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**THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND**

2nd March 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

**EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee will be held in virtually via Microsoft Teams - if you would like to attend this meeting live via Microsoft Teams please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk on Tuesday, 9th March, 2021 at 10.00 am.

***Please note that a pre and post meeting will be held 30 minutes prior to the start and following the conclusion of the meeting for members of the committee.***

Yours faithfully

Michelle Morris  
Managing Director

**AGENDA**

**Pages**

**1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION**

You are welcome to use Welsh at the meeting a minimum notice period of 3 working days is required

We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh or English. / Croesawn ohebiaith trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg.

should you wish to do so. A simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

2. **APOLOGIES**

To receive.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

To consider any declarations of interests and dispensations made.

4. **EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES** 5 - 16

To receive the Minutes of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee held on the 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021.

(Please note the Minutes are submitted for points of accuracy only).

5. **ACTION SHEET - 11TH FEBRUARY 2021** 17 - 20

To receive the Action Sheet.

6. **ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW - BLAENAU GWENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19** 21 - 40

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

7. **EAS BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022** 41 - 74

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

8. **INSPIRE 2 ACHIEVE AND WORK PERFORMANCE REPORT JANUARY – DECEMBER 2020** 75 - 82

To consider the report of the Youth Service Manager.

9. **WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS (WPLS) ANNUAL RETURN 2019/20** 83 - 96

To consider the report of the Youth Service Manager.

10. **BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR NURSERY AND STATUTORY** 97 - 130

## **EDUCATION 2022/23**

To consider the report of the Education Transformation Manager.

### **11. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 20TH APRIL 2021 131 - 134**

To receive the report.

To: Councillor H. Trollope (Chair)  
Councillor J. Holt (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor D. Bevan  
Councillor G. Collier  
Councillor M. Cook  
Councillor M. Day  
Councillor L. Elias  
Councillor J. Hill  
Councillor C. Meredith  
Councillor J. C. Morgan  
Councillor J. P. Morgan  
Councillor L. Parsons  
Councillor T. Smith  
Councillor B. Summers  
Councillor D. Wilkshire  
T. Baxter  
A. Williams

All other Members (for information)  
Manager Director  
Chief Officers

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**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO:** **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT:** **EDUCATION & LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2021**

**REPORT OF:** **DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

**PRESENT:** COUNCILLOR J. HOLT (IN THE CHAIR)

Councillors: D. Bevan  
 M. Cook  
 M. Day  
 L. Elias  
 J. Hill  
 C. Meredith  
 J.C. Morgan  
 J.P. Morgan  
 L. Parsons  
 T. Smith  
 B. Summers

**Co-opted Member**

A. Williams

**AND:** Corporate Director of Education  
 Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
 Service Manager Inclusion  
 Youth Services Manager  
 Press & Publicity Officer  
 Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	

<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from the Chair, Councillor H. Trollope and Councillor D. Wilkshire.</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Member</u></b> T. Baxter</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
	<p><b><u>VERBAL UPDATE - COVID-19 PANDEMIC</u></b></p> <p>At the request of the Chair, the Corporate Director of Education provided a verbal update on the Education Directorate’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were two key strategic updates, the first related to the Estyn Thematic Review Letter, the Welsh Government had requested Estyn to carry out a review on how Councils supported schools since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic which covered the period March to October 2020. The Letter via a report would be presented to the next meeting of this Committee. Overall, there had been constructive feedback from the regulator with four areas of notable practice being identified, including strong collaboration across the Local Authority, particularly the way the Council and schools had worked in a coherent, collective and collegiate fashion. There was recognition of the beneficial support for vulnerable pupils from the Education Psychology Service and it was acknowledged that there was strong work from the Local Authority’s Youth Services and the effective use of ICT resources.</p> <p>The second key strategic update was that the Welsh Government had made a decision that Foundation Phase learners have face to face learning following half term from 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2021. The Director was pleased to report that discussions had taken place with Headteachers and it had been agreed that Foundation Phase learners in Blaenau Gwent would have face to face learning from 22<sup>nd</sup> February.</p>	

	<p>A Member sought clarification on whether all Foundation Phase pupils would be returning to school on the same date.</p> <p>The Service Manager Inclusion responded that it was his understanding from the Headteachers meeting that all Foundation Phase pupils would be returning to school on the same date, but would seek clarification.</p> <p>A Member enquired if the Council had been informed when it would receive the funding from Welsh Government for extra PPE for schools, and sought assurance that this money would be spent on additional equipment, in light of reports that cases could rise when schools return.</p> <p>The Service Manager Inclusion would contact the Education Transformation Manager to clarify.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 15<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2020</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS (ALN) ACT READINESS</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Inclusion which was presented to provide Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) and the progress the Education Directorate is making in readiness.</p>	

The Service Manager Inclusion spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

The Service Manager noted the cost pressure referenced in the report in relation to statutory duties, however, owing to managing the difficulties of running two systems and the additional capacity required within the ALN Team, the cost pressure would be closer to £100,000.

The Chair congratulated the team for all the hard work and collaboration that had been undertaken.

A Member said he welcomed the report and requested an update with a breakdown of statemented children, ALN children, dyslexic children etc. In response the Service Manager Inclusion said he could provide a breakdown of pupils that are at School Action and School Action Plus that have a statement and their primary needs and include details around the resource base for Members information.

Service  
Manager  
Inclusion

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

With regard to the ALN Bill coming into force in September a Member commented on the excellent work that had been undertaken and congratulated the Service Manager and the team for leading on this issue.

A Member requested that it be acknowledged the excellent work that the officer and his team had achieved on leading this piece of work.

In response to a Member's question regarding cross border transfers into Primary and Secondary and the delay with transfer paperwork and enquired if the new Act would help or hinder this, the Service Manager Inclusion said he felt positive that the changes would be of significant benefit in that area. There had been issues with the current system, delays with transfer paperwork etc. and the five authorities interpreting the criteria at different stages in entirely different ways. The new system was less bureaucratic and the introduction of the Individual Development Plan would replace statements. There would be one plan so whether there was a low level of additional learning need or significant complex needs it would be the same plan. Work was still ongoing in relation to consistency across all five



local authorities such as the type of letters sent to parents, etc. With one plan in place there would no longer be multiple interpretations of the different stages and this would make a significant difference to the paperwork received with regard to understanding pupils needs when transferring from one local authority to another. The Service Manager felt that the Welsh Government framework provided a good basis to address the issues in the current system.

A Member referred to capacity issues and enquired what investment would the Directorate or Council make to overcome these capacity issues to meet Estyn recommendations for improvement. He felt that with such an important issue there was a need to ensure that appropriate capacity was in place to carry out all the requirements of the Act. The Director of Education responded that Full Council had endorsed a new structure for the Education Directorate and that it recognised the need for capacity in terms of school improvement and inclusion. As part of the budget setting process a £100,000 growth item had been requested for next year's budget and that will now form part of discussions for setting next year's budget and would be presented to Full Council in March, which if agreed will fund an additional statutory post linked to ALN reform. This issue was a priority and a request had also been put forward to support the additional capacity that was required via the growth bid.

A Member requested clarification on paragraph 2.9 of the report, in relation to IDPs. The Service Manager Inclusion clarified that with an Individual Development Plan in place the school would determine if it was comfortable to manage the pupil with the funding to support the pupil's needs. There may be a threshold that still needs to be defined by the Welsh Government and then reflected in regional and local practice to determine at which point was the complexity of need enough that the local authority would then take on the responsibility for that IDP. Currently local authorities were responsible for all statemented pupils and the statement, however, local authorities delegate that responsibility to the schools in terms of managing the annual review and the provision etc. The new system would still give schools the opportunity, that if a pupil had significant complex needs, to request that the pupil had a

local authority IDP. There were still some issues around looking at what the threshold would be between a school IDP and a local authority IDP.

The Service Manager said that once the ALN Code of Practice was finalised he was keen to provide an opportunity for Members to have a more detailed explanation and discussion around some of the key areas such as; what is Person Centred Practice, what is an Individual Development Plan, what is the ALN post 16 transition etc. at some point in the future.

A Member raised concerns regarding a backlog of pupils waiting to be statemented and enquired if this would affect the report going forward and to be implemented in September. The Service Manager Inclusion responded that local authorities were required to carry out statutory assessment within 26 weeks. There was a backlog as the key elements to a statutory assessment were; an Educational Psychologist carried out an assessment of the pupils needs, this would need to be done within a school setting and Health provide a medical report on the pupil that requires them to attend a meeting; and due to the lockdown fulfilling and completing statutory assessments had not been possible. However, going forward the expectation from the Welsh Government was that the majority of IDP's would be school based and would not require the input of the local authority. It would still be a statutory document that had legal entitlement to tribunal appeal. The new system was less bureaucratic without lengthy timeframes attached to it. If a school felt a pupil had additional learning needs and required additional learning provision they were in a position to establish an Individual Development Plan. The majority of IDP's would be managed by schools without requiring input from local authorities, this would speed up the process and where schools feel the local authority should adopt that IDP, that would entail taking ownership of the existing IDP. The Team were addressing the backlog as quickly as they possibly could.

In response to a Member's question regarding risks to missing the September date, the Service Manager felt that the only risk was Covid-19, he had no concerns regarding being ready in time, as fundamental key elements were in place. However, he felt that, as with all new systems there

	<p>may be some teething problems at first and moving forward post September there may be a need to refine and improve some elements.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education advised Members that the Welsh Government had advised Directors of Education across Wales that the discussion on ALN reform was planned for the last session prior to the Senedd recess. As there was currently an emergency situation, there could be national considerations regarding Covid-19 that may take precedent and therefore there could be a potential delay in Welsh Government final conversations and approvals around ALN reform.</p> <p>A Member referred to capacity issues and commented that it was one of the Estyn recommendations for improvement and proposed that a paper on the new structure of the ALN service and how it would be funded be prepared and presented to a future meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members agreed that Blaenau Gwent will be ALN ready for September 2021 when the ALN Act becomes operational and that appropriate preparations are taking place; and</li> <li>• a paper on the new structure of the ALN service, to include details of funding, be prepared and presented to a future meeting.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS BAND B PROGRESS</u></b></p> <p>With regard to declarations of interests, it was noted that some Members of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee were also School Governors.</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Education Transformation Manager which was presented to provide Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise progress in line with the delivery of the Band B Programme.</p>	

The Corporate Director of Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member commented that an excellent job had been done in lengthening the life of Tredegar Comprehensive School by 10-15 years, however, he felt that other school buildings in the Borough would face the same problems in the future. He referred to paragraph 2.4 of the report, investment objective 3 - to establish effective management and provision of school places by having the right schools in the right places at the right time. He enquired if consideration had been given to the 70 to 100 extra pupils attending schools in Tredegar over the next 5-6 years. The Corporate Director of Education said annual reports were prepared and presented to Scrutiny Committees to look at the management of school places. In the past a lot of work had been undertaken to reduce surplus places, the current position was now in the region of 10% surplus places in both secondary and primary sector. The availability of places, across the school estate, was being closely monitored. There were some schools now experiencing sufficiency issues and this would be considered within the Band B planning arrangements to ensure appropriate places for the demand coming through the system. The Member said the team should be congratulated on the work undertaken on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.

A Member referred to the Band B funding forecast for the Welsh-medium school proposal and enquired regarding the £7.5 million funding. The Director explained this was the latest cost estimate from Technical Services, the new build would be in the region of £7.5 million, and this was 100% funded by the Welsh Government. The Directorate had raised the likely cost pressures associated with the delay due to Covid-19 with the Welsh Government and had received positive feedback around the potential for additional resources should the proposal proceed. This was not a cost pressure for the Council it was one that the Welsh Government would need to address.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee considered and accepts the report as presented.

No. 8

**YOUTH SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT**  
**2019 – 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Youth Services Manager which was presented to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the Youth Service, demonstrating how the Council meets its statutory requirements of providing a Youth Service for young people aged 11-25 and a Counselling Service for 11-18 year olds.

The Youth Services Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein, which included a brief update on how the service has refocussed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chair congratulated the Youth Services Manager and the team on all the work that had been undertaken especially in relation to the qualifications achieved and the reduction of pupils becoming NEET's.

A Member commented that Youth Services were doing an exceptional job in the circumstances and agreed with the Chair's comments and added that it was pleasing to note the part the Youth Services played in supporting youngsters to achieve qualifications.

The Member raised concerns regarding EU funding coming to an end and enquired if consideration had been given to where to look for future funding. The Youth Services Manager said that discussions were taking place with various working groups to look at funding coming from Westminster to Wales. Discussions were being held with the Regeneration Directorate and the 10 local authorities across Wales which will look at opportunities to highlight the funding that is needed and that the Youth Services Manager was also involved in these discussions. There would be funding coming to Wales but at this point in time, how that funding would be prioritised was unclear. She felt it was important to take part in regional discussions to put forward the argument around how important this area of work was.

The Corporate Director of Education said in relation to the loss of European Social funding and EU funding across the board that was a real risk. Directors of Environment across the 10 local authority areas in line with the Cardiff Capital

	<p>Regional City Deal were in dialogue with both the Welsh Government and Central Government and there was a distinct possibility that it would be a priority as part of the Shared Prosperity Fund moving forward. Although this had yet to be confirmed, the Director was aware that there was advocacy at the highest levels taking place. The loss of EU funding featured on the Education Directorate Register as being high risk because of the implications for the Youth Service, it also featured on the Corporate Risk Register.</p> <p>A Member commented that as the Youth Service had now absorbed the Leisure Trust within the Section did the Youth Services Manager have capacity to meet the demand of the extra workload. In relation to capacity within the Youth Services, the Director of Education responded that there had been a restructure, and a new post, Young People and Partnerships was endorsed that encompassed the leisure client function within Education. There would be a phase 2 restructure that would enable capacity to support the Youth Services Manager in managing her large portfolio of work, with focus on the right people with the right skill sets to be able to manage both the Youth Services and the Leisure client function.</p> <p>Another Member also commented on the excellent report, and felt that the outcomes over the last year with the pandemic were incredible, not only maintaining the success but actually adding to it.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee considered and accepts the report as presented.</p>	
<p><b>No. 9</b></p>	<p><b><u>USE OF CONSULTANTS</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide Members with the information requested, relating to expenditure incurred during 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 on the use of consultants to support, supplement and complement the work of Officers across the Council.</p>	

	<p>The Corporate Director of Education spoke to the report and gave a brief overview of the main points contained therein.</p> <p>With regard to consultancy fees for Bryan Jeffreys a Member enquired what the consultancy fees related to. In response the Director of Education said they related to management support for two schools that were in an Estyn category and were considered schools causing concern and confirmed that the arrangement had now concluded. He clarified that some of the time did include support for the Governing Body but there were other elements of external support that the consultant supported the Education Directorate at a point in time.</p> <p>A Member mentioned that it had been agreed that this item would be a briefing note for Members. The Director of Education explained that it had been agreed to share a briefing note with Members, but as the request came forward corporately, the Chief Officer Resources decided that it was appropriate to produce a report that would go to each Scrutiny Committee with the relevant expenditure for each portfolio.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report on the Use of Consultants be noted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 10</b></p>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2021</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education advised that as the Key Stage 4 results were confirmed, there were no examination remarks etc., item 4 - Final School Performance Report would be replaced with the Estyn Thematic Review Letter report.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report on the Final School Performance be replaced with the Estyn Thematic Review Letter report for the next meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2021.</p>	

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**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**Action Sheet**

**Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Action to be Taken</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>
	<p><b><u>Verbal Update – COVID-19 Pandemic</u></b></p> <p>Clarification was sought on whether all Foundation Phase pupils would be returning to school on the same date.</p> <p>Clarification to be provided on when the Council would receive the funding from WG in relation to extra PPE equipment for schools and sought assurance that the funds would be spent on this area.</p>	<p>Emma Jones</p> <p>Emma Jones</p>	<p>All Foundation Phase pupils will be returning to school on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 with the exception of those schools that have a planned INSET day and also the new Rising 3 Nursery pupils, who will start on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021</p> <p>We have received details of the funding allocation but have not yet been provided with a date when we can expect to receive the grant, however, we anticipate it to be over the next few weeks.</p>
8	<p><b><u>Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act Readiness</u></b></p> <p>A breakdown of the numbers of pupils in receipt of School Action and School Action Plus to be provided.</p>	<p>Gavin Metheringham</p>	<p>See attachment</p>

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**Breakdown of School Action / School Action Plus / Statemented  
(Broken Down Into Year Groups)**

SEN Status as of January  
2021

NCY	School Action	School Action Plus	Statemented	Not SEN	Total
<b>N1</b>		1		186	187
<b>N2</b>	6	12	1	664	683
<b>R</b>	11	26	6	676	719
<b>1</b>	31	27	14	653	725
<b>2</b>	45	42	7	685	779
<b>3</b>	56	44	14	669	783
<b>4</b>	78	45	10	596	729
<b>5</b>	81	60	10	610	761
<b>6</b>	84	49	20	635	788
<b>7</b>	77	43	31	494	645
<b>8</b>	104	50	27	504	685
<b>9</b>	76	54	14	426	570
<b>10</b>	68	80	30	463	641
<b>11</b>	55	72	32	401	560
<b>12</b>			13		13
<b>13</b>			6		6
<b>14</b>			5		5
	772	605	240	7662	9279

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# Agenda Item 6

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **9<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Estyn Thematic Review - Blaenau Gwent's Response to COVID-19**

Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member of Education, Cllr. Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director for Education, Lynn Phillips**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
Feb 2021	25.02.21	22..2.21			9.3.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Education and Learning Committee with an opportunity to review the Estyn Thematic Review report that outlines narrative on the corporate response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Corporate Director of Education provided a verbal update to Scrutiny Committee throughout the Autumn term regarding the Education Directorate's and corporate response to the COVID-19 emergency. This was complemented by presenting an update COVID-19 response report to Members during the November cycle, in line with the forward work programme. The report provided background, context and an overview of the corporate response, in particular how the Council has and will continue to support schools during the pandemic. Members were also briefed that Estyn was carrying out a Thematic Review across Wales. The review was titled 'Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19' and covered the period June to November 2020. The report was published in January 2021 and Blaenau Gwent received a dedicated letter as part of this regulatory work.
- 2.2 The Estyn report was written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education in July 2020. It provides an overview of how local authorities and regional consortia have worked with schools and pupils referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils. It captures the ways local authorities and regional consortia have adapted their work to respond to the challenges resulting from COVID-19. The work was carried out before all schools returned to remote learning in January 2021 but will be helpful to inform current ways of working. The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, local authority and regional consortia officers and staff in schools and PRUs. The report features 'cameos' from local authorities and regional consortia. These were

not considered as case studies because Estyn were unable to evaluate the impact of the work because of restrictions on our activities due to COVID-19. The cameos are included to exemplify points raised in the report, giving a flavour of the work that has taken place across Wales and in Local Authorities. The report focused specifically on two aspects:

- Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning? Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services; and,
- Support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist?

