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Consultation Document

Review of Primary and Secondary School catchment areas in Blaenau Gwent and proposal to introduce a catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School and determine the catchment areas for Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg and Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar

Consultation Period:

Commencing at 12 noon on Tuesday 4th February 2025

Concluding on Friday 14th March at 5.00 p.m. 2025

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1. **Introduction**

This booklet has been prepared for parents/carers, school staff, school governors and the wider community of Blaenau Gwent. It sets out some changes we are proposing and the reasons for suggesting them.

The consultation provides you with an opportunity to share your views, comment on and raise any questions you may have about the proposal. The Council will consider all input into this consultation and will then make an informed decision on whether the proposal should be taken forward.

These proposed changes will be part of the School Admission arrangements for 2026/2027. To view a copy of the draft School Admission Policy for 2026/27 click on the below link.

[Consultations | Blaenau Gwent CBC](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/consultations/)

1. **Your views matter.**

We want everyone to understand the information so you can tell us what you think.

To let us know what you think:

* by e-mail to [schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) or
* By completing a snap survey : [https://online1.snapsurveys.com/mar1oq](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fonline1.snapsurveys.com%2Fmar1oq&data=05%7C02%7Cemma.jones%40blaenau-gwent.gov.uk%7C89c7a3c34e0e45cc3df908dd4145910e%7C2c4d0079c52c4bb3b3cad8eaf1b6b7d5%7C0%7C0%7C638738489223460747%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=gQoxjch3eRBtKCNuV604qs5gbdK9TOthBDVF5zObMEg%3D&reserved=0)

Or by attending the drop in consultation session below

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Venue | Date | Time |
| General Offices, Ebbw Vale | Wednesday 12th February 2025 | Between 3pm – 6pm |
|  |  |  |

Please note all views must be submitted by 5pm on Friday 14th March 2025. Any comments received after this time will not be able to be considered.

1. **Consultation Requirements**

The Admissions Code 2013 requires all admission authorities to consult annually on all their admission arrangements. Where proposals to existing arrangements are made i.e. changes to catchments areas, a consultation must be undertaken with all who would be affected by the proposal.

1. **Issues identified**

There are some primary school catchment areas in Blaenau Gwent that are not aligned to their nearest secondary school and should be reviewed to establish whether change is feasible.

There are some cases of imbalance within existing primary and secondary school catchments whereby some catchment areas are showing regular patterns of oversubscription.

The proposals put forward for consultation under this stage of the review are not financially driven. However, a full cost analysis looking at the financial impacts of each proposal will be undertaken alongside this consultation, paying particular attention to the impact on the Blaenau Gwent schools affected by these proposals, as well as the impact on home to school transport costs

1. **What are we proposing to do?**

The Council is proposing, for the 2026/27 school year –

* To make changes to Abertillery Learning Community and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community catchment areas.
* To introduce a catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School
* To establish a catchment area for Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar and amend the current catchment area for Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.

Below are the main aims of the proposal:

* To establish a new catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School and improve the

balance in the number of pupils and places in the other secondary schools in the Borough.

* To balance the number of pupils and places in both Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase and Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Phase catchment areas.
* To balance the number of pupils wanting to receive a Welsh education across the Borough.
* To realign the catchment areas for both Abertillery Learning Community and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community.
* Where possible, to address areas whereby the catchment school is not necessarily the nearest school.
* To seek to address any imbalances within existing school catchment areas to ensure robust arrangements for the planning for school places.
* To vary the arrangements for the transfer of pupils from a primary school to a secondary school by altering the designated secondary school for the directly affected primary schools.

Any proposed changes to catchment areas are subject to statutory consultation which requires a Local Authority/Foundation School to consult if it wishes to vary the catchment areas for schools.

It is important to note that these proposals only relate to admission intake for September 2026 onwards.

1. **Background**

Brynmawr Foundation School is the only Foundation school in Blaenau Gwent. The school has historically served the whole of the Borough and also the northern end of Monmouthshire County Council (Clydach and Lanelly Hill). The school has seen a downward trend in pupil numbers over the last few years.

