperity of the Welsh language locally in the Tredegar area.
  - The demand for Welsh-medium education has always been a difficult issue to prove, as often without provision to exemplify it, or direct experience of Welsh or Welshmedium education, it is not always possible to express an opinion about it as it needs to relate to the individual's experience, and thus not always an easy choice for parents.
- Therefore, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans moved away from the need to prove demand to creating demand. In our experience, there has been latent demand in communities across Wales, until a clear community understanding of what Welsh Medium Education and provision is and that its available in the community. This is what this school will help to do.
- There will be important promotional work to do with the community in the area and RhAG is ready to assist with this work.
  - We fully support the proposal to establish this school and look forward to working with the county to establish it successfully.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. I would be more than happy to expand on our comments.

## Response 8

### Mudiad Meithrin Response – Consultation to establish a new Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar Sirhowy Valley. January 2021

#### Background:

#### Who we are:

Mudiad Meithrin is the main provider of Welsh-medium care and education in the voluntary sector through a national network of nursery groups ( Cylchoedd Meithrin), Ti a Fi groups, wrap-around and Welsh-medium day nurseries.

Mudiad Meithrin was established in 1971. Our main aim is to give all young children in Wales the opportunity to access early years services and experiences through the medium of Welsh. We also believe that it is important to ensure that all children have the opportunity to benefit from early years experiences and activities in their local community.

There are now 501 nursery groups offering daily care and education sessions for 2 - 5 year olds and 49 day nurseries providing full day care for children across Wales. There are 292 Ti a Fi groups across Wales that offer a great opportunity for children from birth to school age and their parents to meet once a week to socialise and share experiences together in an informal Welsh atmosphere. The services provide early years experiences for around 19,000 children each week.

As a result, we work with children and families from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. We are working with *Flying Start* to provide opportunities in the most deprived areas, and with the local education authorities to offer part-time education places to 3-year-olds in their local community.

In addition, Mudiad Meithrin's subsidiary, Cam wrth Gam, provides Welsh-medium training to gain early years qualifications. This has been done by working with secondary schools to provide courses for school pupils, and through the national training plans. Training courses based on work-based learning are delivered by a network of tutors, assessors and internal verifiers across Wales.

### **Background:**

When Mudiad Meithrin was established in 1971 the Census figures that year indicated that 11.3% of 3-4 year olds in Wales were able to speak Welsh. There has been a gradual increase in this percentage in each decade since then and it is pleasing to note that in the 2011 Census the figure had increased significantly in the last decade to 23.3% of 3-4 year olds able to speak Welsh.

Mudiad Meithrin is an important agent in the key work of creating new Welsh speakers in early years, childcare and play. The Welsh for Kids ( Cymraeg i Blant) groups, the Ti a Fi Groups, the Cylchoedd Meithrin all lay a foundation that leads to the progression of Welsh-medium education. The groups and the Cylchoedd can also be seen as drivers of the use of the Welsh language on the ground leading to the anchoring of the language in the community. They are also a starting point to encourage the use of Welsh in the home and seek to support parents and families to speak Welsh with their children. As the 'Welsh 2050: A Million Speakers' strategy states:

*"Over the last four decades, the voluntary sector, under the auspices of Mudiad Meithrin, has maintained Welsh-medium nursery care, developing opportunities for children across Wales to receive early years care and services through the medium of Welsh "(Welsh 2050: Million Speakers, 2017 p.35).*

The Welsh Government has set a target of having a million Welsh speakers by 2050, and each Local Authority has a responsibility to play a part in achieving this innovative vision so that many more children have the opportunity to speak and use Welsh. We are a core part of the aim of creating the Welsh, bilingual and multilingual citizens of the future partnering with Local Authorities, schools, organisations and communities. It must also be recognised that the vision cannot be realised without investment of resources to meet the demand for Welsh-medium education, expanding Cylchoedd Meithrin (and 'Welsh for kids' groups and Ti a Fi Groups), filling the geographical gaps, and contributing to the demand for Welsh-medium education.

### **Cymraeg I Blant / Welsh for Kids**

This project which is managed by Mudiad Meithrin is one of the main partners of a language Strategy Welsh Government Welsh #Cymraeg 2050 to promote the early benefits of Childcare and Welsh-medium education.

A bilingual journey for new parents begins with Cymraeg I Blant support groups, the Ti a Fi Groups (Welsh-medium parent and toddler groups) and the Cylchoedd Meithrin (Welsh-medium playgroups) where 80% of the children come from a home where English is spoken as the main language. The

overall aim is therefore to increase the number of Welsh-speaking children aged 3-4 and to increase the number of 7-year-olds receiving Welsh-medium education.

The All Wales maternity note folder , the Baby Can card and the Child Health Record Book are sponsored by Cymraeg I Blant and the local Blaenau Gwent officer works closely with the Midwives and local Health visitors to direct parents over to our local support groups in EbbwVale, Aberbeeg and Tredegar.

Since March 2019 we have moved our groups online and have been supporting parents in the Tredegar area **with weekly Welsh rhyme time sessions as well as one-to-one baby massage sessions**. Parents have also been able to join the following weekly groups:

**Cuppa and Chat in Welsh** – increasing their confidence in using Welsh with their baby and a 6 week course **Me and my baby** for expectant mothers and their partners and new mothers and fathers – sharing how a baby learns a second language and how to access a Welsh-medium school, bilingual resources and much more.