2.3 In Blaenau Gwent there were two sessions convened with Estyn Local Authority Link Inspectors (LALI) during the Autumn term and they also interviewed a cohort of Blaenau Gwent's Headteachers. The BG Estyn Thematic Review letter is attached as appendix 1 to this report. The letter is positive overall and highlights four cameos of notable practice, covering;

- Strong collaboration across the Local Authority;
- Beneficial support for vulnerable pupils by the Educational Psychology service;
- The work of the local authority youth service; and,
- Effective sharing of ICT resources.

The narrative from the Estyn Thematic Review findings provides Members with assurance that the Council/Education Directorate has handled the emergency response well in supporting our schools, but clearly there are also areas to learn moving forward, such as the need to enhance water testing compliancy when school buildings are closed for longer periods of time. This has been the subject of a separate report to the Executive and Full Council for consideration and recommendations were adopted.

### **3. Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 This report has been discussed by Education DMT and CLT prior to submission to Scrutiny Committee. There are two options for Member consideration:
- 3.2 Option 1: That Members of the Scrutiny Committee accept the report as presented.
- 3.3 Option 2: Members are requested to review the information detailed within the report and offer comments that contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness, particularly in light of the response to COVID-19. This report provides the Scrutiny Committee with important emergency response and statutory information, as well as opportunity to identify where progress has been made and where further improvement is required.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 One of the key objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan is for every child to have the best start in life. The Council seeks to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress is in line with ambitious expectations. This is particularly pertinent in an emergency crisis situation.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, however, it should be noted that the impact of the COVID-19 emergency response on both Council and school revenue budgets is being closely monitored. The Education Directorate Q3 revenue budget monitoring report's position demonstrated a favourable variance circa £210,000, mostly attributable to the reduced provision of transport and out of county support for vulnerable learners. There are, however, some significant cost pressures that are being managed through school support services, such as cleaning, but there is WG Hardship funding available to offset aspects of the additional cost burdens at this point in time.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

There are two strategic risks associated with this report;

1. The impact of COVID-19 on learner progression and pupil regression. This is being mitigated through the Council, EAS and Schools working in collaboration to support learners across the board; and,
2. The risks associated with the provision of safe learning environments to minimise the potential transmission of COVID. There are comprehensive risk assessments in place to mitigate the risks, but the situation is constantly under review and appropriate remedial action is taken e.g. self-isolation protocols are implemented.

5.3 **Legal**

This report provides information relating to the emergency response requirements as well as the specific Education obligations set out the School Standards and Organisation Act Wales (2013) to support strategic and operational activity to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

5.4 **Human Resources**

Colleagues in Organisational Development provide a weekly analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the Education Directorate's workforce. There is a stabilisation of cases amongst the workforce, which has resulted in only a limited impact on service delivery within schools at the time of drafting this report.

## 6. Supporting Evidence:

### 6.1 Performance Information and Data

Across the board, the emergency response from the Council and its schools has been coherent, especially in the following aspects of work:-

- Re-purposing of schools – supporting children of key workers & vulnerable learners;
- Re-opening schools – from the 29th June 2020; and,
- Preparing for academic year 2020/21, particularly whole school re-opening from September 2020, in line with WG expectations.
- Managing the move to remote learning during the Spring term, with the exception of on-site provision for key worker families and vulnerable learners.

### 6.2 Expected outcome for the public

There is a commitment from the Council and its schools to provide quality education for our children and young people to improve their life chances, despite the challenges faced during the COVID-19 emergency crisis.

### 6.3 Involvement

There has been extensive involvement of key stakeholder both corporately and across the school estate. The planning groups for secondary, primary and special schools that are established, including Headteacher representation has secured a collaborative and corporate response. This approach has been recognised as a cameo in the Estyn Thematic Review letter.

### 6.4 Thinking for the Long term

This report largely reflects on the emergency response to date, however, there are robust governance arrangements in place to support the next stages of the emergency for the foreseeable future.

### 6.5 Preventative focus

The Council's emergency response has facilitated a preventative approach to minimising the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

### 6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

The report outlines the significant amount of partnership working at a strategic and operational level. This has resulted in a strengthening of the working relationships between the Council and the schools.

### 6.7 Integration

The emergency response has been a 'One Council' approach.

### 6.8 EqIA

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since there only a limited change of policy and guidance associated with this report.



7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The report will be presented to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and then subsequently through to the Executive Committee for monitoring purposes.

**Background Documents / Electronic Links**

Appendix 1 - BG Estyn Thematic Review Letter

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Dear Michelle Morris,

During the early autumn term, the Welsh Government asked us to undertake a review of local authorities work in supporting their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) during the period from March to October 2020.

This letter outlines the outcome of this work in Blaenau Gwent local authority. The content of the letter is based on virtual meetings with officers, the cabinet lead member for education and a sample of schools and PRUs. We have also considered the supporting documentation provided by the local authority and the feedback from surveys of school/PRU leaders, governors, teachers and support staff, parents and pupils. We have referred to the outcomes of the surveys where relevant, although the surveys were mainly be used to inform the national report which was published on our website on 15 January. Here is a [link](#) to that report.

We would like to thank your staff for giving of their time to discuss their work with us and for providing additional information on request.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Meilyr Rowlands".

**Meilyr Rowlands**

**Her Majesty's Chief Inspector**

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## The local authority's work to support its schools from March to August 2020

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### Leadership and collaboration

In March, the local authority established two groups to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The gold level response team consisted of the corporate directors and the emergency response team (ERT) consisted of service area leads and associated officers. These groups supported the school repurposing planning groups which involved all officers working with schools. The authority revised this structure in June to support school re-opening, establishing two executive school planning groups, one for the secondary sector inclusive of special schools and one for the primary sector inclusive of Welsh-medium provision. In addition, a local authority transition group was established with representation from key services including health and safety, environmental health and social services to provide support to schools. Headteachers were involved in these groups, acting as cluster representatives and liaising with the schools in their own clusters.

In June, officers surveyed parents about their intentions to send children back to school for the last three weeks of the summer term. There were 4,221 responses to the survey on behalf of 8,000 pupils. The results of the survey indicated that 53% of pupils would return to school, however actual attendance was lower than this. In the first week, attendance levels were 43%, increasing to 46% in week two. The survey results also showed that most parents were concerned about children's health, particularly where families had members who were shielding or had children with medical needs. Parents had concerns about children from hubs mixing with children that had not been attending school. Officers worked with Public Health Wales to try to address these concerns and took advice from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to identify the best ways to support pupils back into school.

Officers created a strategic framework for school re-opening in September with a set of key principles to ensure consistency in approaches where possible and to try to avoid the need for schools to develop their own solutions to the challenges around re-opening. The executive school planning groups established a common local authority wide approach for the first two weeks of September. Officers provided a risk assessment template and guidance for reopening schools and established a process for reviewing these upon completion.

#### **Cameo: Strong collaboration across the local authority**

The reopening of schools in Blaenau Gwent was managed well in conjunction with corporate colleagues and schools. There are robust reporting arrangements on education matters to the gold level response team via the Emergency Response Team (ERT) protocols. In addition, education officers established two executive school planning groups - one for the secondary sector inclusive of special schools, along with one for the primary sector inclusive of Welsh-medium provision. The aim of these groups was to oversee the development of a common framework and

principles within which the reopening of schools could be implemented. Blaenau Gwent's approach was to offer pupils the opportunity to have at least three opportunities to check in and catch up during the summer term, where practicably possible. They also aimed to ensure that schools established maximum engagement opportunities for key year groups.

There was an issue with the water supply in four schools and these were unable to re-open on time. The schools' water supplies were tested once the Minister had announced that schools would re-open on 29 June. The local authority was unable to access the testing process earlier as staff involved in testing were part of the furlough scheme. By the time that the results were available, and Legionnaires' disease was found to be present in the systems, it was too late for the schools to open on 29 June. The local authority conducted an independent review so that they could prevent this happening during any future school closures. All four schools opened for the last week of the summer term.

Local authority officers supported staff in both of their non-school settings for children under five throughout the pandemic, including providing financial support through grants and advice on the furlough scheme.

Local authority officers worked well with officers from the regional consortium (EAS) to ensure that schools had appropriate guidance and information to support their work. In the main, the local authority provided support for operational processes such as school transport and health and safety and the EAS provided guidance around learning and professional development.

Officers feel that there is a good working relationship between schools and local authority staff. The local authority established a group of officers from key local authority services to support the transition from schools providing childcare hubs to reopening for education. School membership of this group is organised on a cluster basis with cluster representatives liaising with the schools in their own clusters.

Officers worked with Public Health Wales to share key messages with staff, parents and pupils about the safe reopening of schools. They provided advice and guidance to headteachers, for example about classroom organisation and pupil movement through schools. Officers put processes in place to maintain communication with parents throughout the school summer holiday period.

### **Promoting learning**

Officers consider that the EAS has provided good support to schools in blended learning approaches. The EAS implemented a 'playlist' for schools soon after providers closed. This was a resource with comprehensive coverage of key information that EAS officers shared with all headteachers on a weekly basis. The resource was designed to support school leaders by collating national and regional advice and guidance together and locating it in one place to enable easy access for

school leaders. The resource was refined and updated during the summer term as the situation evolved.

Senior officers in the local authority recognised that learner engagement was an issue during the period when schools were closed. The EAS surveyed school leaders about distance learning, with all schools in Blaenau Gwent responding. The main reasons given by schools for the lack of engagement of learners were lack of ICT equipment, lack of support from parents and parents struggling to juggle their employment responsibilities with supporting their children's learning. As a result of these findings, the local authority set up a communication group to focus on learner wellbeing. The group produced videos for families about home and distance learning. The group also considered how best to support learners from Welsh-medium schools in their home environment.

The local authority undertook a survey to find out how many learners had either no digital equipment or no internet access at home. To support these learners and to enable them to access the provision offered by schools, officers arranged for devices from schools to be rebuilt. Around 900 laptops and approximately 133 Wi-Fi devices were allocated to learners and distributed to their homes.

Officers provided guidance and resources to support schools in managing the change to digital learning. The EAS provided professional learning opportunities for teachers and support staff. Prior to the publication of Welsh Government guidance, the EAS discouraged teachers across the region from streaming lessons live. However, after receiving the guidance one secondary school and one all-age school started to stream lessons, primarily to pupils in key stage 4. Coleg Gwent has also engaged with pupils using this method. The all-age school shared its live lessons with pupils from a school in a neighbouring authority.

### **Supporting vulnerable learners**

The response to the pandemic forged closer links between social services, family services, CAMHS and the education service and allowed the local authority to streamline some of its work. Officers from these services held early discussions about school closures and by 3 April, the educational psychology service had produced and distributed five support packs for children and families. Both the

#### **Cameo: Beneficial support for vulnerable pupils by the educational psychology service**

The educational psychology service produced and distributed support packs for children and families. These focused on managing worries, learning at home including wellbeing advice, emotional health and wellbeing, communication and relationships and transition back into school. This work was done early in the school closure period to provide timely support for families. Parents and schools provided positive feedback on this guidance and the local authority shared this resource with local authorities across Wales.

education psychology service and the education welfare service set up telephone helpline services to support families. At the start of the lockdown period, headteachers identified children whose wellbeing they had concerns about and provided the local authority with information about these. Education welfare officers contacted these families by telephone or by making a socially distanced home visit to discuss wellbeing and learning.

The local authority implemented a food distribution service for pupils eligible for free school meals when schools first closed. This service provided meals each day, which were available for families to collect from hubs or were delivered to families in more isolated communities. In early May, the local authority replaced the food delivery service with direct payments to families. There was a high level of uptake for these payments and local authority officers contacted eligible families who had not applied for funding to give them support with the application process. Since the start of the pandemic, the number for families with school-aged children who submitted applications for universal credit increased by 600.

#### **Cameo: The work of the local authority youth service**

The local authority reconfigured the youth service to support the young people identified as having the greatest need for support and intervention. Officers obtained details of pupils identified as needing support from schools. Around 600 pupils below the age of 16 and 150 young people over the age of 16 were identified and have been contacted weekly by youth support staff. The lead officer for youth work tried to ensure the young people were familiar with the youth workers assigned to them. The youth service identified a number of challenges facing young people in the first few weeks of the pandemic. These included the loss of employment, running out of money and eviction from accommodation. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation and the local authority placed some young people who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support. As the lockdown period progressed, youth workers liaised with other agencies to produce resources to emphasise the importance of social distancing to young people. Youth officers began working in different ways with young people, for example providing music sessions and cookery lessons online. This allowed them to work with an increased number of young people.

Following the urgent work carried out to support young people in these early weeks, youth workers moved from crisis management to focus on young people's wellbeing. They held one-to-one and group sessions virtually and continued with counselling sessions where these were in place previously. They recognised the difficulties for some young people in not having a private place for sessions, so a number of engagements became check-ins and some young people asked for sessions to be put on hold. Youth workers provided guidance to young people on the restrictions in place as a result of the pandemic and tried to make sure that young people were not congregating in groups outdoors. The youth service worked in partnership with agencies such as the police and crime commissioners and contributed to videos

produced to explain to young people the importance of staying at home and not mixing with others.

Youth workers identified early on in the pandemic that many of the young people they were working with did not have access to ICT equipment. They responded quickly to these needs, for example by distributing mobile phones and laptops. They started working with young people in different ways, for example holding music sessions and group cookery lessons online. The local authority reports that these have been successful, and they anticipate that these will continue as they have reached young people that would not usually attend youth centres. Youth workers provided weekly updates to schools about school age learners and to parents and carers.

Once it became apparent in March that schools would close to most pupils and that the local authority would need to provide childcare for the children of key workers and those that are most vulnerable, officers developed a hub protocol. The protocol provided detailed guidance on safeguarding, health and safety, hygiene and social distancing as well as clear procedures for organising the hub provision, including meal provision, opening hours and registration procedures. They established a repurposing group to carry out this work and to monitor the childcare hubs.

Initially hubs were organised around the four secondary catchment areas with an additional hub in the local authority's special school for pupils with specific needs, for example those with healthcare plans. In response to feedback from primary head teachers who were concerned with the initial arrangements for hubs to be solely in secondary schools, the local authority quickly arranged for an additional hub to be based in a primary school. The hubs were open from 8am until 6pm including through school holiday periods. Approximately 380 children of key workers and \*\*\* vulnerable pupils attended hub provision between March and July. Officers from education and social services worked together to identify vulnerable children to attend the provision, including at the special school. Hub provision ceased on 19 June and the children that had been attending returned to their own schools during the week beginning 22 June.

The local authority has two non-school settings for children under five. One remained open throughout the pandemic to cater for the children of key workers. In addition, the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme, funded by Welsh Government, for children between the ages of 0-4 years supported 145 children to access funded childcare.

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## **The local authority's work to support its schools from September**

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### **Leadership and collaboration**

Following eight months of undertaking the role on an interim basis, in early November the local authority appointed the new permanent corporate director of



education. To help strengthen the education department, in the summer term, the local authority advertised for a new lead officer for school improvement. However, they failed to appoint to this position and a decision was taken to delay the appointment until the new corporate director had been appointed. Neither the interim arrangements for the corporate director position or the lack of school improvement lead officer appear to have impacted negatively on the local authority's ability to support schools during the pandemic. The new director has already met with headteachers and has outlined his vision for the local authority and his desire to align the various education teams more closely. The executive member for education is very well informed about the local authority's support for schools during the pandemic and has a clear understanding of the challenges facing schools and their leaders.

Education officers within the local authority continue to work productively with other corporate service staff. The gold level response team has maintained their lead work since September through their twice-weekly meetings. Education officers think that collaborative working across the council has been strengthened throughout the pandemic and that the local authority's 'one council' ethos is being reinforced through joint working practices to support children their families and the local community as a whole. This improved partnership working, and collaborative approaches have supported a strong response to the local challenges.

Officers have held workshops to discuss lessons that they have learnt through their actions so far and how they are addressing new ways of working. Officers are learning on a daily basis and they now have stronger amended systems and processes in place to manage the challenges should there be another full lockdown.

Working in conjunction with the EAS, local authority officers continue to recognise the importance of supporting the wellbeing of school leaders. Officers consider that they have provided leaders with a high level of support and Estyn's survey results show that many headteachers feel that the local authority cares about their wellbeing. Headteachers have appreciated how swiftly officers have responded to their concerns and this has helped them deal with a range of issues quickly. The local authority is also providing education officers with appropriate wellbeing support. This includes timely communication, guidance and resources to support effective homeworking, recognising officers' commitments to support family members and the need for a flexible approach to homeworking to support individual needs.

### **Promoting learning**

From September, the local authority maintained a strong focus on supporting schools to provide a safe return to school for pupils and staff. Officers issued schools with an updated version of their 'Guidance for whole school reopening document' to help leaders manage operational matters. In addition, they have provided schools with a flexible range of support in order to respond to emerging learner and school improvement needs. Officers have worked closely with the EAS,

school leaders, staff and governors to support the identified needs. They have ensured that they have provided timely communication for school leaders as well as access to virtual networks for staff governors and pupils.