This has been as a result of a number of things including the school removing its free home to school transport provision in 2019 and it is also due to the school not having a designated catchment area resulting in the school not having formal transition and cluster arrangements with neighbouring primary schools.

The graph below shows the decline in numbers on roll from 701 in September 2019 to 576 on roll in September 2024.

**Figure 1: Numbers on roll at Brynmawr Foundation School between 2019 and 2024**

The projections for the school for the next 7 years show a projected further decline in pupil numbers.

**Figure 2: School projections for Brynmawr Foundation Schools from 2025 to 2031**

The capacity of the school up until 2016 was 820 with an admission number of 164, however due to the projected falling numbers and an increase in the projected surplus places within the school the capacity of the school was reduced to 755 with an admision number of 151. This resulted in the school surplus place % going from 14% in 2015 to 7% in 2019. However as mentioned above over the last few years the school has seen its surplus place % increasing from a healthy 7% to a concerning 24% in Sept 2023.

**Figure 3 – Projected surplus place % for Brynmawr Foundation Schools from 2025 to 2031**

The above graph shows that the school is projected to find itself with a school of 33% surplus places in 2031.

Since the closure of Nantyglo Comprehensive School in 2010 the majority of pupils at Blaen y Cwm Primary School have applied and been offered places at Brynmawr Foundation School. In 2009 it was determined that the catchment secondary school for Coed y Garn and Ystruth Primary Schools became Abertillery Learning Community for the 2010/11 academic year onwards. This initially saw the number of pupils living in the catchment area for both these schools applying for places at Abertillery Learning Community. However, as the data below shows this has dramatically changed with the majority of pupils from Coed y Garn and Ystruth primary schools applying for places at Brynmawr Foundation School.

Figure 4 and 5 show the % of pupils transitioning from Blaen y Cwm, Coed y Garn and Ystruth primary schools. It shows an increase in pupils living in the catchment area for the 3 schools applying for a place at Brynmawr Foundation School and a decrease in those appying for Abertillery Learning Community.

**Figure 4: % of pupils from Blaen y Cwm, Coed y Garn and Ystruth in Y6 who transitioned to Brynmawr Foundation school**

**Figure 5: % of pupils from Blaen y Cwm, Coed y Garn and Ystruth in Y6 who transitioned to Abertillery Learning Community**

Up until 2019, a high percentage of pupils at Beaufort Hill primary school applied for places at Brynmawr Foundation School, however for the last few years the school has seen a downward trend in the number of pupils applying to the school from Beaufort Hill catchment area. It is assumed that the reason for this is the removal of school transport to Brynmawr Foundation School which was independently provided by the school.

This proposal will result in a large proportion of Beaufort Hill primary school catchment area qualifying for home to school transport to Brynmawr Foundation School. At present only 4/5 pupils qualify for free home to school transport from the Beaufort Hill Catchment Area to Ebbw Fawr Learning Community.

**Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg and Ysgol Tredegar**

Until 2024 Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg was the only Welsh primary school in Blaenau Gwent and has served the whole of the Borough. In 2021 the Council agreed, due to demand to build a new Welsh medium primary school which is to be situated in Tredegar. The new school is currently being housed in Bedwellty House in Tredegar until the new build is completed and ready to open in September 2025.

The new school will require its own catchment area to ensure the schools growth and to ensure equity across the two Welsh provisions.

1. **The proposal to establish a catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School**

**Why are we considering the proposal?**

The Council is therefore well placed to propose establishing a catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School. The creation of a catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School and the associated amendments to the catchment areas for Abertillery Learning Community and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community will allow local families to have a better understanding of the school options available and would allow more parents to be able to access a local place.

The proposal will also provide a better balance of school places available and the number of pupils in each area.

**Present catchment areas:**

Each Blaenau Gwent secondary school, with the exception of Brynmawr Foundation School, has a defined catchment area which consists of the combined associated primary school catchment areas served by the secondary school.

**Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus**

* Tillery St Campus
* Six Bells Campus
* Roseheyworth Rd Campus
* Sofrydd Primary School
* St Illtyd’s Primary School
* Coed y Garn Primary School
* Ystruth Primary School
* Blaen y Cwm Primary School

**Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Campus**

* EFLC Primary Campus
* Cwm Primary School
* Glyncoed Primary School
* Rhos y Fedwen Primary School
* Willowtown Primary School
* Beaufort Hill Primary School

**Tredegar Comprehensive School**

* Bryn Bach Primary School
* Glanhowy Primary School
* Deighton Primary School
* Georgetown Primary School

**Proposed catchment areas:**

The proposals will mean that Coed y Garn, Ystruth, Blaen y Cwm and Beaufort Hill Primary Schools will transfer from their current secondary school catchment area and form the new catchment area for Brynmawr Foundation School:

**Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus**

* Tillery St Campus
* Six Bells Campus
* Roseheyworth Rd Campus
* Sofrydd Primary School
* St Illtyd’s Primary School

**Brynmawr Foundation School**

* Blaen y Cwm Primary School
* Coed y Garn Primary School
* Ystruth Primary School
* Beaufort Hill Primary School

**Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Campus**

* EFLC Primary Campus
* Cwm Primary School
* Glyncoed Primary School
* Rhos y Fedwen Primary School
* Willowtown Primary School

**Tredegar Comprehensive School**

* Bryn Bach Primary School
* Glanhowy Primary School
* Deighton Primary School
* Georgetown Primary School

**Figure 6: number on roll at both Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Phase and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase along with the projected take up in future years.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **PROJECTED NUMBERS 2025 - 2031** | | | | | | |
| **School** | **24/25** | **actual NOR SEPT 2024 (exc. ALN)** | **SEPT** | **SEPT** | **SEPT** | **SEPT** | **SEPT** | **SEPT** | **SEPT** |
|  | **capacity** | **2025** | **2026** | **2027** | **2028** | **2029** | **2030** | **2031** |
| **SECONDARY SCHOOLS** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Abertillery Learning Community, Secondary Campus** | **750** | **703** | **726** | **714** | **702** | **701** | **711** | **684** | **662** |
| **Brynmawr Foundation School** | **755** | **576** | **584** | **570** | **567** | **539** | **534** | **519** | **515** |
| **Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase** | **1035 \*** | **1117** | **1148** | **1152** | **1152** | **1151** | **1153** | **1152** | **1164** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

\***Note – The capacity of Ebbw Fawr will increase to 1191 from September 2025**

Abertillery Learning Community secondary campus currently has 6% surplus places with it reducing to 3% in 2025 and slightly increasing to 5% in 2029.Ebbw Fawr Learning Community secondary campus is currently experiencing a 8% insufficiency of places. Since the school was built a number of rooms and spaces across the secondary school have been changed into alternative use, including an ALN provision, this has resulted in the capacity of the school reducing to 1035 places. Blaenau Gwent has addressed this and funding was approved to build a small extension on the current school site. These extra classrooms will replace the rooms that have been repurposed and reinstate the capacity to its original level of 1191. BFS currently has a 24% surplus which is projected to increase in 2029 to 29%.

The proposal will have a positive impact on the surplus/sufficiency issues that all 3 schools are projected to have over the next few years.

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**Figure 8: Map showing the catchments areas with the proposed changes**

A map of the united states

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1. **Advantages and Disadvantages of the proposal**

**Benefits of proposals**

If the proposal was implemented the following benefits would be realized:

* All 4 secondary schools would have their own designated catchment area
* Catchment areas form part of the over subscription criteria when allocating places. Pupils living within the catchment area would have an advantage over those living out of catchment.
* Pupils living in Beaufort Hill, Coed y Garn and Ystruth Primary School catchment areas would have clarity as to which secondary school they should transition to.
* The proposal supports the current transition links between Blaen y Cwm, Coed y Garn and Ystruth Primary Schools.
* Reduce the distance that some pupils currently travel to school. Almost all of the address in the Coed y Garn and Ystruth Primary Schools catchment area are nearer to Brynmawr Foundation School than Abertillery Learning Community.
* Nearly half of the catchment area for Beaufort Hill Primary School is nearer to Brynmawr Foundation School than Ebbw Fawr Learning Community and these pupils would qualify to free home to school transport to Brynmawr Foundation School.
* The proposal would improve the balance of pupils across all 4 of Blaenau Gwent secondary schools.