As well as increasing parents' confidence in using Welsh with their child the groups are also a platform for sharing Welsh and bilingual books, information about the Cyw children's channel on S4C, how to access local Welsh language learning courses through Learn Welsh and family events organised by Welsh for children, Menter Iaith, the Urdd and partners.

**Further information is available on:**

**Facebook Welsh for children local pages**

**@CymraegforKids**

**Meithrin.cymru**

**gov.wales/english**

**Sefydli a Symud (SAS ) Set up and Succeed**

As a result of the Welsh Government's Language strategy, #Cymraeg 2050, mudiad meithrin established a SAS (Sefydli a Symud / Set up and Succeed) project with the intention of increasing the numbers of early years provision over a decade by 150 to enable progression from Welsh-medium care provision to Welsh-medium education. One of the scheme's targets is to create 40 new Welsh language provisions by 2021. After discussion with Blaenau Gwent County officials and with an eye on the intertwining of the County's CSGA schemes, we are establishing a new Cylch Meithrin in Tredegar. Due to Covid 19, the Cylch has not yet opened its doors but the cylch has been established as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and registered with CIW.

**Croesi'r Bont**

Croesi'r Bont is a national scheme to ensure effective Welsh language immersion within Cylchoedd Meithrin and linguistic transition between the groups and schools. With a very high percentage of the children of our cylchoedd coming from non-Welsh speaking homes , it was decided to create a structured language scheme that would apply for each cylch meithrin

Cylch Meithrin Brynithel and Cylch Meithrin Helyg Bychan have been part of the scheme since September 2017. They were part of the original pilot scheme in South East Wales.

Although the majority of staff are fluent in both groups, the scheme has ensured linguistic consistency and accuracy as staff use purposeful language patterns and songs in the cylch's daily routines and in the play areas. The scheme has helped staff who are learners and as a result they feel more confident in using Welsh with the children and their colleagues. As a result of the scheme, the staff have developed good use of songs, resources and reading books during their sessions and are successfully modelling language patterns.

We are also very excited to offer Croesi'r Bont support to Buds to Blossoms Day Nursery who have developed Cylch Meithrin sessions for their children. The work with Buds to Blossoms is innovative and a combination of the Mudiad Meithrin projects- Croesi'r Bont and SAS.

One of the essentials of Mudiad Meithrin's work is to ensure transition. What is meant by the term transition in this context is the number of children when leaving the Cylch Meithrin to attend school to receive statutory education proceed to receive their education through the medium of Welsh. In 2020, over 89% of children left their Cylch Meithrin to receive education through the medium of Welsh which represents an increase of 4% since 2014 with a target of reaching 90% by 2030. The rates vary widely from area to area, from Local Authority to Local Authority depending on how close the child's home is to the local Welsh School, to the LA's transport policy, to family and wider community attitudes, to the reputation of the Welsh School (to identify only a few of the reasons).

30 hour provision through the 'Childcare Offer' is an opportunity but also a risk if it is not carefully planned to take advantage of it as there are clear gaps in Welsh-medium childcare provision.

#### **Points / Questions to be raised:**

- We welcome the development of a seedling school with childcare in the Tredegar and Sihowy Valley for a number of reasons. We believe that this development will enable parents to choose access to Welsh-medium care and education within a reasonable distance of their homes. It will also give the children of the county equal opportunities to receive Welsh-medium education in their local community. Locating the seedling school in Tredegar means a significant reduction in mileage and journey times for children wishing to access Welsh medium education. The creation of a school with care attached will undoubtedly create a new generation of Welsh speakers within the county and contribute to the Welsh Government's #2050 target.
- We welcome the Council's intention to ensure the building will incorporate Childcare because planning space on the school site for the early years facilitates progression to primary age Welsh-medium education. Ensuring continuity of Welsh-medium education is a priority for Mudiad Meithrin and we commend the consideration given to this by the Council's planners. We have worked with the county by working on opening a Cylch Meithrin in Tredegar to respond to the demand for Welsh-medium care in the area. We hope that there will be an opportunity for the Cylch Meithrin to relocate to the new site as the existing Welsh language provider in the area in due course.
- Convenient childcare provision that is part of the 30-hour 'Childcare Offer' is also an advantage for families considering choosing Welsh-medium education because this offers a similar wrap around service to English-medium provision.
- Mudiad Meithrin has a scheme for parents who want to learn Welsh 'Clwb Cwtsh' currently takes place online. In Mudiad Meithrin's Equality and Diversity Strategy, we prioritise the need to engage with Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, and we would encourage the Local Authority to do the same in order to remove walls and dispel prejudices about who can access Welsh-medium education. Background, class, race, creator or ability is not a barrier to speaking Welsh.
- We believe that wrap-around care, after-school and holiday care extends to pupils' opportunities to be immersed in Welsh as well as expanding their Welsh-language social skills. Opportunities to use Welsh beyond the context of education are extremely important to creating lifelong users.
- Given the increasing demand for Welsh-medium education that comes from parents' experiences in Cylchoedd Meithrin for example, it would be beneficial for the Local Authority to think about the future of the provision beyond the school's capacity on a new site.
- We urge the Local Authority to build the new school in as environmentally friendly a way as possible and create an energy green building, which also gives pupils and the community the opportunity to learn about sustainability.

#### **Other useful documents:**

[Welsh Government \(2017\) Welsh 2050: Million Speakers](#)

[Mudiad Meithrin \(2015\) Dewiniaith: Mudiad Meithrin vision 2015-2025](#)

[Welsh for Children](#)

[Cwtch Club](#)