Across Wales, very few pupils currently need to receive blended learning. Most pupils are able to attend school and benefit from face-to-face teaching. Where pupils are required to isolate or shield, schools are providing distance learning until they are able to return. A blended learning approach would involve a cohesive, intentional plan for pupils' learning to involve a combination of learning in school and at home which is not required in most schools at the moment.

The local authority has worked in partnership with the EAS to support schools to plan their distance learning offer and to enable them to plan for a blended approach should they require it in the future. Officers have recognised key areas for improvement regarding distance learning, including ensuring better engagement from parents and all learners. As a result, officers have worked closely with schools to provide additional guidance for parents who need support in using ICT to help support their children's learning at home and to access communication.

In September, officers collaborated with colleagues from the EAS to produce an executive update on their strategy for supporting schools with continuity of learning. The document outlines various phases for school support and includes how the local authority and the regional consortia worked with other partners to produce guidance for schools to support them in preparing their approaches for distance learning. Initially written in September, the document was then updated in November and presented to all elected members.

In September, in line with other local authorities within the EAS, officers sent a survey to all headteachers to gain information around their strategy for distance learning. The response from schools in Blaenau Gwent was higher than the region as a whole. Local authority officers used the information from the survey to share good practice and to identify any professional learning requirements within individual schools to help them customise support. The results of this survey suggest that all schools are offering pupils a suitable variety of blended learning approaches. There are no schools where the local authority has concerns over their ability to support pupils' learning effectively. The local authority has used the survey responses to help share good practice, for example in the use of shared platforms and the streaming of live lessons.

Officers have used the findings of the Children's Commissioner's survey 'COVID and me' to help improve their support for schools. An example of this is increased emphasis on teaching pupils resilience to help them remain focused when learning at home. The survey also highlighted that over half of pupils worried about falling behind when not in school and so this information was shared with school leaders.

Local authority officers have weekly updates from the EAS as to how challenge advisers are working with individual schools. The local authority has now resumed a more formal approach to working with their three schools who are causing concern.

This has included more regular meetings that now have a stronger focus on school improvement rather than just supporting leaders to address wellbeing issues.

The local authority's Welsh-medium education forum is helping to embed the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Officers also feel they have good representation from the Welsh-medium sector on their various strategic groups. They have established a communications group who are promoting the benefits of being bilingual. In addition, officers have worked with partners from other local authorities to develop a regional booklet on the benefits of being bilingual. This is now included in their admissions booklet and on their website. To help promote Welsh oracy in particular, the local authority organises a Welsh-medium youth club. Since the start of the pandemic this has been run as a virtual club and officers report that members attending has increased when compared to face-to-face sessions. Officers are continuing with their plans to expand provision for Welsh-medium education within the authority.

Local authority officers are well aware of the impact of high levels of COVID-19 within the locality and there are many schools with positive cases. Officers have worked closely with school leaders to assist them in supporting pupils with distance learning when they are isolating. The local authority has continued to provide a high level of support for pupils who require ICT equipment and Wi-Fi access in their homes. Officers have liaised regularly with school leaders to ensure that they target that provision to pupils in greatest need. They have also been proactive in supporting schools to work with parents to increase their capacity to support their children's learning at home.

#### **Cameo: Effective sharing of ICT resources**

Over recent months there has been an international problem of delays in procuring additional ICT devices with increased demand due to additional home learning and working. To help overcome this issue, local authority officers have worked effectively with schools to help co-ordinate the sharing of surplus ICT devices. Where there has been a need to provide pupils with ICT hardware, this local approach has been effective in supporting pupils' learning at home. It has helped mitigate the impact of a delay in receiving new devices.

Officers have undertaken a survey with members of their youth service to measure the impact of their support and to ask young people for suggestions for improvement. From this work, they discovered that at times, young people felt contacted too often and therefore youth officers have reduced contact with young people when appropriate. They also amended their approach in contacting these young people by addressing individual preference for either face-to-face, virtual or telephone contact.

Local authority officers have maintained their regular headteacher stakeholder group meetings with a strong focus this term on supporting learning.

At the start of the autumn term, local authority officers were mindful of not placing excess pressure on schools and therefore took a graduated approach in considering how schools were using their 'Recruit, recover, raise standards: the accelerating learning programme' grant funding. Working with officers from the EAS, they

grouped schools into three tiers depending on their categorisation. Schools therefore received a level of initial support to complete their plans based on their individual needs. All leaders were expected to submit their school development plan by October half-term.

The local authority has directed all schools to use the EAS grant monitoring tool to plan and check on that spending. Officers are fully aware of the year groups who have been disproportionately affected by school closures. They are working with individual school leaders to ensure that additional funding is targeted appropriately to support these pupils to catch up with their learning. Officers have not yet put plans in place to monitor the impact of grant spending by each school but will be working closely with EAS challenge advisors once schools have evidence available to measure the impact of their plans on improving outcomes for pupils.

In particular, officers are working very closely with the leaders of schools causing concern and expect leaders to provide them with a regular update on the progress against each of their recommendations. The local authority is working in conjunction with the EAS to continue to broker and provide bespoke support to these schools, dependent on their individual need. Additional support has a strong focus on helping to improve teaching, learning and leadership.

From September, officers determined that they would need to revise their transport provision to ensure that it would enable them to provide safe travel for all eligible pupils. Currently pupils from 15 schools within the local authority are eligible for transport in line with the council's policy, along with pupils from 12 schools and specialist education facilities outside of the authority. The local authority has been able to meet the transport requirements identified by schools within and outside of the authority. This has assisted in providing these pupils with continuity of learning.

Since September, the local authority has continued to work closely with the EAS to provide schools with a weekly 'playlist' of support and training. There is a strong focus on blended learning and approaches to delivering a curriculum virtually and in school and to ensure that professional learning opportunities are available for all staff. The playlist is updated regularly in response to feedback from staff and to share good practice. Individual schools are able to apply to have their good practice included in the playlist. Local authority and regional consortia officers endorse this provision before it is included in the training materials.

Feedback from headteachers has been that there has been a lot of useful information on the playlist and it has supported training needs well. However, a few leaders have expressed concerns that the playlist can be too large, overwhelming and difficult to navigate.

In November, the EAS has launched a new website to help support schools to maintain consistent high quality blended and distance learning experiences for pupils. The website has been designed to share practice in learning approaches to help schools in their curriculum design. Local authority officers have undertaken work with the EAS to support schools with this work, for example through organising master classes to be shared on the website. The local authority has recognised that

it is of paramount importance to enable staff to access professional learning flexibly. As a result, professional learning sessions are recorded and therefore available for staff to access at their preferred time. Feedback from school leaders is that this approach has been much appreciated by schools. Local authority officers monitor the impact of professional learning through monthly reports and quality assurance meetings with the EAS. Through this work, officers help identify further areas for development and target professional learning opportunities accordingly.

Middle leaders across the local authority continue to access the EAS's useful middle leadership training. This is particularly helpful in strengthening the capacity of leadership in schools causing concern.

### **Supporting vulnerable learners**

Local authority officers have continued to work closely with schools and other services, such as children's services, to identify and support vulnerable learners within the local authority. Education officers liaise with officers from children's services and their established group meets on a regular basis to consider how best to provide support for vulnerable pupils.

Across the local authority, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils had generally been the most anxious about re-engaging in education in September. The local authority's GRT worker has been working closely with GRT families and schools with large numbers of GRT pupils. There is a higher level of non-attendance amongst these pupils and officers are working hard to persuade parents not to register their children as being electively home educated. Officers have had concerns regarding some GRT pupils and their access to digital learning platforms. They have addressed this by supplying these families with printed paper packs of work as required.

At the time of writing, school attendance was between 80% and 85%. Officers are aware that some pupils have been anxious about returning to school and that they have individual needs. The local authority has adopted a risk-based approach to address these needs and support learners and their parents. Staff from the Gwent Education Minority Ethnic Service (GEMS) have assisted schools in making phone calls to families and provided a translation service when needed. This has helped ease the anxieties of some parents of pupils who have English as an additional language.

The contact that education welfare officers (EWOs) and educational psychologists established during lockdown to offer support to families continued during the autumn term. Feedback from parents and staff is that this has been a very useful service and it provided valuable support for them, particularly for pupils with special educational needs. Across the local authority, there has been a sharp increase from parents requesting elective home education with 27 new requests received since the start of the autumn term. Numbers of these requests had previously been reducing. EWOs

are providing advice and information to parents to ensure that they are aware of the full implications of their decision.

The local authority put procedures in place to ensure that it maintained contact with vulnerable learners in Year 9 to post-16 who could not return to school during the fire break. Officers met with all secondary headteachers and they have agreed a programme of distance learning to provide support for these pupils. All youth service workers that are normally based in schools returned to their school after half-term in November but have changed the focus of their support. They now support identified pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills and also make visits to pupils' homes as needed.

Local authority officers recognise the importance of smooth transition for vulnerable pupils to post-16 provision. To address this, they have strong links with Coleg Gwent.

Since September, the local authority has continued to use its early identification tool for learners who may potentially be not in education, employment or training (NEET). They have now added additional factors such as family breakdown and accommodation issues which could lead to youth homelessness. Schools can refer pupils for immediate crisis support. Officers will also work with schools to identify other pupils who need enhanced support or contact.

Officers feel that they have given schools a high level of support to ensure a safe return to school. This has included guidance on social distancing, good hygiene, and suitable personal protective equipment (PPE). They have also provided model risk assessments. All schools have adopted and adapted the local authority risk assessment templates. Guidance was provided to schools regarding the use of PPE in general, for first aid, medical, intimate care and other purposes. PPE and other resource requirements such as signage, were audited on a school by school basis to allow appropriate provisions to be made.

Education and Health and Safety teams visited all school sites in order to review the reopening plans, risk assessments and to undertake environmental health-based assessments ensuring compliance with key legislation, guidance and infection control and management measures. Individual risk assessments were also undertaken to support the needs of pupils accessing specialist provision including resource bases, along with vulnerable and shielding pupils or families. Officers agreed with headteachers that there would not be a requirement for pupils to wear uniform and that the dress code would be relaxed. In addition, it was agreed that pupils would bring their own refreshments into schools.

Officers recognise that there is a real concern for the wellbeing of young people aged 16 to 25. They have used youth service buildings to provide takeaway food for these young people as well as giving them access to digital resources which they may not otherwise be able to use. Partners from the 'raising aspirations strategic group' have met regularly to help ensure that all young people can achieve as well as they can. Partners include the Prince's Trust, Careers Wales and the housing sector.

On a regional basis, the local authority has supported the South East Wales Consortium (SEWC) ALN Transformation Network on Hwb, a place where ALN resources and training materials can be accessed by all school and central staff. Over 1,000 members have been able to access this network. The local authority has provided weekly specific ALN resource ideas to all schools, for pupils and parents including suggesting online web-sites, games to play, and things to do whilst at home and fun exercises. Staff from the Sensory and Communication Support Service (SenCom) and GEMS have also contributed specific resources and advice. In response to headteachers identifying a regression in pupil's language skills on return to school, the local authority extended their 'Word Aware training' to support the development of language within primary schools.

The local authority have facilitated regional drop in advice sessions for schools to access. For example, for ALNCoS are able to speak to occupational therapists, speech and language workers, physiotherapists, and CAMHS. At the time of writing, none of these specialist support workers are visiting schools with all their work being undertaken remotely.

The local authority anticipated a surge in new referrals for counselling, with the service being close to full capacity. Feedback from pupils already accessing counselling services has been mixed with many saying that it is not working well as they cannot find a private place in their homes with which to chat to the counsellors. When this has been the case, phone calls have just been used to check up on their wellbeing. The local authority has used additional funding from Welsh Government for counselling services to recruit extra counsellors.

There is a new partnership board with the council's leisure services and officers hope that this work will further strengthen working relationships between different departments. The local authority has agreed to continue commissioning the Aneurin Leisure trust for the next five years as it has worked well previously. They feel that provision is good and that it has helped them with revenue savings.

The Education and Environment Directorates worked closely with schools, along with colleagues in Social Services and Aneurin Leisure Trust, to establish Clwb Yr Haf/Summer Club. The club operated in four school buildings in the most deprived areas of Blaenau Gwent with the schools being selected on the basis of eFSM, area/deprivation status and interest.

Since September, the local authority reports that all annual reviews have taken place as planned. As these meetings have taken place virtually, attendance at meetings by other professionals has been higher than usual. Education officers have seen this as a positive benefit to working this way. Feedback from parents has also been that they have been happy with this approach to holding reviews. All reviews for looked after children within the local authority are up-to-date with all meetings also having taken place virtually.

The local authority has met requirements on pupils' individual statements as far as possible given the current restrictions due to the pandemic. However, the local

authority recognises that this has not been at the same level of support as it was prior to the pandemic. Since September, most support has returned to normal levels. If pupils are self-isolating, this support has to be adapted and schools have used support staff to meet pupils' needs.

Within the local authority, most statemented pupils are in Learning Resource Bases (LRBs) or special schools. Schools have maintained a high level of online contact with statemented pupils and this process is evolving and should improve further over time.

Schools have reported a big increase in information received through the Operation Encompass initiative, possibly reflecting a rise of cases of domestic abuse within the local authority.

Officers recognised that, due to the pandemic, there was the potential for the implementation of their plans to meet additional learning need reforms to be delayed. However, they are taking steps to address this. They have already seconded another person with ALN specialism to work for the local authority for two days a week and will shortly be seconding a full time ALNCo to join the team. They are establishing an oversight group with partners from Children's Services and other agencies to help them be ready for implementation. All schools are now trialling the use of individual development plans (IDPs) and are accessing refresher training to help staff prepare. As a result of this work, officers feel that they have largely caught up and schools have reported that they are now on track and have no concerns about being ready for implementation in September 2021.



# Agenda Item 7

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **9 March 2021**

Report Subject: **EAS Business Plan 2021-2022  
(Draft for consultation)**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J. Collins, Executive Member for Education**

Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Report Written by: **Debbie Harteveld, Managing Director, EAS**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
√	25.02.21	22.02.21			09.03.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

This report asks for members to consider the full contents of the draft EAS Business Plan 2021-2022, as part of the regional consultation process. Through this activity, members will ensure that the plan enables appropriate support for schools and settings in Blaenau Gwent.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The EAS delivers, through an agreed Business Plan, a wide range of school improvement services to all schools (all key stages, including all through schools and special schools), pupil referral units and funded non-maintained nursery settings on behalf of each LA. This plan supports the role LAs have in delivering their statutory function, addressing their individual improvement priorities and promoting improved pupil outcomes.
- 2.2 The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan. This document contains the main priorities that the EAS believe will be relevant to focus upon in the next iteration of the regional Business Plan for 2021-2022. It is challenging to try to predict the way in which society will be operating from summer 2021 with regards to managing the spread of coronavirus. The priorities contained within this document assume that the EAS will build upon the learning and momentum from the past few months.
- 2.3 However, this plan will also need to consider how schools and settings will operate in a COVID-19 recovery phase and the support that will be required. Consideration will also be given to the priorities that were set and agreed prior to the pandemic in the previous Business Plan 2020-2021 depending on their relevance in the current climate.

- 2.4 The EAS will work collaboratively with local authority partners, schools and settings to implement the Business Plan. It is critically important that the EAS remains sensitive and responsive to the needs of the school workforce and will continue to be a highly supportive, reflective and responsive organisation.
- 2.5 The EAS will build upon what has worked well during this period, particularly the aspects of our role that have been successful within the virtual environment. The support that the EAS will offer will fully align to the expectations set by local authorities, Welsh Government (WG) and links to emerging research.
- 2.6 The EAS understands the need to over communicate with clarity to provide reassurance regarding advice, guidance, support and expectations. As a result, the EAS will work with local authorities to minimise any unnecessary bureaucracy for schools and settings to ensure they are able to focus on their important priorities and their support for learners.
- 2.7 The timing, delivery and focus of the support will be carefully considered considering the challenges that are likely to continue into the summer and autumn terms 2021.
- 2.8 Members are asked to take the opportunity to comment on the contents of the Business Plan as part of the consultation process and provide a written response as appropriate.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 This report has been approved by Education DMT, CLT for submission to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee:

**Option 1:**

For members to receive the report and accept the Business Plan as presented.

**Option 2:**

For members to consider the plan and offer further comment for consideration by the EAS; this can be done via a written response back to the EAS. Written feedback on the draft Business Plan should be provided to the EAS Managing Director following the scrutiny meeting. This feedback will be taken into consideration in the final version of the Business Plan.

### 4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

#### 4.1 **Statutory Responsibility**

- 4.1.1 The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan.

#### **Corporate Improvement Plan**

##### 4.1.2 **Education Aims**

- Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.

- Ensure high quality leadership and teaching that secures good progress for all learners, particularly the vulnerable and those who are eFSM.
- Improve wellbeing for learners at all stages of development.
- Secure strong progress in skills, particularly in English and mathematics at key stages 3 and 4.
- Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.

#### **Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan**

- 4.1.3 The content of the EAS business plan is clearly aligned to the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan which aims for everyone to have the best start in life. Through this plan it seeks to ensure that the education provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people so that their progress is as good as it ought to be.

### **5. Implications Against Each Option**

#### **5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

- 5.1.1 The EAS is subject to a robust governance model that is underpinned by a Collaboration and Members agreement (CAMA) and Articles of Association. Ensuring that the EAS provides value for money is of utmost importance. As recipients of public funding, it is important that budgets are allocated wisely. We will endeavour to deliver even better value for money through achieving financial balance and delivering services within the constraints of our budget, making further efficiency savings wherever possible and ensuring delegation rates to schools are maximised.
- 5.1.2 The EAS is funded on an annual basis from three sources: Local authority core contributions, regional school improvement grants and a service level agreement for governor support services. A spending plan will accompany the Business Plan and will be intrinsically linked to all actions contained within it. A detailed overview of the regional distribution of all grants will be available for all schools to view and compare allocations and rates of delegation through the regional grant monitoring tool.
- 5.1.3 Delegation rate to schools has increased to 94.4%, whilst the EAS staff profile has reduced by 53.1% since 2012.
- 5.1.4 The local authority's indicative core contribution for 2021/22 are as follows: Blaenau-Gwent LA's contribution for 2021/22 is £351,806 compared with £358,985 in 2020/21 and £364,452 in 2019/20.
- 5.1.5 At the time of writing this report, there is uncertainty with regards to the regional grant funding from WG for 2021/2022. As a result of the pandemic, it is likely that there will be reductions in the regional grant profile. When the grant position has been confirmed the EAS detailed delivery plan will be updated accordingly.

## 5.2 **Risks**

EAS Regional Risks: As part of the internal EAS risk management process several aspects have been identified as potential barriers to the successful implementation of this Business Plan. These clearly set out the elements that will be important to ensuring optimum impact of the work of the EAS in partnership with LAs. These are:

- Full use is not made of consultation events to help shape the direction of the Business Plan to ensure collective regional ownership of priorities and actions for improvement.
- Uncertain financial grant projections may destabilise the ability to deliver the agreed business plan.
- The uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and the effect this will have on schools and settings.

5.3 These risks are mitigated through the identification of priorities as seen in the priority areas above and within the detailed within the EAS Business Plan, Blaenau Gwent LA Plans and the Education Strategic Plan.

5.4 Blaenau Gwent will have its own risks linked to the delivery of the strategic objectives within their corporate plans.

## 5.4 **Legal**

The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan.

## 5.5 **Human Resources**

None for this report.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 Please note that a mid-year evaluation of the current revised Covid Business Plan (2019/20) has been submitted to each of the EAS governance groups and has been available for local authorities to share as appropriate within their own democratic processes (created in January 2021). Within the context of evolving accountability arrangements and the Covid-19 Pandemic, school and aggregate LA performance data has not been available for presentation to this committee.

6.1.2 The delivery model for the Business Plan is on a regional basis, the needs of each school and trends within Blaenau-Gwent will continue to be met through bespoke work with each school, both virtually and when safe to do so physically.

6.1.3 The EAS will offer an evolving Professional Learning Offer (PLO) to all schools and settings across the region, in order to meet development needs as we emerge from the pandemic. We will continue to fund schools (grant permitting) to deliver a large proportion of the professional learning activity, where appropriate virtually

6.1.4 All schools will continue to be provided with a bespoke support package that compliments the priorities identified within their own School Development Plans

(SDPs) in line with the levels of support they require. There is a degree of flexibility within the deployment model to allow for in-year changes in circumstances and to allow for changes in light of the pandemic.

- 6.1.5 The centralised model of service delivery that has been adopted across the South East Wales region has enabled efficiencies to be realised, economies of scale to be secured, particularly in relation to avoiding duplication of functions and the ability to secure a range of educational expertise within the region.
- 6.1.6 The talent and expertise that resides in schools within and beyond the region is incentivised and used effectively to support professional learning and school improvement activity. There has been inevitable fragility in the ability of schools to offer support beyond their own settings because of the pandemic, this situation will be managed with sensitivity and will be constantly reviewed.
- 6.1.7 For sustained school improvement to happen it is essential that all partners work together more closely than ever recognising that each partner (school, LA and EAS) has its role to play in providing support to secure improvements.
- 6.1.7 The Business Plan is currently in the consultation process. The Consultees are noted below:
- EAS staff
  - Directors of Education (within South East Wales) and Diocesan Directors
  - Regional Joint Executive Group
  - EAS Company Board
  - EAS Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
  - Individual local authority education scrutiny committees
  - All Headteachers from within the region
  - All Chairs of Governors from within the region
  - School Councils from within the region
  - All school based Professional Learning Leads
  - EAS Supporting School Trade Union Group (SSTU Group)
- 6.1.8 The final version of the Business Plan will be supported by a range of supporting documents:
- Detailed Business Plan 2021–2022
  - Regional Grant Mapping Overview 2021–2022
  - Regional Self-Evaluation Report (Executive Summary)
  - EAS Risk Register (Executive Summary)
  - Regional Professional Learning Offer 2021–2022
  - Local Authority Strategic Education Plans
- 6.1.9 This Business Plan addresses each local authority strategic priority that are indicated with \*. These priorities fall within the remit of the work of the EAS. The EAS will work in partnership with local authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate and those that arise from the changing local and national situation.

6.1.10 The improvements that are required at regional and local authority level require a strong commitment of partnership-working to be successful. Where local authorities and the EAS work in close partnership, there is evidence, that rapid and sustainable school improvement can be achieved. This joined up approach will be even more critical as we work in partnership to support schools and settings during this challenging time.

Blaenau-Gwent Strategic Priorities 2021-22 (as provided by the LA):

Strategic priorities for 2021/2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure high quality leadership and teaching that secures good progress for all learners, particularly the vulnerable and those who are eFSM.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve wellbeing for learners at all stages of development.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure strong progress in skills, particularly in English and mathematics at key stages 3 and 4.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.</li> </ul>

#### 6.1.11 **Regional Priorities 2021-2022**

The EAS will endeavour to be a professional partner working with schools to provide support using external expertise and experience. All schools and settings will be offered a range of professional learning and bespoke support which aligns to their school improvement priorities. Full consideration will be given to the current climate in which schools and settings are operating. Within this context the priorities of the EAS will be to:

- A. To ensure that the wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings is paramount.
- B. Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.
- C. Provide support to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including continued use of blended learning approaches, particularly in identified secondary schools.
- D. Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures.
- E. Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise Curriculum for Wales, as appropriate.

- F. Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards.
- G. Consolidate, promote and further develop the regional school and practitioner networks, enabling effective routes of communication and support.
- H. Continue to support the development of leaders at all levels in schools and settings.
- I. Further build the capacity of governing bodies through the regional professional learning offer and bespoke support, as appropriate.
- J. Further develop a culture around accountability that identifies and values a broad spectrum of characteristics of effective schools and settings.
- K. Embed the EAS internal evaluation model, continue to welcome external challenge and support, ensure the effective and efficient support to schools and settings and adhere to legislative requirements that fully supports the wellbeing of staff.

### **Ambitions for 2021/22**

#### 6.1.12

Working in partnership with local authorities, schools and setting the ambitions for 2021/22 and beyond are challenging to capture without having clarity around the changing nature of the pandemic and the effect it will have on schools and settings. In this regard, the ambitions below need to be read within the context they have been derived:

- The EAS has placed wellbeing at the forefront of its work.
- There is a clear strategy to improve the quality of distance and blended learning experiences for learners. There has been good engagement in the regional strategy and many opportunities have been provided for schools to share to develop more effective teaching across and within schools and settings.
- Where schools and settings have engaged in the regional wellbeing support offer it has helped to support improvement in their provision for wellbeing.
- Schools and settings receive the right type of support, as appropriate to help them make progress against their school improvement priorities.
- Most schools can identify and provide the most appropriate support to specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures, to help them to progress.
- A regional strategy developed in collaboration with practitioners provides a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionally affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals.
- The quality and impact of the provision for professional learning for educational practitioners and governors is good and those schools that have engaged are able to evidence the impact of this.
- Refined and extended networks ensure effective collaboration and communication to support school improvement.
- A range of professional learning and bespoke support provided to schools and settings helps them realise Curriculum for Wales.

- Working with schools and local authorities, a regional model of support will be developed and implemented, focusing on accurate self-evaluation using a broad range of characteristics, aligned to school improvement priorities.

## 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

High Quality education is a fundamental pre-requisite of ensuring future local and national prosperity through the provision of an informed and well-educated workforce and society. The Local Authority's statutory role to monitor and evaluate school performance and the quality of provision, coupled with its statutory powers of intervention in schools causing concern is fundamental to ensuring that all schools provide high quality education provision.

## 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Involvement of partners is fundamental to securing and sustaining school improvement. The statutory framework advocates this and the work of the Local authority, its commissioned school improvement service (EAS) and schools evidences the positive impact of working in this way.

## 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The EAS Business Plan that is being consulted upon for 2021/2022 aligns to the strategic priorities within Blaenau Gwent.

## 6.5 ***Preventative focus***

A key element of the Council's work is to monitor settings and ensure appropriate support to secure continuing high standards. Estyn Inspection reports reflect the extent to which settings and Local Authorities has been effective in achieving this.

## 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Educational improvement in Blaenau Gwent is delivered on a regional basis through the South East Wales Consortium in collaboration with Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Blaenau-Gwent Councils.

## 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The Estyn Inspection Framework is aimed at promoting high standards and high-quality education provision. This aim is fundamental to the Council's well-being objectives and is fundamental to the joint work between Education and Social Services Directorates.

## 6.8 ***EqIA***

Not required for this report.

## 7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The EAS is required to submit to the Business Plan to Welsh Government, this plan covers the period 2021-2022. As noted above, the EAS will be sensitive and responsive to changing priorities as a result of the pandemic and may need to change direction and repurpose priorities as required. The support will be made available to all schools and settings, there is an understanding that schools and



settings are likely to be facing continuing challenges. It will be the decision of leaders to determine the most appropriate type and timing of at any of the support on offer in line with their priorities.

- 7.2 The progress on the implementation and impact of the Business Plan will be reported formally at a mid-year basis to the Joint Executive Group and Company Board. These reports, as in previous years, will be suitable for scrutiny activity at local authority and national level. In addition, the progress made towards the implementation of key actions will be reported at each meeting of the Joint Executive Group and Company Board.

### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

Appendix A - Education Achievement Service: Regional Business Plan (Post Covid Recovery: April 2021-March 2022) (Consultation 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft)

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**Education Achievement Service**  
for South East Wales  
**Gwasanaeth Cyflawni Addysg**  
i Dde Ddwyrain Cymru



# Education Achievement Service Regional Business Plan

**(Post Covid Recovery: April 2021-March 2022)**

**(Consultation 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft)**



**The final version of the Business Plan will be available in both Welsh and English.**

**This first draft document containing the high-level priorities has been shared with the following groups as part of the consultation process in December 2020:**

- EAS staff
- Directors of Education (within South East Wales) and Diocesan Directors
- Regional Headteacher Strategy Group

Comments and feedback from the first consultation process have been considered in this draft version of the Business Plan.

**This draft version of the Business Plan 2021-2022 will be shared with the following groups in January 2021. Views on the document can be submitted via this link: [BP 2021-22 Feedback](#)**

- EAS staff
- Directors of Education (within South East Wales) and Diocesan Directors
- Regional Joint Executive Group
- EAS Company Board
- EAS Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
- Individual local authority education scrutiny committees
- All Headteachers from within the region
- All Chairs of Governors from within the region
- School Councils from within the region
- All school based Professional Learning Leads
- EAS Supporting School Trade Union Group (SSTU Group)

**The final version of the Business Plan 2021-2022 will be presented for agreement to the Regional Joint Executive Group and then to each LA Cabinet / Executive and Welsh Government in March 2021.**

<p><b>Cllr K Preston</b> Chair of Education Achievement Service Company Board</p>	
<p><b>Cllr J Collins</b> Chair of Joint Executive Group</p>	
<p><b>Ms D Hartevelde</b> Managing Director, Education Achievement Service</p>	
<p><b>Mr Will McClean</b> Lead Director on behalf of South East Wales Directors Group</p>	

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## Section 1: Position statement

*“Especially in times of uncertainty, it is important for the organisation to be agile and to be able to respond quickly to changing needs. In these times of challenge, the continue to focus on staying close to schools, listening to the voice of school leaders and working closely with local authorities. Relationships and trust are crucial in times of uncertainty so in spite of the other pressures this needs to continue to be prioritised very strongly and time proactively put aside in diaries to do it.” (Steve Munby: Review of the EAS - October 2020)*

This document contains the main priorities that the EAS believe will be relevant to focus upon in the next iteration of the regional Business Plan for 2021-2022. It is challenging to try to predict the way in which society will be operating from summer 2021 with regards to managing the spread of coronavirus. The priorities contained within this document assume that the EAS will build upon the learning and momentum from the past few months.

However, this plan will also need to consider how schools and settings will operate in a COVID-19 recovery phase and the support that will be required. Consideration will also be given to the priorities that were set and agreed prior to the pandemic in the previous Business Plan 2020-2021 depending on their relevance in the current climate.

The EAS will work collaboratively with local authority partners, schools and settings to implement the Business Plan. It is critically important that the EAS remains sensitive and responsive to the needs of the school workforce and will continue to be a highly supportive, reflective and responsive organisation.

The EAS will build upon what has worked well during this period, particularly the aspects of our role that have been successful within the virtual environment. The support that the EAS will offer will fully align to the expectations set by local authorities, Welsh Government (WG) and links to emerging research.

The EAS understands the need to over communicate with clarity to provide reassurance regarding advice, guidance, support and expectations. As a result, the EAS will work with local authorities to minimise any unnecessary bureaucracy for schools and settings to ensure they are able to focus on their important priorities and their support for learners.








The timing, delivery and focus of the support will be carefully considered considering the challenges that are likely to continue into the summer and autumn terms 2021.

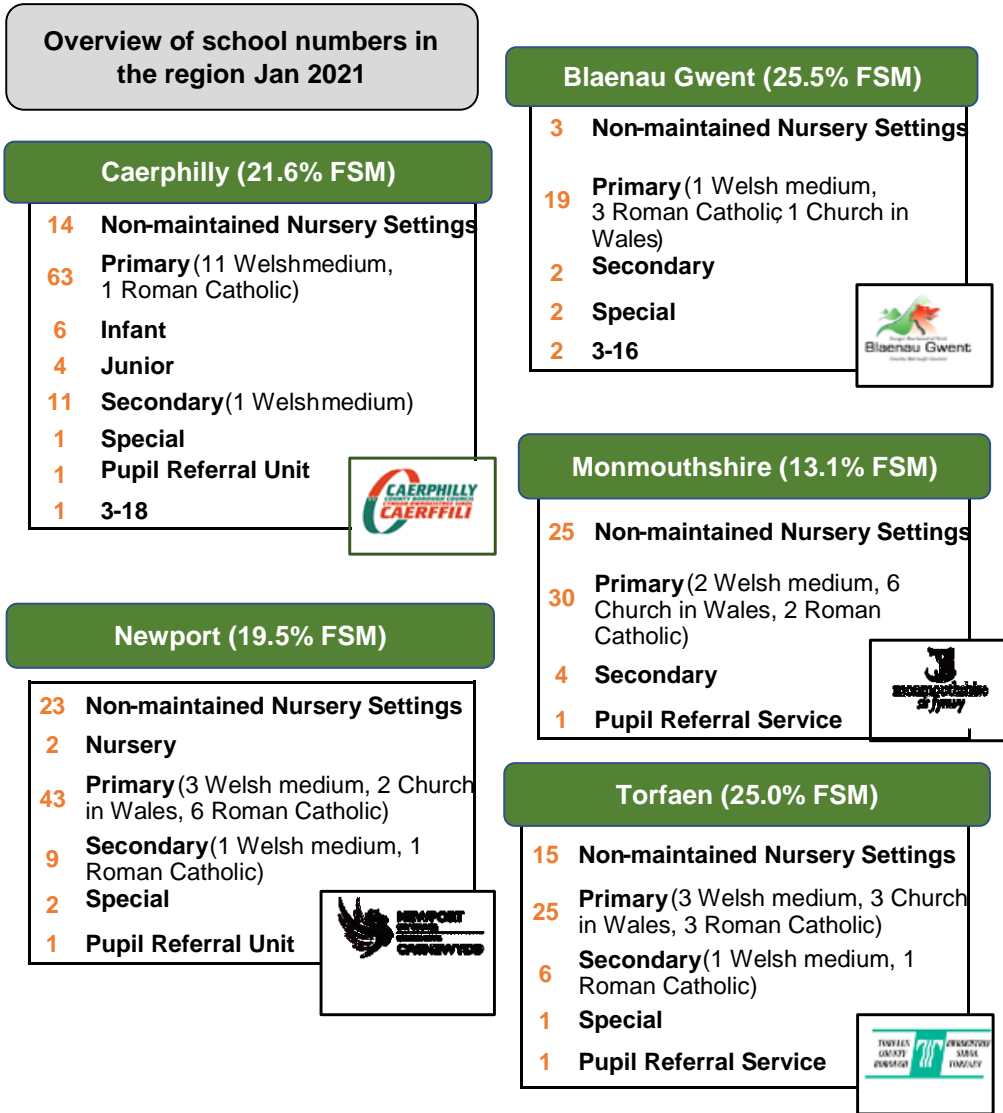
## Section 2: Regional Context

The centralised model of service delivery that has been adopted across the South East Wales region has enabled efficiencies to be realised, economies of scale to be secured, particularly in relation to avoiding duplication of functions and the ability to secure a range of educational expertise within the region.

The talent and expertise that resides in schools within and beyond the region is incentivised and used effectively to support professional learning and school improvement activity. There has been inevitable fragility in the ability of schools to offer support beyond their own settings because of the pandemic, this situation will be managed with sensitivity and will be constantly reviewed.