**Disadvantages of proposal**

* There will be an increase to Home to School Transport costs.
* Pupils living in the areas that are changing would still be able to apply for a place at Ebbw Fawr Learning Community (Beaufort Hill catchment area) and Abertillery Learning Community (Coed y Garn and Ystruth catchment areas) but they would be considered a lower priority in the over subscription criteria due to them now not living in the schools catchment area.

1. **The proposal to establish a catchment area for Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar**

**Why are we considering the proposal?**

The Council is therefore well placed to propose establishing a catchment area for Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar. The creation of a catchment area for Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar and the associated amendments to the catchment areas for Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg will allow local families to have a better understanding of the school options available and would allow more parents to be able to access a local place.

The proposal will also provide a better balance of school places available and the number of pupils in each area.

**Figure 8: Map showing the current catchment area for Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg**

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**Figure 9: Map showing the catchments areas with the proposed changes**

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1. **Advantages and Disadvantages of the proposal**

**Benefits of proposals**

If the proposal were implemented the following benefits would be realized:

* Both Welsh primary schools would have their own designated catchment area.
* Catchment areas form part of the over subscription criteria when allocating places. Pupils living within the catchment area would have an advantage over those living out of catchment.
* Reduce the distance that some pupils wanting to attend a Welsh Primary school would travel to school.
* The proposal would improve the balance of pupils receiving a Welsh education across the Borough.

**Disadvantages of proposal**

* Pupils living in the Tredegar and Ebbw Vale areas would still be able to apply for a place in Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg but they would be considered a lower priority in the over subscription criteria due to them now not living in the school’s catchment area.

1. **Financial implications for both proposals**

These proposals will impact on Home to School Transport Costs, but this will be managed within the existing Home to School Transport budget with no cost pressure to the Council.

1. **Travel arrangements**

Any pupils affected by the proposal will be offered the same home to school transport support that is provided across the Borough. The council’s current policy is:

Free transport will be provided for children attending their nearest suitable school, where the distance from home to school is over the specified walking distance detailed below:

* more than 1.5 miles from home for children aged under 8 years (at the commencement of the academic year) but of statutory school age. Any transport awarded will remain in place for the whole of the academic year
* more than 2 miles from home for children aged 8 years and over (at the commencement of the academic year).

1. **Welsh Language impact if any**

The proposals would not have a negative impact on the provision of the Welsh Language.

1. **Equalities for both proposals**

An EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) has been undertaken and it has concluded that the 2 proposals will not negatively impact any particular group in society.

1. **What happens next**

The closing date for the consultation is 5pm on Friday 14th March 2025. Following this the Council will then collect, review and summarise all of the feedback. This report will then be presented to Cabinet in April 2025 and be considered and a decision taken if the proposal is to be implemented. The Report will be made available for all consultees to view.

The admission arrangements for 2026/27 which this proposal forms part of must be determined by 16th April 2025.

1. **How you can give your views**

You can submit your views

* by e-mail to [schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) or
* By completing a snap survey : [https://online1.snapsurveys.com/mar1oq](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fonline1.snapsurveys.com%2Fmar1oq&data=05%7C02%7Cemma.jones%40blaenau-gwent.gov.uk%7C89c7a3c34e0e45cc3df908dd4145910e%7C2c4d0079c52c4bb3b3cad8eaf1b6b7d5%7C0%7C0%7C638738489223460747%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=gQoxjch3eRBtKCNuV604qs5gbdK9TOthBDVF5zObMEg%3D&reserved=0)

Should you have any questions please contact the School Operations teams using the contact details above. The closing date for responses to the consultation is 5 p.m. on 14th March 2025.

If you have any questions on the proposal, please contact the Admissions Team by emailing schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk