

Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy

January 2015



Final Version

1. Overview

The Council is committed to providing all children and young people with high quality education and training tailored to meet their needs, which will develop their potential, extend aspiration, promote social inclusion and contribute to the economic regeneration of the area. Progress has been made, however there is still work to be done to improve outcomes and wellbeing for all children and young people. It is, therefore, implicit within the Council's 21st Century School Strategic Outline Programme ("SOP"), that a fundamental review of the school estate be undertaken in order to transform education across the County Borough.

The vision is to improve pupil attainment, achievement and wellbeing through the transformation of schools and learning environments to meet modern 21st Century School expectations. Our vision to secure and sustain the delivery of high quality education for all pupils across the agreed range from 3-16 is underpinned by two objectives:

- to be the best performing Local Authority within the family of Local Authorities (Caerphilly, RCT, Merthyr Tydfil and Neath Port Talbot) by 2017/2018; and,
- to exceed the Welsh average for all key indicators by 2018.

The regeneration of the area is underpinned by the transformation agenda, which seeks to address issues of social inclusion, poor health and economic inactivity. Clearly, new approaches are needed to ensure that all children and young people are given the best life chances to fulfil their potential.

The Council is committed to:

- securing sustainable high quality education across the 3 to 16 age range, particularly in Key Stage 4;
- establishing greater consistency, continuity and progression in learning from 3 to 16; and
- maximising effort to focus on teaching, learning and the development of leadership by removing duplication where it exists in the current system.

The Council's Education Transformation Strategy (2010/11) seeks to achieve significant improvements in pupil attainment through addressing the following areas:

- raising attainment through improved teaching and learning, including the innovative use of ICT;
- raising attainment, achievement and progress in the skills of Reading, Writing and Maths both separately and in combination, and at all Key Stages;

- securing consistency in approach and progression of skills, particularly between Key Stages;
- improving levels of pupil aspiration;
- high quality support for pupils with ALN;
- effective use of performance data; and
- buildings and school reorganisation through the 21st Century Schools programme.

2. Duty - Planning and Provision of School Places

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient provision of school places to meet the anticipated demand for education that is set within the Education Transformation Strategy (2010/11).

Parents can apply for their child to be educated at any school of their preference, and the Council must manage allocation of places to its schools in line with the agreed School Admission Policy and the relevant admission number, so as to ensure that no school is over subscribed and children and young people have appropriate space in which to be taught.

All children in Wales between the ages of 5 and 16 are entitled to a free place at a state school whilst nursery children are entitled to a free part-time education place as from the term following their third birthday.

The most typical types of school provision within Wales are:

- community schools, controlled by Councils;
- faith schools which can be different kinds of schools e.g. voluntary aided schools; and
- foundation schools, which have more freedom to change the way they do things than community schools.

3. Context – Blaenau Gwent’s School Estate

The Education Transformation Strategy’s (2010/11) building and organisation arrangements are underpinned by the Council’s explicit commitment to the national, regional and local school improvement agenda and are based on:

- social inclusion and equal opportunities;
- continuous improvement against performance;
- community focused schools and lifelong learning in its broadest sense; and
- community engagement.

The Council is committed to the provision of a cost-effective and efficient estate, providing the right schools in the right places. Substantial work has been undertaken in recent years through the provision of modern 21st Century buildings and the reduction of surplus places.

The current position of Blaenau Gwent's schools estate in respect of surplus places, building condition and suitability, and provision is shown overleaf.

3.1 Surplus Places

The January 2014 surplus places comparative data for Wales shows an improving position for Blaenau Gwent whose position is as follows:

- at primary level, combined position of 21st out of 22 local authorities
- at secondary level, combined position of 12th out of 22 local authorities
- overall position of 19th out of 22 local authorities

However, whilst an improving picture for surplus places at primary level is anticipated, further work is required in respect of the secondary school estate in order to meet the 10% target by 2020.

3.2 Building Condition and Suitability

The 2014 position for building condition and suitability is categorised as A (good) to D (bad) and summarised below:

	A	B	B/C	C	D
Primary					
Condition	4 (18%)	9 (39%)	0	10 (43%)	0
Suitability	3 (13%)	6 (26%)	12 (52%)	2 (9%)	0
Secondary					
Condition			1 (33%)	2 (67%)	
Suitability	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	1 (33%)		
Middle (2 buildings)					
Condition	2 (100%)				
Suitability	2 (100%)				
Special					
Condition	1 (100%)				
Suitability	1 (100%)				

3.3 Provision

There has been a continual review of school provision throughout Blaenau Gwent, working towards a vision of transforming education to meet modern 21st Century school standards. Since the establishment of BGCBC in 1996, there has been substantial school reorganisation which has resulted in significant developments within the school estate.

In 1997 there were 32 primary schools, 1 special school, 1 PRU and 6 secondary schools.

The position as at September 2014 has been reconfigured to 23 primary schools, 1 special school, 1 PRU, 1 3-16 school and 3 secondary schools serving a pupil cohort of 8,723 children including nursery. Post-16 provision is now provided through the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone in partnership with Coleg Gwent.

The size of a school can vary depending upon the area/community that it serves. Within Blaenau Gwent, there is a mix of the category of provision described above, with all primary schools providing education for 3-11 year olds and the remaining 3 secondary schools now established as 11-16 schools. There is also specialist provision for children with SEN provided at Penycwm with EBD and Community tuition provided at Canolfan Yr Afon, although the admission arrangements for this provision are different to that of other schools in the area. Further, in 2012, the Council opened the first 3-16 maintained school in Wales through the establishment of Ebbw Fawr Learning Community and since this time other Local Authorities have adopted the all-through schooling approach.

3.4 School Organisation-The Strategic Direction

In Blaenau Gwent, the size of a school is determined by a number of factors which include, as previously stated, the community that it serves.

This policy reinforces 3-16 provision as a strategic priority for school organisation across the County Borough and the following framework principles are intended to be implemented:

- schools whose number on roll are forecast to be less than 90 pupils should be reviewed;
- nursery provision to be co-located and part of the governance structure of statutory school provision;
- all-through primary schools within a minimum capacity of 210 (7 years at 30 pupils), other sizes to include 360,420,630 places;
- secondary provision through 11-16 schools with no secondary school being smaller than 600 places;
- 3-16 provision – this is classed as a middle school and provides continuity for students in one organisation with a single leadership and management structure; and

- the use of federation where up to 6 schools can work together under a formal governance structure.

The school reorganisation principles detailed within this Policy will require phased implementation and be determined on a case by case basis. The following criteria will be used to assess the case for change:

- standards and pupil wellbeing
- leadership/ capacity
- building condition
- building suitability
- surplus places
- sustainability/cost effectiveness
- socio-economic status

With respect to 3-16 provision, the benefits of the establishment of a 3-16 learning environment are well documented but for ease of reference may be summarised as follows:

- a common ethos and shared values across the 3-16 learning environment;
- joined-up curriculum planning to increase coherence and continuity in pupils' learning;
- greater consistency in learning and teaching styles;
- opportunities for cross-age learning and shared enrichment and community-based activities;
- extended care and support for pupils with additional learning needs and in provision for other vulnerable groups;
- increased access for pupils to a range of specialist accommodation, facilities and learning resources;
- developing relationships and shared expertise between primary and secondary staff;
- joint management and implementation of common systems for recording and tracking pupils' progress;
- unified governance and efficient use of financial and human resources; and
- strengthened links with parents and involvement in the local community.