### Key regional facts and figures

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The number of pupils of compulsory school age within the region in 2020 was 73,090. This represents 19% of all pupils in Wales.</li> </ul>
	<p>There are 233 maintained schools in the region, 16% of all maintained schools in Wales (EAS figure correct from September 2020, Wales figure from PLASC, 2020).</p>
	<p>There are 20 Welsh medium primary schools, 3 Welsh medium secondary, 17 Roman Catholic and 11 Church in Wales schools within the region.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The percentage of pupils of compulsory school age who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 20.9%. This level of eligibility is the second highest of the four regional consortia with Central South Consortium with Central South Consortium highest with 21.3% (PLASC, 2020).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•In the region, 10% of people aged three and over say that they can speak Welsh compared to the Wales average of 19% (2011 Census, ONS).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The percentage of pupils aged 5 or over from an ethnic minority background is 11.3%.</li> </ul>
	<p>Based on local authority reported numbers (Summer 2019), 1024 children in the region are looked after (LAC) by a local authority and attend a school in the region. (No new information available and not included on PLASC for 2020)</p>



Overview of regional school staffing		
Local Authority	Number of Teaching Staff	Number of Support Staff
Blaenau Gwent	506	554
Caerphilly	1,523	1,389
Monmouthshire	644	648
Newport	1,475	1,316
Torfaen	779	773
<b>EAS</b>	<b>4,927</b>	<b>4,680</b>

Overview of regional school governors*	
Local Authority	Number of school governors*
Blaenau Gwent	327
Caerphilly	1063
Monmouthshire	429
Newport	768
Torfaen	396
<b>EAS</b>	<b>2983</b>



## Section 3: Regional Priorities 2021-2022




**The EAS will endeavour to be a professional partner working with schools to provide support using external expertise and experience. All schools and settings will be entitled to a range of professional learning and bespoke support which aligns to their school improvement priorities. Full consideration will be given to the current climate in which schools and settings are operating. Within this context the priorities of the EAS will be to:**



- A. To ensure that the wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings is paramount.
- B. Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.
- C. Provide support to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including continued use of blended learning approaches, particularly in identified secondary schools.
- D. Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures.
- E. Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise Curriculum for Wales, as appropriate.
- F. Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards.
- G. Consolidate, promote and further develop the regional school and practitioner networks, enabling effective routes of communication and support.
- H. Continue to support the development of leaders at all levels in schools and settings.
- I. Further build the capacity of governing bodies through the regional professional learning offer and bespoke support, as appropriate.
- J. Further develop a culture around accountability that identifies and values a broad spectrum of characteristics of effective schools and settings.
- K. Embed the EAS internal evaluation model, continue to welcome external challenge and support, ensure the effective and efficient support to schools and settings and adhere to legislative requirements that fully supports the wellbeing of staff.

## Local authority education strategic priorities 2021/22 (provided by each local authority)

This Business Plan addresses each local authority strategic priority that are indicated with \*. These priorities fall within the remit of the work of the EAS. The EAS will work in partnership with local authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate and those that arise from the changing local and national situation.

The improvements that are required at regional and local authority level require a strong commitment of partnership-working to be successful. Where local authorities and the EAS work in close partnership, there is evidence, that rapid and sustainable school improvement can be achieved. This joined up approach will be even more critical as we work in partnership to support schools and settings during this challenging time.

Local Authority	Strategic priorities for 2021/2022	Main link(s) to improvement strands within the Business Plan
<p><b>Blaenau Gwent</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.</li> <li>• Ensure high quality leadership and teaching that secures good progress for all learners, particularly the vulnerable and those who are eFSM.</li> <li>• Improve wellbeing for learners at all stages of development.</li> <li>• Secure strong progress in skills, particularly in English and mathematics at key stages 3 and 4.</li> <li>• Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Caerphilly</b></p> 	<p>To be confirmed by the LA</p>	
<p><b>Monmouthshire</b></p> 	<p>To be confirmed by the LA</p>	

Local Authority	Strategic priorities for 2021/2022	Main link(s) to improvement strands within the Business Plan
<p><b>Newport</b></p> 	<p>To be confirmed by the LA</p>	
<p><b>Torfaen</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the progress (ensure catch up) of all learners, with a particular focus on FSM and vulnerable learners at key stage 4 by ensuring LA services compliment and support regional provision.*</li> <li>• Ensure all of Torfaen schools have a clear strategy for improving the quality of teaching and learning particularly in secondary schools to reduce within school variation so all pupils, including boys and vulnerable learners, make appropriate progress over time. *</li> <li>• Ensure continued development and support for blended learning across all sectors in Torfaen.*</li> <li>• Reduce the level of variability in the quality and impact of leadership at all levels in secondary schools in the authority to secure strong, sustained pupil outcomes.*</li> </ul>	

**EAS Business Plan 2021/2022**

The actions below have been developed in collaboration with our key partners, many of the actions have been refined from the originally agreed Business Plan 2020/2021 and the Revised Business Plan 2020/2021.

As noted above, the EAS will be sensitive and responsive to changing priorities as a result of the pandemic and may need to change direction and repurpose priorities as required. The support will be made available to all schools and settings, there is an understanding that schools and settings are likely to be facing continuing challenges. It will be the decision of leaders to determine the most appropriate type and timing of at any of the support on offer in line with their priorities.

<b>Priority A</b>	<b>To ensure that the wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings is paramount.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 3: Equity, excellence and wellbeing	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils</li> </ul>			
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refine the regional Equity and Wellbeing Strategy (which encompasses strategies for all disadvantaged and vulnerable learners) to further develop multi-agency working, to build on the universal provision for all schools and settings.</li> <li>Enhance the regional wellbeing offer to practitioners and learners.</li> <li>Create an online interactive curriculum tool that captures the resources available to support schools in shaping their provision for Health and Wellbeing at a local and regional level.</li> <li>Provide a programme of professional learning to build the capacity within schools and settings to support learners with their emotional health and wellbeing based upon the principles of adverse childhood experiences.</li> <li>Support schools and settings to adopt the National Whole School Approach to Wellbeing and Mental Health.</li> </ul>			

<b>Priority B</b>	<b>Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 3: Equity, excellence and wellbeing	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs</li> </ul>			

- R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals

### What will the EAS do?

- Undertake professional dialogue with schools and LAs to agree on school's improvement priorities and support.

### Supporting a self-improvement system

- Refine the Challenge Adviser Role to reflect national model for school support identification and ensure key focus on support for school improvement.
- Identify lead schools and settings considering strengths in leadership capacity, curriculum design, learning culture and behaviour to support system wide improvement, including support for distance and blended learning.
- Broker school-to-school collaboration and cluster working.
- Refine the Learning Network Schools approach to reflect new and emerging service priorities.
- Develop a bespoke peer working model that builds mutual and reciprocal peer support to achieve increased levels of excellence across schools.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for schools, governing bodies and local authorities to understand the changing assessment and accountability arrangements within the reform agenda.

### Supporting School Self Evaluation and Quality Assurance

- Further develop a boarder range of evaluation criteria that do not focus solely on end of key stage outcomes but look at a wider range of school improvement information, including quality and effectiveness of distance and blended learning.
- Provide professional learning to all schools and settings to promote effective self-evaluation, improvement planning processes and effective strategies for formative and summative assessment.
- Further develop the regional approach of 'School on a page' so that a broader range of information is used for accountability purposes focused on pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning, the standards achieved and progress made by all pupils including those in vulnerable groups, the quality of teaching and learning in schools and settings as well as the quality of leadership.
- Support Schools to effectively quality assure their processes for distance and blended learning.
- Provide a comprehensive professional learning programme for elected members that supports the regional and national priorities around evaluation and quality assurance including distance and blended learning in order that they are able to hold schools to account more effectively.
- Establish mechanisms whereby schools may engage peers in the self-evaluation process to gain external perspective on improvement priorities including distance and blended learning.
- Support the continuing pilot of the national evaluation and improvement resource (NEIR) in identified regional schools as context dictates and ensure key learning is shared with all schools and settings.
- Further develop the use of pupil progress data at school level in line with national guidance on whole school target setting

<b>Priority C</b>	<b>Provide support to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including continued use of blended learning approaches, particularly in identified secondary schools.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs</li> </ul>			
<b>Teaching and Learning</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a range of delivery models and access to a wider range of blended professional learning across all areas of learning to support schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning within and beyond the region.</li> <li>Use the established network of school practitioners to further enhance the regional website as a mechanism to share effective whole school strategies for teaching and learning, including distance and blended learning.</li> <li>Support schools to use a range of first-hand evidence to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including distance and blended learning through a modelled, shared and guided approach.</li> <li>Continue to work in partnership with key partners, to include Welsh Government and Higher Education Institutions to offer a programme of professional learning to develop staff proficiency in the Welsh language.</li> <li>Continue to support and work collaboratively with school leaders, as appropriate, to develop and refine whole school teaching and learning strategies, using a team around the school model.</li> <li>Continue to provide a range of strategies to support leadership of teaching and learning e.g. school to school, research informed approaches, virtual professional learning and networking opportunities.</li> </ul>			
<b>Targeted support for the secondary phase (in addition to above)</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting schools to ensure that curriculum pathways provide an appropriate choice for all learners.</li> <li>Engage with Career Wales to design a programme that offers learners career advice from year seven onwards in order to map their flightpaths to their desired destinations.</li> <li>Design and facilitate national online resources to complement the middle leadership programme for more able and SEREN school leads.</li> <li>To support schools with Sixth Forms to have access to Russell Group Universities to support them with their SEREN learners.</li> <li>Collaborate with schools and other sectors to share and analyse outcome and destination data at key stage 5 for all groups of learners.</li> </ul>			

<b>Priority D</b>	<b>Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 3: Equity, excellence and wellbeing	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
<p>Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals</li> <li>• R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils</li> </ul>			
<b>What will the EAS offer schools and settings?</b>			
<p><b>Specific focus on improving the outcomes of Vulnerable Learners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the regional plan for Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) to provide appropriate support and guidance for identified learners to make progress.</li> <li>• Design and facilitate professional learning for specialist teaching assistants in partnership with local authorities and settings.</li> <li>• Evaluate the current range of enhanced curriculum opportunities funded via the pupil development and RRRS grants to share best practice across the secondary phase.</li> <li>• Capture best practice of a range of curriculum offers that are provided in PRU and Special school settings.</li> </ul> <p><b>Partnership Working: LA Inclusion Leads</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a revised regional approach, as appropriate, to improve the monitoring and impact of the pupil development grant.</li> <li>• Work in partnership with local authorities to analyse attendance and exclusions data for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners and support school leaders to share effective practice and to improve outcomes, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Work in partnership with local authorities to analyse FSM and LAC data and provide additional advice and support for schools and settings who have an increase in these groups as a result of COVID.</li> </ul> <p><b>Partnership Working: External Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work in partnership with Challenge Education to support the ‘RADY’ network of schools engaged with the ‘Raising the achievement of disadvantaged youngsters’ programme.</li> <li>• Commission and external evaluation of the impact of the RADY programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Partnership Working: ALN reform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with local authority partners to explore and agree roles and responsibilities with regards to the EAS role in securing the effective regional provision for ALN.</li> <li>• Support, as appropriate, the Regional ALN Transformation Officer to update stakeholders on ALN Reform and support the delivery of professional learning in line with the remit of the work of the EAS.</li> </ul>			

**Targeted Support for Schools and Settings:**

- Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected as a result of COVID pandemic.
- Refine the current Teaching and Learning Strategy to include an annex supporting the teaching and learning of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of learners.
- Extend the use of first hand evidence within schools to support and ratify the progress that is made by disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of learners.
- Extend the Vulnerable Learner Lead Programme through primary and secondary settings.
- Refine the grant planning system and the processes in place to support the planning, reviewing and evaluating of impact of expenditure in line with the research from the Education Endowment Foundation.
- Provide a programme of professional learning through a ‘Train the Trainer’ approach that provides the foundations of universal provision across all schools and settings. This will include strategy development and professional learning for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of learners.
- Improve pupil voice and pupil participation across the region in partnership with the School and Super Ambassador Programme to influence school and regional priorities.
- Deliver a regional programme across all settings supporting More Able and Seren Learners.

<b>Priority E</b>	<b>Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools to help them realise Curriculum for Wales.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 3: Equity, excellence and wellbeing	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs</li> <li>• R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design</li> </ul>			
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide all schools with access to the national professional learning programmes to support the implementation of the curriculum for Wales. Ensure that this professional learning reflects the priorities set out in the national implementation plan.</li> <li>• Provide schools with examples of effective school development actions for curriculum reform and provide bespoke support to schools and settings to implement these.</li> <li>• Encourage all schools to be research informed by creating a network of lead enquirers to develop the capacity for professional enquiry in all schools.</li> <li>• Review the regional Welsh language strategy in collaboration with school leaders and other partners, considering the findings for future delivery models.</li> <li>• Encourage schools to actively seek resources and experiences that support learners to understand the stories of different groups, including diverse and minority groups, and enable all learners to see themselves and their experiences and knowledge developed through the curriculum.</li> </ul>			



<b>Priority F</b>	<b>Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 3: Equity, excellence and wellbeing	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In partnership with other regions and higher education institutions, provide a national mentoring and coaching programme to develop and support school leaders and governors.</li> </ul>			
<b>Schools as Learning Organisations</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all professional learning is underpinned by the principles of effective learning organisations and encourages schools to develop as effective learning organisations.</li> <li>Provide coordinated support to ensure all schools develop as effective learning organisations e.g. how to use the survey to inform school development priorities.</li> <li>Share case studies where schools and clusters are effectively developing as learning organisations.</li> </ul>			
<b>Professional learning teaching assistants</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a virtual professional learning offer that supports teaching assistants whether new to the role, a practicing teaching assistant or as an experienced higher-level teaching assistant.</li> <li>Design and facilitate professional learning for specialist teaching assistants in partnership with local authorities, Special Schools and PRU's.</li> </ul>			
<b>Professional Learning for statutory induction</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refine and develop a Nationally designed virtual induction professional learning offer to support all those who support the induction process including: Newly Qualified teachers, the school-based induction mentor, and the external verifier.</li> <li>Continue supporting early career teachers beyond the statutory induction period.</li> <li>Further strengthen partnership working with HEI institutions to offer joint induction support for early career entry.</li> </ul>			
<b>Initial Teacher Education</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to work with higher education partners, cross regional partners and schools in developing and delivery of all routes into initial teacher education, as appropriate within the current arrangements.</li> </ul>			

<b>Priority G</b>	<b>Consolidate, promote and further develop the regional school and practitioner networks, enabling effective routes of communication and support.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs</li> <li>• R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design</li> </ul>			
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review all existing networks to ensure all practitioners have access to relevant networking opportunities with colleagues within and beyond the region.</li> <li>• In partnership with schools and settings continually review their capacity to support the wider system.</li> </ul>			

<b>Priority H</b>	<b>Continue to support the development of leaders at all levels in schools and settings.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 4: Evaluation, improvement and accountability	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs</li> <li>• R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals</li> </ul>			
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further develop the strategic approach to identifying and supporting the next group of leaders within the region.</li> </ul>			
<b>National professional learning offer for leaders</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a blended professional learning offer in partnership with higher education institutions and other regions to support leaders at all levels in all schools and settings through a nationally endorsed range of programmes: Middle leadership, senior leadership, aspiring headteacher / preparation for NPQH, NPQH, New and Acting headteachers, experienced headteachers.</li> <li>• Work in partnership with local authorities to support school leaders to address the actions, as appropriate, contained within the Welsh in Education strategy and Cymraeg 2040: Welsh language strategy.</li> </ul>			

**Identifying, recruiting and retaining effective leaders**

- Identify aspirational leaders and provide them with bespoke professional learning and a range of leadership experiences that supports them to develop an individual professional learning journey, particularly within the Welsh medium and secondary sectors.
- Work with local authorities and governing bodies to explore a range of leadership models e.g. Executive headship
- Regional specialist HR will work with local authorities to review and revise senior leadership recruitment processes to include using evaluations from a range of stakeholders and professional learning for appointment panel members.
- In partnership with other regions and higher education institutions, provide a national mentoring and coaching programme to develop and support school leaders and governors.

**Specialist HR**

- Work with local authorities to complement existing education HR services and provide a range of specialist HR professional learning for school leaders and governors.

<b>Priority I</b>	<b>Further build the capacity of governing bodies through the regional professional learning offer and bespoke support, as appropriate.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 4: Evaluation, improvement and accountability	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>What will the EAS offer schools and settings?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to refine the delivery of the Governor Support Service Level Agreement (2020-22), ensuring governing bodies are supported through timely, constructive guidance that enables effective governance.</li> <li>• Further develop professional learning for governors, including online materials, interactive and recorded workshops, regular briefings for all chairs of governing bodies, support for existing self-evaluation tools and the development of a cluster-based approach.</li> <li>• Provide focused professional learning for chairs and vice chairs of governing bodies in secondary schools, that supports them in addressing phase specific challenges.</li> <li>• Develop a pilot programme to develop coaching approaches for Chairs of Governors.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for collaborative professional learning for school leaders and governors, encouraging and enabling peer support arrangements for governing bodies to refine and develop their capacity to support their schools.</li> <li>• Identify governors who can undertake additional roles within and beyond their own governing bodies, providing bespoke professional learning to strengthen and build capacity within the region.</li> </ul>			

<b>Priority J</b>	<b>To further develop a culture around accountability that identifies and values a broad spectrum of characteristics of effective schools and settings.</b>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 4: Evaluation, improvement and accountability	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>What will the EAS offer schools and settings?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work collaboratively with a range of partners to develop a regional approach that identifies and values the characteristics of an effective school.</li> <li>• Identify a broader range of evaluation strategies that do not focus solely on end of key stage outcomes but looks at a wider range of school improvement information.</li> <li>• Provide a comprehensive professional learning programme for elected members that supports the regional and national priorities around evaluation and quality assurance including distance and blended learning in order that they are able to hold schools to account more effectively.</li> <li>• Determine the support arrangements for all schools in line with national guidance considering how regional consortia and local authorities can agree with the school the additional support it needs to improve and to build its own capacity to improve and considering specifically distance and blended learning.</li> </ul>			

<b>Priority K</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Embed the EAS internal evaluation model, continue to welcome external challenge and support and ensure the effective and efficient support to schools and settings.</b></li> <li>ii. <b>Ensure the EAS adheres to legislative requirements and fully supports the wellbeing of staff.</b></li> </ul>		
<b>Link to National Mission</b>	Enabling objective 1: Professional learning Enabling objective 2: Leadership Enabling objective 3: Equity, excellence and wellbeing Enabling objective 4: Evaluation, improvement and accountability	<b>Link to LA Strategic Priorities</b>	To be updated when LAs provide their strategic priorities
<b>Link to Estyn Recommendations:</b> Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 Update report from June to November 2020:			
<p>Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design</li> </ul>			
<b>What will the EAS do?</b>			
<b>Business delivery model</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to refine the business model for the EAS to ensure that it aligns to regional and national priorities and addresses the needs of schools and settings.</li> <li>• Maintain the credibility of the service using EAS core staff and the move to the school led system whilst ensuring effective provision and value for money.</li> <li>• Embed the EAS internal evaluation model, continue to welcome external challenge and support and ensure the effective and efficient support to schools and settings.</li> <li>• Ensure the EAS adheres to legislative requirements and fully supports the wellbeing of staff.</li> <li>• Use the Investors in People development programme to support service improvements.</li> <li>• Refine and enhance the communication and marketing strategy to ensure appropriate stakeholder engagement, to include the development of a regional pupil forum.</li> </ul>			

- Continue to engage with other consortia and middle-tier organisations, such as Estyn, to realise efficiencies in programme development and delivery.
- Support and advise local authorities, as appropriate, in the delivery of their statutory functions for SACRE and the development of individual Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

### **Staff Development**

- To maintain high levels of staff morale and wellbeing in the backdrop of reduced funding and the implementation of change management processes.
- Continue to develop collaborative ways in which the EAS team contribute to and feel part of the decision-making processes and are recognised more systematically for their successes.
- Provide access to coaching and mentoring support for all staff.
- Maintain a high-quality, well informed, flexible and motivated workforce that represent the service values and vision.
- Embed performance management processes and extend the professional learning opportunities for staff that meet individual and service needs.
- Ensure all EAS staff are well informed regarding all aspects of the reform agenda.

### **Funding, Resourcing and Governance**

- Work with key partners to deliver a more sustainable funding model that aligns with the workforce plan and secures an updated Collaboration and Members Agreement.
- Continue to develop the regional grant mapping tool to enable more efficient and effective interrogation of data, impact capture and value for money at school, LA and regional level.
- Continue to publish the regional grant allocations and maximise delegation rates to schools.
- Refine the value for money model, further exploring access to comparative data.
- Managing a complex governance interface to ensure communication, satisfaction and engagement levels remain high.

## Section 4: Ambitions for 2021/2022

**Working in partnership with local authorities, schools and setting the ambitions for 2021/22 and beyond are challenging to capture without having clarity around the changing nature of the pandemic and the effect it will have on schools and settings. In this regard, the ambitions below need to be read within the context they have been derived:**

- The EAS has placed wellbeing at the forefront of its work.
- There is a clear strategy to improve the quality of distance and blended learning experiences for learners. There has been good engagement in the regional strategy and many opportunities have been provided for schools to share to develop more effective teaching across and within schools and settings.
- Where schools and settings have engaged in the regional wellbeing support offer it has helped to support improvement in their provision for wellbeing.
- Schools and settings receive the right type of support, as appropriate to help them make progress against their school improvement priorities.
- Most schools can identify and provide the most appropriate support to specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures, to help them to progress.
- A regional strategy developed in collaboration with practitioners provides a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals.
- The quality and impact of the provision for professional learning for educational practitioners and governors is good and those schools that have engaged are able to evidence the impact of this.
- Refined and extended networks ensure effective collaboration and communication to support school improvement.
- A range of professional learning and bespoke support provided to schools and settings helps them realise Curriculum for Wales.
- Working with schools and local authorities, a regional model of support will be developed and implemented, focusing on accurate self-evaluation using a broad range of characteristics, aligned to school improvement priorities.
- Evaluations of the impact of regional policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic will be used to inform future ways of working and curriculum design.

## Section 5: Delivery arrangements for 2021/2022

### Governance and funding

The EAS is subject to a robust governance model that is underpinned by a Collaboration and Members agreement (CAMA) and Articles of Association. Ensuring that the EAS provides value for money is of utmost importance. As recipients of public funding, it is important that budgets are allocated wisely. We will endeavour to deliver even better value for money through achieving financial balance and delivering services within the constraints of our budget, making further efficiency savings wherever possible and ensuring delegation rates to schools are maximised.

### How will the EAS held to account for the delivery and impact of this Business Plan?

The progress on the implementation and impact of the Business Plan will be reported formally at a mid-year basis to the Joint Executive Group and Company Board; this will include an evaluation of the regional plan and of each individual local authority annex document. These reports, as in previous years, will be suitable for scrutiny activity at local authority and national level. In addition, the progress made towards the implementation of key actions will be reported at each meeting of the Joint Executive Group and Company Board.

This year the EAS will report additional information on a termly basis, to both the Joint Executive Group and local authorities around the progress and impact of its work in support of each local authority strategic objective and their related success criteria and the progress schools are making towards their individual targets. This approach will be aligned to the national changes in the accountability system.

Throughout the year there will be many interim impact reports associated with the implementation streams within the Business Plan which will be reported through each of the governance groups, though individual LA committees (as requested) and through evaluation and improvement events with Welsh Government officials, These include: reports on pupil outcomes and progress, progress on schools causing concern, regular updates on outcomes/impact from regional / local authority self-evaluation activity and regional strategies, feedback from external reviews, annual regional value for money report, Managing Director's Annual Report, outcomes from regional school and governor surveys.

The financial accounts are reported to both the company board on a quarterly basis and through the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on a termly basis. The final year end accounts are externally audited and reported in line with the 2016 UK Corporate Governance Code. In compliance with the Companies Act these accounts are reported and approved at the Annual General Meeting by the Joint Executive Members who are shareholders of the EAS.

### Consortium funding

The EAS is funded on an annual basis from three sources: Local authority core contributions, regional school improvement grants and a service level agreement for governor support services. A spending plan accompanies the Business Plan which is intrinsically linked to all actions contained within it. A detailed overview of the regional distribution of all grants is available for all schools to view and compare allocations and rates of delegation through the regional grant monitoring tool.

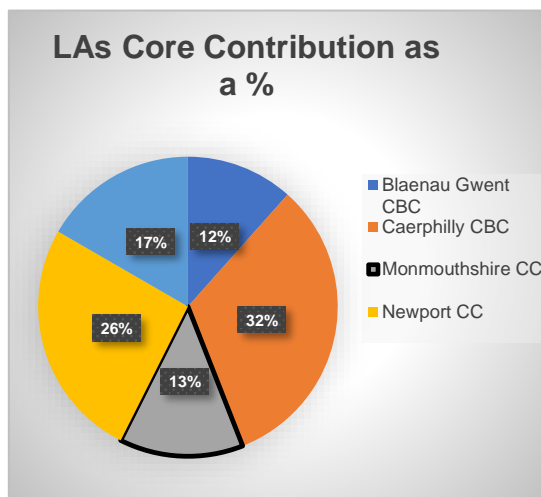
Delegation rates to schools has increased to 94.4% whilst the EAS staff profile has reduced by 53.1% since 2012.

### Local authority contributions 2021/2022

Local authority funding for consortium working is underpinned by the National Model for Regional Working, published by the Welsh Government in 2014. The model recommended a core funding allocation of £3.6m for the EAS. The current LA core contribution is based on these figures less year

on year efficiencies of £1.23m since 2012 agreed in collaboration with the 5 local authorities. The local authorities' indicative figures for 2021/22 are as follows:

Local Authority	£
Blaenau Gwent CBC	£351,806
Caerphilly CBC	£985,591
Monmouthshire CC	£405,844
Newport CC	£787,227
Torfaen CBC	£506,028
<b>Total</b>	<b>£3,036,496</b>



In terms of the above £0.796m of this figure is used to secure capacity within the EAS team from current serving headteachers and schools and £0.2m of this figure is used to secure service level agreements and venue costs sourced through local authorities.

### Regional school improvement grants

The Collaboration and Members Agreement (CAMA) details the procedure that needs to be followed for all school improvement grants received into the region. All grants are approved by local authority Chief Education Officers / Directors of Education with a follow up ratification from JEG members.

Grant Name  (To be updated when information on grants is received from Welsh Government)	Grant Total	Amount delegated to schools	Delegation* Rate	Regionally Retained
	Indicative Calculation 2021/22			
	£	£		£
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant (RCSIG)				
- Education Improvement Grant	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
- Professional Learning for Teachers	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
- Other grant initiatives	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
Pupil Development Grant (PDG)	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
PDG (Lead Regional PDG Adviser)	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
Seren Pre 16	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
Seren Post 16	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
<b>Total</b>	<b>TBC</b>	<b>TBC</b>	<b>TBC</b>	<b>TBC</b>

\*Delegation: This refers to funding which gives freedom of choice to a school in how it is used. It must however be spent in accordance with, and in the spirit of, the core purpose of the grant and the individual school development plan.

### Governor Support Service Level Agreement

The EAS has responsibility for providing a Governor Support service to all schools in the region. The service provides support to school governing bodies, headteachers, and individual governors.



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This includes advice, guidance, training, and an optional clerking service to support governing bodies to deliver their responsibilities.

The optional clerking service is provided through an annual service level agreement with an option to buy into a clerking service and then additionally a statutory committee clerking service. Only two school opted not to buy into the clerking service in 2020/21. The indicative funding for 2021/22 is £0.387m.

## Section 6: Additional supporting documents

This Business Plan is supported by the following documents:

- Local Authority Annex documents 2021 – 2022
- Detailed Business Plan 2021–2022
- Regional Grant Mapping Overview 2021–2022 (to follow once detailed received from WG)
- Regional Self-Evaluation Report (Executive Summary)
- EAS Risk Register (Executive Summary)
- Regional Professional Learning Offer 2021–2022
- Local Authority Strategic Education Plans

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# Agenda Item 8

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **9<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Inspire 2 Achieve and Work Performance Report January – December 2020**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Jo Collins, Executive Member for Education**

Report Submitted by: **Joanne Sims, Youth Service Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
22/02/21	25/02/21	22.02.21			09/03/21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the local Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). These projects are part of the Youth Service team's approach to reducing the numbers of young people becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In 2013, Blaenau Gwent Youth Service led on the development of two ESF operations across West Wales and the Valleys (10 Local Authorities and 4 FE Colleges) called Inspire 2 Achieve (11-24 at risk of NEET young people) and Inspire 2 Work (16-24 NEET young people). In July 2015, the lead was transitioned to Environment and Regeneration, whilst the local delivery projects still remained with the Youth Service within the Education Directorate.
- 2.2 The ESF Inspire 2 Achieve project was approved by WEFO in February 2016, with Inspire 2 Work being approved in November 2016, both approved until 2022. The Youth Service had established both teams by 2017, with additional posts (two for year 6 to 7 transition, 1.5 for emotional and mental health and 1 x health and fitness) recruited later. These projects have ensured continued support for young people both at risk of becoming and currently NEET for the past 5 years.
- 2.3 The Inspire projects are underpinned by the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF), which outlines 6 key areas which Councils are required to have in place, to support young people who are at risk or who are currently NEET. The Inspire projects are how the Council provides the brokerage/lead worker role for young people.

2.4 The two Inspire projects have ensured that as a Council we deliver the requirements of the YEPF and that the numbers of young people becoming NEET continue to reduce. The additional posts address the emerging themes identified since the onset of the project, which are contributory risk factors, which include transition from year 6 to 7 and additional support for young people pre and post 16 around emotional and mental health needs.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 It is recommended that Members scrutinise the current performance of the two projects and considers the following options:

Option 1 – Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the report, contribute by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee and accept the report.

Option 2 – Members do not accept the report and offer comments.

### 4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Inspire programmes contribute to all areas of the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan through supporting young people to overcome barriers in their life enabling them to become positive members of the community. The programmes also contribute to key objectives within the Corporate Plan, provide support to some of the most vulnerable young people in Blaenau Gwent, supporting them to overcome significant barriers to their learning, training and/or employment. This work also ensures that the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) 6 key areas are fully met.

### 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

#### 5.1 Impact on Budget:

The two programmes are externally funded by ESF and so have no impact on core budget. Although, there is an amount of match funding required, this is minimal and is provided by some officer in-kind time from the Youth Service Manager, one Youth Service Team Manager and then other externally funded posts. The financial profiles for the two Inspire programmes for 2016 - 2022 are below:

#### **I2W**

Total Project Costs - £2,440,445  
ESF Grant receivable - £2,148,723  
Match Funding identified - £310,874

#### **I2A**

Total Project Costs - £3,787,353  
ESF Grant Receivable - £3,325,260  
Match Funding Identified - £470,026

**NB.** Redundancy costs are built into the lifetime of the programme.

5.2 Risk Including Mitigating Actions:

Securing ESF monies until 2022 has provided some stability for targeted services for the past 5 years. However, plans need to be put in place prior to this end date to secure support for young people beyond this date. If the entire project support ends in 2022, this will have a detrimental impact on managing the NEET agenda. This has been flagged up as a risk and needs to be considered in the Education Directorate risk planning arrangements this year as well as the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). Regional discussions are underway to involve the Youth Service in considerations relating to future plans for 'Shared Prosperity' funding.

5.3 Legal:

There are no legal implications for this report.

5.4 Human Resources:

There are no immediate implications for Human Resources. However, as the end date of 2022 approaches, all staff within the two projects will need to be put on notice.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Performance Information and Data:

Although support is provided to young people up to the age of 25, Local Authorities are measured and compared nationally against the recorded numbers of young people leaving school each year at the end of Year 11 and then becoming NEET. Since 2010, Blaenau Gwent has seen a steady reduction in the numbers of young people leaving in Year 11 becoming NEET from 8.7% (74 young people) in 2009/10 to 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019/20. This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the lowest figure ever achieved. The national comparative report is published later this year.

6.1.1 Considering the context of the past year, it is extremely positive that so many young people transitioned successfully and maintained their post 16 placement. This reduction is attributed to improved partnership working but also due to the focussed efforts of the Youth Service using ESF funded programmes, initially Prevent 14-19 and now Inspire.

6.1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on I2A and I2W

Since March 2020, Inspire youth workers have been part of the Youth Service's response to COVID-19. Although school based youth workers returned to buildings in September, initially, the service refocussed to identify and support the most vulnerable young people known to the Youth Service, Education and schools. Since March 2020, the service supported 600 11-16 year olds and 250 16-25 year olds and from March to July made weekly contact. Initially, the focus was supporting young people

around the challenges they faced linked to the pandemic, including delivering essentials such as food, toiletries, wellbeing packs, supporting issues around lack of money, losing employment and facing eviction. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation and the local authority placed some young people who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support.

6.1.3 Over time, the emergency response changed to support young people around their wellbeing. Online activities were developed such as music, cooking and art club, and face to face activities included wellbeing walks, supporting attendance at college and job interviews. A full summer programme was provided including a mixture of online and face to face activities. The Inspire teams have supported with detached work in the evenings, responding at times to requests from the Police and community members. This has been an opportunity to keep young people informed about the restrictions, any changes and what that means for them. Between April 2020 and December 2020, 24 referrals (MARFS) were made to Social Services.

#### 6.1.4 Inspire 2 Achieve (11-16)

The Youth Service Team Manager: Education, Employment and Training oversees both the Inspire programmes.

6.1.5 There are 12 members of staff in the Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) team. This includes 1 x team leader, 5 x school based youth workers, 4 x transition youth workers (2 x Yr 6/7, 2 x Yr 11 including year 11 Electively Home Educated young people) and 1 x Emotional and Mental Health youth worker. Usual support includes one to one support and group programmes depending on the needs of the individual in an out of school.

6.1.6 The projected outcomes (targets) for the lifetime of the project and progress for Inspire 2 Achieve (11-16) are set out below:

- Total number of young people supported: 1196 (699 males, 497 females)
- 7% to gain qualifications (84 young people),
- 20% to enter into further learning when leaving school (239 young people)
- 50% to be at reduced risk of becoming NEET (598 young people)

6.1.7 Since 2016 (when team was established):

- 752 young people (out of 1196) have been supported, (372 male, 379 female), with one young person identifying as Non-Binary.

6.1.8 Due to COVID, the team has not closed any young people to the service this year. This will be reviewed at Easter. Therefore, the outcomes

recorded are those captured up to March 2020. 431 closed and the following outcomes are recorded:

- 24% have gained qualifications;
- 76% have entered further learning;
- 52% have reduced their risk of becoming NEET; and,
- 93% have improved their soft skills.

6.1.9 For the period of January to December 2020, 140 new young people were supported (81 males, 59 female). All school based youth workers supported school leavers this year, rather than just the two transition workers. This was due to the concerns that COVID could have on transition, and has contributed to the numbers of young people transitioning successfully.

6.1.10 Emotional and physical wellbeing became the dominant theme for 2020. 90 wellbeing packs were delivered, qualifications were delivered and support was provided to ensure young people had appropriate equipment and Wi-Fi access. Staff liaised with schools, arranged community walks and virtual activities. All to keep young people engaged in various ways and offer support. This support was highlighted as an area of good practice in a recent Estyn thematic review. In June 2020, The Youth Service won a national Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award and the Inspire programmes were key to that award.

6.1.11 Inspire 2 Work (16-24)

The team has reduced from 6.5 to 4.5 this year as two members of staff have temporarily supported the youth homelessness work in the Youth Service. The team, managed by the Youth Service Team Manager, includes 3 x core I2W youth workers (Education, Employment and Training), 1 x Health and Fitness youth worker and 0.5 emotional and mental health youth worker was appointed at the latter end of this year.

6.1.12 This project also funds one day a week counselling for 16-24 year olds and part funds a psychologist for the service.

6.1.13 Inspire support for young people aged 16-24 is provided on a one to one and group basis, delivering projects such as gym, fitness, training, enterprise and wellbeing and plays a pivotal role in supporting young people on Tiers 1,2 and 3 of the Careers Wales 5 Tier Model. Support is also offered to young people linked to the DWP, Housing associations, Social Services and other agencies. I2W can only support any young person who is NEET, and not living in a Communities First area, as Communities 4 Work is based in those areas. The reality is that the majority of young people coming through to the team often need long term intensive support, addressing issues such mental health, low self-esteem and housing. Therefore, the team work closely with other Youth Service colleagues and other partners, and small steps are seen as a big success.

6.1.14 The Communities 4 Work (C4W) Triage partnership work is pivotal. Each I2W Youth Worker acts as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for each C4W cluster area. All referrals for young people who live in Communities First post code areas must go to the Triage post in Communities 4 Work before agreed to refer to Inspire. This ultimately means that Inspire has limited control over how many young people can access the project.

6.1.15 The projected outcomes (targets) for the lifetime of the project and progress for Inspire 2 Work (16-24) are set out below:

- Total number of young people supported: 780 (438 males, 342 females)
- 50% to gain qualifications (390 young people),
- 20% to enter into further learning when leaving school (156 young people)
- 20% to gain employment NEET (156 young people)

6.1.16 Since 2017 (when team was established):

250 young people (out of 780) have been supported (146 male, 104 female). Of the 211 closed, the following outcomes are recorded:

53 achieved a qualification (25%)

64 supported into further learning (23%)

54 supported into employment (26%)

82 still NEET but improved soft skills (39%)

Of the 211 closed, 202 (96%) improved their wellbeing support scores, meaning that their overall awareness and understanding of themselves and the wider world has significantly improved.

6.1.17 For the period of January to December 2020, 102 new young people were referred, with only 29 eligible through the Triage process and enrolled (15 male, 14 female). Out of the 29, 10 young people have now moved onto further learning and employment, with 19 continuing with support into 2020. However, an additional 150 young people were supported during this year linked to COVID. Food supplies, wellbeing packs, laptops, mobile phones, wellbeing walks, virtual fitness and cooking sessions and access to counselling were all facilitated through the small team.

6.1.18 It's clear to see that the sharing of participants between the Inspire 2 Work programme and C4W programme (C4W is an all Wales programme, run by Welsh Government, funded by ESF) has made meeting and/or exceeding targets difficult. This has been the same experience across the region where Local Authorities have a higher percentage of Communities First old areas. WEFO and the lead team are aware of this situation as all ESF programmes for this age group are facing a similar situation. Despite this, the numbers of young people being supported are good, with positive achievements being made by all young people. Nevertheless, future funding developments needs to take this into consideration, as many more



young people could be supported if the tight restrictions on where they live could be removed.

- 6.2 Expected outcome for the public:  
Through the delivery of these programmes, young people will be supported at the times when they most need it and are more likely to achieve better outcomes in school, training and employment. The by-product of this enhanced support should lead to more economically active young people, more young people reaching their potential in secondary education and further learning/training and less mental health barriers hindering the development of young people.
- 6.3 Involvement (Consultation, engagement, participation):  
From the outset, young people, schools and partner organisations influenced the design of the programmes.
- 6.4 Thinking for the long term:  
The support provided is expected to better prepare young people for their future and beyond the lifetime of the programmes.
- 6.5 Preventative Focus:  
Both Inspire programmes are preventative in their approach. Inspire 2 Achieve exist to help 'prevent' young people from becoming NEET. Inspire 2 Work exists to 'prevent' young people from developing ingrained negative behaviours and lifestyles into their future.
- 6.6 Collaboration/Partnership Working:  
The programmes are collaborative in their nature as they are a regionally planned programme, locally delivered. The local Raising Aspirations Group holds the Youth Service to account for achieving the outcomes in both Inspire programmes.
- 6.7 Integration:  
These programmes impact upon key objectives for both Education and Environment and Regeneration Directorates, including educational attainment, attendance and behaviour and addressing skills and employment for 11-24 year olds.
- 6.8 EqlA:  
N/A as this programme will not have any negative impact on protected characteristics, only positive.

## 7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The Raising Aspirations Group monitors the progress of the local delivery of the two Inspire programmes. A performance monitoring report is presented annually to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the local delivery. Annual reports and evaluation reports are also provided to Education Directorate Management Team (DMT).

**Background Documents / Electronic Links**  
N/A

# Agenda Item 9

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**  
Date of meeting: **9<sup>th</sup> March 2021**  
Report Subject: **Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) Annual Return 2019/20**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanne Collins Executive Member for Education**  
Report Submitted by: **Joanne Sims, Youth Service Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	25/02/21	24.02.21			9/03/21	14.04.21		

## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the attached report (appendix 1) received from the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of Welsh Government with respect to the third year of the Sixth Assessment Framework for the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) return 2019/20.

## 2.0 Scope and Background

2.1 Aneurin Leisure Trust has been commissioned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to deliver the Library Service as part of their general operations since 2014. In April 2020, the client function for the Leisure Trust moved to the Education Directorate. This is the first year since the portfolio changes that this report has been submitted to the Education and Learning Scrutiny.

2.2 The Trust is now requesting that the Council consider the attached WPLS Annual Assessment Report 2019-20 with respect to the current position of the third year of the Sixth Assessment Framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards "Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Libraries 2017-20" for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

2.3 Public libraries are a statutory service as laid out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. For over a decade the Welsh Government has implemented successive assessment frameworks which have helped bring a more consistent level of public library provision across Wales.

2.4 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 it is a statutory duty for every library authority (Local Authorities) in Wales to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof".

2.6 The attached report (Appendix 1) with respect to the Sixth Assessment Framework for Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Return 2019/20 covers

the third year of a three-year cycle of the new quality framework “**Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Libraries 2017-20**”. It has now been confirmed, however, that the framework will be extended for another year.

- 2.7 The WPLS annual report 2019/20 has been prepared based on information provided by Blaenau Gwent’s annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of Welsh Government in July 2020. This was submitted through the Leisure Trust.
- 2.8 The WPLS Annual Assessment Report includes the following;
1. Executive Summary
  2. Performance against Standards
  3. Analysis of Performance
  4. Strategic Context
  5. Future direction
  6. Conclusion
- 2.9 The sixth framework of Welsh public library standards builds on the developments in the fifth framework. It comprises 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators to monitor how well library services realise these benefits for the local community and the people of Wales.
- 2.10 The report has highlighted that:
- Blaenau Gwent has met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.
  - Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part (QI 13 staffing levels and qualifications) and did not achieve 1 (QI 9 up to date appropriate reading material).
  - Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority, and are noted as a key component in both the local authority and Trust’s service delivery plans
  - The service continues to be reliant on staff from other areas of the Trust, Council and partner organisations to help deliver services. The future resilience of the service remains a concern.
  - The continued partnership work with key organisation remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities.
  - The staff within the service remain a strength with a strong focus on staff training, reflected by the fact that 99% of customers think the standard of customer care is good or very good although staffing levels remain critically low.

- The service scores well for impact and making a difference to people's lives.
- Recognition of an increase in the book fund, which led to an increase in loans and active borrowers and the percentage reporting that they felt the choice of books was good or very good.

- 2.11 The report has highlighted that overall Blaenau Gwent has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with an improvement in Welsh Language resources in 2019/20.
- 2.12 The report concludes that the impact of the new review undertaken in 2019 is not clear, but it is essential in any future planning that staffing and resources levels are appropriate to ensure the service is able to meet its statutory duties.
- 2.13 It is proposed that any considerations identified in the annual assessment report will now be considered through the new governance arrangements established between the Council and the Aneurin Leisure Trust. Full details can be found in the attached report at appendix 1

### 3.0 **Options for Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members scrutinise the content of the report and consider the following options:

Option 1 – Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the report, contribute by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee and accept the report.

Option 2 – Members do not accept the report and offer comments.

### 4.0 **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 sets out the statutory duties of the public library authorities to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service” to their communities.
- 4.2 The Library Service fully supports Blaenau Gwent's Well-being Plan and also acts as an agency for economic wellbeing in our local communities through supporting learning at all stages of life helping with illiteracy, lack of skills and the digital divide.
- 4.3 The Library Service contributes to a range of Welsh Government outcomes such as literacy, skills and learning, digital inclusion, poverty, health and well-being. Library provision spans these outcomes, offering a range of services which often support two or more of the outcomes simultaneously.

4.4 The Library Service is seen as a key partner in tackling the problems of social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health. The library service acts as a single point of contact for local people to access public services and also gain information on local health issues, providing space for local voluntary organisations to provide advice and information on health and other matters. Moreover, the intention is that the library service will be a key component of the Council's community 'hub' provision moving forward and this will bring benefits to both the work of the Council and the Library Service, including enhanced footfall.

## 5.0 **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 There are no current implications associated with the options proposed in section 3 above

### 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

5.1.1 During the review of the Leisure Trust, the Trust committed to increasing the book fund from £27,000 to circa £43,000 in 2018/19 and be reviewed year on year in order to achieve a more appropriate budget going forward. In 2019/20, the Trust spent £51,681, an increase of 5%, exceeding the original agreement. Furthermore, the Trust has invested on a pan Wales level in Borrow Box to increase the availability of eBooks given the current pandemic. This includes a 6% spend on Welsh Language books which will meet this target. There is a planned increase of 20% in the book fund for 2020/21.

### 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The risks highlighted in this report are predominantly linked to two areas. The gradual increase of the book fund mitigates the one area. Regular dialogue through newly established governance arrangements will ensure that collectively, between the Council and the Trust, the Library Service is supported to meet the standards required.

### 5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 There are no legal issues associated with this report

### 5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 There are no direct staffing issues with respect to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in relation to this report. However, the report highlights concern about the level of staffing within the Library Service.

5.4.2 This will be an area of discussion and monitoring through the new governance arrangements between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

## 6.0 **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 Blaenau Gwent continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part (QI 13 staffing levels and qualifications) and did not achieve 1 (QI 9 up to date appropriate reading material). See Appendix 1 for details. The report has highlighted that overall Blaenau Gwent has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with an improvement in Welsh Language resources in 2019/20. The Library Service is only required to undertake a customer survey once in each framework and that was completed this year. The outcome of that survey demonstrated that staff within the service remain a strength with a strong focus on staff training. This was reflected by the fact that 99% of customers think the standard of customer care is good or very good.

### 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

6.2.1 The outcome for the public is to continue to provide a fully accessible and professional Library Service within the local community to meet needs.

### 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

6.3.1 Local people, groups/agencies and volunteers are engaged through regular customer surveys, in line with the Welsh Public Library Standards (WLPS)

### 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

6.4.1 The library standards will help establish a sustainable model for the Library Service going forward.

### 6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 Libraries provide support with many key preventative approaches, such as improving literacy levels for children and young people through early intervention within communities

### 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 Partnership working with a number of agencies/organisations is embedded in the ethos of the Library Service.

### 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

6.7.1 The Library Service has close links to Education, Adult and Community Learning and also acts as a direct link to other Council services through providing the use of ICT to the local community also providing access to third sector organisations. The move towards a community 'hub' model and the alignment of the Leisure Trust to the Education Directorate's portfolio will only strengthen further these links.

6.8 **EqIA**  
N/A

7.0 **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Performance reports related to the Leisure Trust are monitored through Education Scrutiny Committee, the Executive and Council. There is also the recently established Leisure and Libraries Strategic Partnership Board that will oversee the collaboration arrangements between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- *Appendix 1 - Sixth Assessment Framework for the WPLS; Annual Return 2019-20 report*



# Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Blaenau Gwent (Aneurin Leisure Trust)

## Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Blaenau Gwent's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Culture and Sport Division of the Welsh Government.

### 1 Executive summary

Blaenau Gwent met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 1.

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority, and are noted as a key component in both the local authority and Trust's service delivery plans. The service continues to be reliant on staff from other areas of the Trust, council and partner organisations to help deliver services. The future resilience of the service remains a concern. The continued partnership work with key organisation remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities. The staff within the service remain a strength with a strong focus on staff training, reflected by the fact that 99% of customers think the standard of customer care is good or very good although staffing levels remain critically low. The service scores well for impact and making a difference to people's lives. It is pleasing to see the modest increase in book fund, led to an increase in loans and active borrowers and the percentage reporting that they felt the choice of books was good or very good. The impact of the new review undertaken in 2019 is not clear, but it is essential in any future planning that staffing and resources levels are appropriate to ensure the service is able to meet its statutory duties.

- The percentage of adults who experience the library as an enjoyable safe and inclusive space remains high.
- There has been a dramatic increase in electronic downloads, which has increased by 130%, only some of which can partly be attributed to the impact of Covid-19 in the last couple of weeks and month of the reporting period.
- Aggregate annual opening hours have increased by 20% since 2018/19, but remain below the median in Wales.
- Overall staff numbers have decreased slightly in 2019/20 and it is noted that this is as a result of accommodating staff requests for flexible retirement. The overall target for staff per capita is not achieved and remains amongst the lowest in Wales and a cause of concern.
- The service launched 'fines free' in March 2020 and this new approach to borrowing has the potential to remove barriers and increase membership and positively impact on a more equal Wales.

## 2 Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of core entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures. Section 2 summarises achievements against these areas. A narrative assessment of the authority's performance is provided in Section 3. The assessment has been limited to some degree by the fact that local authorities were only asked to comment on any changes to the previous year's return, alongside additional commentary on of partially/not met core entitlements.

### 2.1 Core entitlements

Blaenau Gwent continues to meet all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full.

### 2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Due to the impact of Covid-19, three quality indicators have been removed for the 2019/20 reporting year, five, six and fifteen, of which number six had a constituent target. Of the **nine** remaining targets for 2019-20, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 1 of the indicators.

Quality Indicator	Met?	
QI 3 Support for individual development:		Met in full
a) ICT support	√	
b) Information literacy and skills training	√	
c) E-government support	√	
d) Reader development	√	
QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being		Met in full
i) Book Prescription Wales scheme	√	
ii) Better with Books scheme	√	
iii) Designated health & well-being collection	√	
iv) Information about healthy lifestyles and behaviours	√	
v) Signposting to health & well-being services	√	
QI 7 Location of service points	√	Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material		Not met
Acquisitions per capita	x	
<u>or</u> Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	√	
<u>or</u> Spend on Welsh per capita	√	
QI 11 Online access:		Met in full
a) i) Public access to Internet	√	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	√	
QI 12 Supply of requests		Met in full
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	√	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	√	
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications:		Partially Met
i) Staff per capita	x	
ii) Qualified staff per capita	x	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

Blaenau Gwent has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with an improvement in Welsh Language resources in 2019/20.

### 2.3 Impact measures

The framework includes three indicators aimed at assessing the impact of library use on people's lives. These indicators do not have targets, and authorities are only required to carry out user surveys for QI 1 once over the three-year period of the framework. However, this measure has been affected by Covid-19 and some authority plans to undertake a survey in the first quarter of 2020 were cancelled. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during framework 6. Rankings reflect the numbers of authorities, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Blaenau Gwent completed both its adult and children's user surveys in November 2019.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	94%	=5/19	60%	89%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	99%	1/19	41%	85%	99%

Authorities are also asked to provide up to four case studies describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year. Blaenau Gwent provided four such case studies, alongside wider feedback from users:

- Visually Impaired Group – An art session for visually impaired members. This activity was organised in response to customer feedback from home delivery customers. This was a successful event resulting in a positive impact on the wellbeing of those involved.
- Toddler Group at Ebbw Vale Library – these sessions encourage children and families of all ages to join in a story session in the library. These sessions help foster a love of books and reading. These free sessions also provide parents with a range of techniques to encourage reading at home.
- Support for digitally excluded residents – libraries play a very important role in supporting those individuals who are digitally excluded. This initiative demonstrates how libraries support the needs of their communities by reducing social inequalities and providing support for the most vulnerable in a variety of areas, ranging from bus pass applications to housing benefit.
- Jobseeker gaining employment – Blaina Library offers a job club on a regular basis. A library member considers that the library supported his job search which resulted in him finding employment. The library service plays a key role in enabling people to find appropriate jobs and learning opportunities, in a relaxed and friendly environment.

## 2.4 Quality indicators and benchmarks

Whilst Covid-19 restrictions remain challenging to all library services in Wales, staff resilience, professionalism and care for the community they serve has been outstanding. Although digital services have increased, we know from evidence provided that customers are missing their library services. They are missing the staff, browsing the shelves, IT provision, community spaces and groups such as knit and knatter. The importance of the library as a physical place and the impact on the wellbeing of their customers through interaction with library staff cannot be underestimated.

The remaining indicators do not have targets, but allow services to monitor and benchmark their performance over time, in comparison with other authorities. The following table summarises Blaenau Gwent's position for 2019/20. Ranks are included out of 22, where 1 is the highest, and 22 the lowest scoring authority, unless stated otherwise. Indicators where fewer than 22 authorities supplied data are those where relevant data was not available to some authorities. Figures from the first and second years of the sixth framework or relevant previous surveys have also been included for comparison. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator	Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2017/18	
QI 1 Making a difference					[Framework 5]	
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	91%	=2/18	25%	75%	94%	90%
c) health and well-being	70%	9/19	38%	69%	96%	94%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	99%	=2/19	10%	92%	100%	98%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					[Framework 6]	
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	=7/18	78%	91%	99%	88%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=3/18	88%	97%	100%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	91%	=5/17	65%	85%	99%	N/A
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/18	85%	96%	100%	98%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.3	= 7/19	8.0	9.1	9.5	9.4
QI 8 Library use <sup>1</sup>						
a) visits per capita	4380	5/22	2429	3987	6874	4234
b) virtual visits per capita	395	19/22	239	909	2131	353
c) active borrowers per capita	86	20/22	78	145	244	80
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita <sup>2</sup>	311	22/22	311	680	1468	95
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per 10,000	9	11/22	5	10	14	9
c) % of available time used by the public	35%	4/22	14%	30%	64%	33%
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,513	18/22	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	£8,610
b) % on staff,	69%	7/22	48%	61%	76%	73%
% on information resources	9%	=18/22	5%	13%	22%	8%
% on equipment and buildings	6%	10/22	0%	8%	21%	8%
% on other operational costs	16%	=11/22	1%	18%	35%	11%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	22/22	£0	£1,567	£13,027	£0
QI 16 Opening hours <sup>3</sup>						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	0.23%	3.96	0.00%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	0.00%

<sup>1</sup> figures for co-located services are marked with an asterisk; performances for these services are likely to reflect higher footfall, and will not therefore be directly comparable with stand-alone library provision <sup>2</sup>per 1,000 Welsh speaking resident population

<sup>3</sup>Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority

### 3 Analysis of performance

The core entitlements and quality indicators can be divided into four key areas. This section of the report outlines performance under these areas, and compares this performance with the first and second year of the sixth framework (2017/18 and 2018/19).

#### 3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5) <sup>i</sup>

Blaenau Gwent completed its adult and children's user survey for QI 1 and QI 2 in November 2019. Although there has been a decrease in the ratings for how the service supports health and wellbeing for adults, there has been little change in other areas. The 24% drop in adults "who have found helpful information for health and well-being at the Library" can be attributed to the fact that a dedicated Macmillan Information support officer was based in the Service during the previous framework which is no longer the case,

although the service still has a strong commitment to health and wellbeing. The service continues to provide a wide range of activities for all ages.

### **3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8) <sup>ii</sup>**

Library usage has also been impacted by the closure of all libraries on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2020 due to Covid-19. Blaenau Gwent continues to meet the target for easy access to service points. Library usage has steadily increased since 2017/18, and the number of active borrowers has increased by 7% since 2018/19, despite a decrease of 10% in the total number of library members per capita. The service notes that this may be due to a membership data cleanse. An improvement in the materials budget has impacted positively in this area.

As noted in 2018/19, Blaenau Gwent's performance in relation to children's book issues remains amongst the lowest per capita in Wales. While book issues for children have decreased, Blaenau Gwent has continued to see an increase in the number of adult book issues with a 15% increase since 2017/18, possibly from an increase in the book fund.

There has been an increase in electronic downloads, which has increased by 57% since 2018/19, which can partly be attributed to the impact of Covid-19. The increased usage of social media can also be seen as having an impact in this area.

### **3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12) <sup>iii</sup>**

The materials budget has increased slightly in 2019/20, alongside the figure for overall acquisitions, although neither target is met. The return noted that recently acquired stock was due to be added to the system when libraries were shut in March 2020, and as a result this stock did not feature in the reported figures. Blaenau Gwent is one of seventeen authorities who have not met the acquisitions target (QI 9) in 2019/20. The number of Welsh issues per capita have increased considerably since 2018/19, which is a positive development. The levels of investment in the materials budget still remain amongst the lowest in Wales and a cause of concern.

Blaenau Gwent remains at the median level for the number of computer devices available to the public, with recorded ICT usage still amongst the top quartile in Wales.

The service continues to achieve the targets for supply of requests and as a partner in the regional inter-lending Scheme, Books4U, works collaboratively with partners to continue to promote and develop this service to ensure customers are able to access the resources they need.

### **3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16) <sup>iv</sup>**

Overall staff numbers have decreased slightly in 2019/20 and it is noted that this is as a result of accommodating staff requests for flexible retirement. The overall target for staff per capita is not achieved and remains amongst the lowest in Wales. The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has remained the same and remains an area of concern.

However, there is a comprehensive, uniform offer across all service points, and services are tailored to address the needs within communities.

Total revenue expenditure has gradually increased by just over 3% since 2017/18, with expenditure per capita below the median level. Aggregate annual opening hours have increased by 20% since 2018/19 as home delivery hours have been included and the target has been met, but remains below the median in Wales. Blaenau Gwent did not report any unstaffed opening hours, unplanned closures of static service points or missed home deliveries during 2019/20.

## **4 Strategic context**

As part of the return authorities are asked to report on how the library service is contributing to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals. Blaenau Gwent reports well on a range of services relevant to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The Service demonstrated its commitment to a prosperous Wales through its continuing partnership with NatWest Bank, providing users with support with their financial needs. Together with job clubs, there is a pro-active approach to meeting the educational needs of the community. New partners include a local charity, Hospice of the Valleys. This organisation will help the service deliver the health and wellbeing offer in libraries. This initiative, together with dementia cafes and Reading Well for mental health contributes to the achievement of a healthier Wales.

The service's contribution in other areas, including energy and environmental issues, loneliness and social isolation, digital inclusion, and Welsh language and cultural activity are noted as positive indicators of achieving the goals outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

## **5 Future direction**

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, it is noted that the wider vision for the service is laid out in the Library Strategy (2018-19). A commitment to explore the potential for further co-location of services was highlighted in previous years, but this hasn't been fully realised.

Blaenau Gwent's commitment to partnership working is a key factor in enabling the library service to achieve its vision:

"Improving people's life opportunities, inspiring and enriching lives by providing high quality library services which are relevant and accessible to all".

The service continues to achieve this vision with a variety of initiatives and schemes in place.

Partnership working is a strength of the service, but it is essential that adequate levels of investment enable sufficient capacity to build on these partnership for the benefit of local communities. The beneficial impact on people's lives which the service already achieves could be increased with greater resources. The service launched 'fines free' in March 2020 and this new approach to borrowing has the potential to remove barriers and increase membership and positively impact on a more equal Wales.

## **6 Conclusion**

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority, and are noted as a key component in both the local authority and

Trust's service delivery plans. The service continues to be reliant on staff from other areas of the Trust, council and partner organisations to help deliver services. The future resilience of the service remains a concern. The continued partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the Service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities. The staff within the Service remain a strength with a strong focus on staff training, reflected by the fact that 99% of customers think the standard of customer care is good or very good. The impact of the review undertaken in 2019 is not clear, but it is essential in any future planning that staffing and resource levels are appropriate to ensure the Service is able to meet its statutory duties.

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<sup>i</sup> Due to Covid 19, local authorities were only asked to report any change in provision since the last reporting year for Q1 3&4

<sup>ii</sup> Due to Covid 19, Q1 5&6 were removed for the 2019/20 reporting year

<sup>iii</sup> E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been included in the acquisitions figures for Q1 9 in 2019/20. Each authority has added 201 to their total acquisitions from centrally funded subscriptions. CIPFA Statistics Returns continue to include figures for centrally-procured resources.

<sup>iv</sup> Due to Covid 19, Q1 15 was removed for the 2019/20 reporting year, alongside training and volunteer hours.



# Agenda Item 10

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **9<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Education Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2022/23**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanne Collins, Executive Member Education**

Report Submitted by: **Claire Gardner, Education Transformation Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
X	25.02.21	22.01.21			09.03.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to outline the outcome of the annual review and consultation process associated with the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education. Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee are asked to provide their views and comments on the document in preparation for the 2022-23 admission round, prior to its determination and publication on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Welsh Government's School Admissions Code (2013) dictates that Councils must review their admissions policies annually for consultation and publication by April 15<sup>th</sup> in the academic year preceding the admissions round. Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy outlines the arrangements, criteria and relevant legislation that underpin school admission processes and methodology. The Admissions Authority must ensure that the following information is provided during the consultation process:
- 2.2
- i) Admission numbers for each school;
  - ii) Application procedures and the timetable for the admission process;
  - iii) The criteria to be applied to applications in the event that there are more applications than places for a school;
  - iv) Arrangements for waiting lists and how they operate;
  - v) Arrangements for the processing of late applications; and,
  - vi) Details of how parents will be notified of a decision on their application, as well as appeal procedures should their application be unsuccessful.
- 2.3 The primary changes to the policy document for the 2022/23 academic session are as follows:
- A review of the nursery, primary and secondary admission numbers in line with the annual capacity review. This is an annual process which reviews changes to school plans and physical space within the school,

which affect the provision of teaching and learning. This is carried out in line with the Welsh Government Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). The final agreed capacity calculations are then used to inform admission numbers.

- A review of the dates for the admission round(s), associated processing and offer deadlines.
- A review of the allocation of primary campus places at Abertillery Learning Community this includes a change to their allocation criteria.
- A review of the online application process due to Capita One Online now replacing Abavus.
- A shared residency section and person making the application form has been added to the policy to highlight the importance of whom should be making the application for the child in the case of separated parents (split families).
- A review of the admissions appeals for primary and secondary school places. This is due to the Welsh Government introducing legislation which temporarily disapples or relaxes certain requirements relating to admission appeals to allow appeals to take place despite the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic.
- An updated Blaenau Gwent Schools Catchment Area Overview Map has been added in Appendix 2.

2.4 The draft Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education (2022/23, please refer to **Appendix 1** for the policy document), was distributed to relevant consultees as outlined within the Welsh Government's School Admissions Code (2013, pages 6-7) and detailed on page 2 of the appended policy consultation document. The consultation period commenced on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and concluded on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021. During the consultation period, 1 response was received as follows:

- Glanhowy Primary School made a request for the Nursery intake timings to reduce to support and improve early language skills. The Admissions Authority explained to the consultee that the policy is developed in line with the framework detailed within the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) paragraph 2.57 that states that Local authorities in Wales are under a duty to secure sufficient provision of nursery places for their area for children in the term following their third birthday. Therefore, there is limited flexibility in terms of what can be changed in respect of the Nursery intake.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers and accepts the policy document.

3.2 **Option 2:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the policy document and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made in consideration of the publication date (15<sup>th</sup> April 2021).

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
  - 4.1 In accordance with the Welsh Government's School Admissions and Admission Appeals Code (2013), there is a statutory requirement upon the Council to determine and publish their admissions arrangements annually by the 15th April, the year preceding the admissions round to which they apply.
  - 4.2 Education is a strategic priority within the Corporate Plan, of which school admissions and the planning of pupil places are essential components.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
  - 5.1 ***Impact on Budget*** (short and long term impact)  
There are no direct budget implications associated with this report.
  - 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***  
There is a risk that Council will not be compliant with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013), if the policy is not approved and published by the 15th April 2021. The timeline for approval take account of the publication requirements and dates.
  - 5.3 ***Legal***  
The Council are legally required to prepare, implement and update accessibility strategies for all schools for which they are the responsible body.
  - 5.4 ***Human Resources***  
The Schools Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2022/23 has been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee implementation and reviews of the policy within Blaenau Gwent.  
  
The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, will have a key role in ensuring the key staff-related actions are effectively delivered.
6. **Supporting Evidence:**
  - 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***  
Please refer to **Appendix 2**, for a summary of the 2020/21 Admissions Round. The Council are presently implementing the 2021/22 policy.
  - 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***  
The public can expect a fair and equitable admissions process for all pupils in accessing education, and where possible place allocation in line with parent/pupil preference.
  - 6.3 ***Involvement***  
Stakeholders and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance and a key focus of both the policy development, and ongoing admissions process. The Policy is subject to consultation on an annual basis, in line with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013).

In addition, the admission arrangements and forms are developed in consultation with key stakeholders including: schools, partners, governing bodies, parents etc.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term***

The Strategy is aligned to the Corporate Plan and covers the period 2020 to 2022.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The admissions process prevents oversubscription of schools and inequality in line with access to education.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 The Admissions Authority works with other internal admission authorities i.e. the faith and foundation schools, along with external admission authorities within the region and partners such as Social Services, to ensure that there are sufficient arrangements and pupil places for Blaenau Gwent Schools. Also, supporting effective appeal, capacity assessment, childcare offer and other associated processes. The Blaenau Gwent Admission Forum which is comprised of school, council, governor and other service representatives; oversee application of the policy, procedures and compliance with the Welsh Government School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes (2013).

6.7 ***Integration***

The Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education is aligned to early year's education, pupil place planning, school organisation, the work of social services, planning in line with housing developments etc. Service integration is essential to ensure effective policy implementation, whilst also securing appropriate access to education for current and prospective pupils. The Admissions process is monitored and assured by the Admissions Forum, works in accordance with ALN and Managed Move Panels and associated process. Work with Social Services, Health & Safety, Early Years, Health, Occupational etc. is ongoing to ensure effective transition processes are in place.

6.8 ***EqIA***

An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EQIA) has been completed in line with the policy, which determined that there is no negative impact upon the protected characteristics. The policy promotes equality of opportunity for all, with regards to accessing education.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

The Admissions Authority monitors the development and delivery admission round(s) and processes on a weekly basis; reporting the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Forum quarterly, providing monthly data analysis and undertaking annual appraisals in line with the delivery of the admission arrangements, which are reported via Councils political processes.

## **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent Education Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2022/23
- Appendix 2 - Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Analysis 2020/21

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2022/23

# Blaenau Gwent Admission Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education



## **Consultation Process**

In accordance with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council consults upon its admission arrangements on an annual basis, attempting where possible to mirror the admission round timescales of neighbouring admission authorities. The coordinated admission arrangements will determine the date at which application forms are sent to parents as well as the publication of an agreed closing date (For more information please refer to page 13).

Consultation will commence on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and conclude at 5 pm on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021. The admission arrangements will then be published on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021, the year preceding the 2022/2023 admissions round. The Local Authority will ensure that the following information is provided during the consultation process:

- i) Admission numbers for each school
- ii) Application procedures and the timetable for the admission process
- iii) The criteria to be applied to applications in the event that there are more applications than places for a School
- iv) Arrangements for waiting lists and how they operate
- v) Arrangements for the processing of late applications
- vi) Details of how parents will be notified of a decision on their application, as well as appeal procedures should their application be unsuccessful.

The Local Authority will consult with the following parties on its admission arrangements:

Headteachers of relevant Schools:	All headteachers of community Schools in Blaenau Gwent
Governing body of relevant Schools:	All governing bodies of community Schools in Blaenau Gwent
All neighbouring Local Authorities within the area:	Caerphilly County Borough Council Torfaen County Borough Council Monmouthshire County Borough Council Newport City Council
Admission Authorities for all other schools in the area:	All headteachers of voluntary aided schools in Blaenau Gwent All governing bodies of voluntary aided schools in Blaenau Gwent Brynmawr Foundation School All Saints RC Primary School St Marys Church in Wales Primary School St Marys RC Primary School St Joseph's RC Primary School



## **Blaenau Gwent Proposed Admission Policy for Statutory Education 2022/23**

### **1. Introduction/ Purpose**

There is a requirement upon Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as a directive from Welsh Government, to develop, review and consult upon the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education, on an annual basis. The purpose of the policy in question is to guide and inform the statutory admissions function within Blaenau Gwent, ensuring equality of opportunity for all current and prospective pupils. **\*Please note that the following non-maintained schools and non-maintained early year's education providers are responsible for the development of and governed by their own individual Admissions Policies:**

- Acorns Nursery
- All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School
- Brynmawr Foundation School
- Mrs Tiggywinkles Day Nursery
- St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School
- St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School
- St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

The Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery (non-statutory) and Statutory Education has been updated in line with confirmed admission numbers and the dates from the 2021/22 admission round. All other content remains the same. The policy is fully compliant with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) and School Admissions Appeal Code (2013). This document outlines requirements associated with and guidance relating to pupil admissions and in-year transfers/admissions for nursery, primary, and secondary school place allocation within Blaenau Gwent.

The Welsh Minister for Education and Skills in 2013 outlined the following key considerations in relation to how pupil place allocation in respect of admissions should ensure equality of opportunity:

*“The process of starting or transferring between schools can be a time of uncertainty or anxiety; therefore, it is essential that the principles of fairness and openness are applied to all aspects of school admissions. A properly functioning admissions system, that reflects this, can play a vital part in helping to minimise concerns. It is crucial in delivering equality of opportunity.”*

Minister for Education and Skills (2013)

## 2. Admission Types

### 2.1 Nursery Education

The Council provides free part-time nursery education to every child and every child is entitled to a 'rising 3' place from the start of the term following their third birthday, at either school nursery provision or a quality assured early years education provider.

- Nursery places are in the main offered on a part time basis (am and/or pm sessions which vary in each school throughout the year). Children start attending nursery classes at the age of 3 or 4 years.
- There are three intakes for rising 3 pupils per year as follows:
  - **January**
  - **April**
  - **September**

\*Please note that the specific dates for intake change on an annual basis linked to school term dates. These dates are communicated within the Starting Schools Booklet and on nursery application forms, in line with the admission rounds for nursery, reception and secondary school places.

- Some governing bodies offer full-time provision, which is funded directly from the schools budget. The nursery entitlement within Blaenau Gwent is part-time which equates to 12.5 hours per/week (2.5 hours per/day), other than the following nursery provisions, which offer:
  - Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg – full time rising 3 and nursery places
  - St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School – part-time rising 3 places and full-time nursery places
  - St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School - part-time rising 3 places and full-time nursery places
- The regulations pertaining to nursery education are specific and confirm that: **attending a nursery class does NOT give a child priority for a place in the reception year group. A separate application is required for this purpose.**

### 2.2 Admission to Primary Education

Children are eligible for admission to school at the start of the school year in which their fifth birthday falls (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> August inclusive).

It is against the law to prevent your child from accessing education at the start of the school year in which their fifth birthday falls.

The Council must provide education places for the admission of all children in the September following their fifth birthday; however, parents/ guardians or carers have the right to:

- a. request that the date their child is admitted to school is deferred until the term after the child's fifth birthday; or,
- b. request that their child takes up the place part-time until the term after their fifth birthday.

### 2.2.1 Allocation of Primary School Places at Abertillery Learning Community

In the case of Abertillery Learning Community Primary Phase, the admission authority (Blaenau Gwent Council) is responsible for placing pupils at the Learning Community. These pupils are then allocated a site within the Learning Community by Abertillery Learning Community Leadership team and Governing Body in line with the following criteria:

1. Siblings in the campus already
2. Catchment area
3. Ensuring each session stays within the agreed teacher to learner ratio

Once the site has been confirmed the notification process is then administered by the admissions authority. This process has been established in accordance with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) point 2.51 which states:

“Where split site schools are in operation, the admission authority **should** in most cases, apply the admission arrangements as if the school were a single unit. They **should** make it clear to parents that admission applications are made to the school as a whole and not to a particular site. The site that children attend is a matter for the internal organisation of the school. Appeals **cannot** be made against the site allocated”.

The Council's School Organisation Policy (2015), advocates having the right schools, of the right size, in the right places. All school organisation proposals are assessed in line with the Council's admissions and pupil place planning arrangements, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within Blaenau Gwent Schools to accommodate local pupils.

### 2.3 Admission to Secondary School

Children/ young people transfer from primary school to secondary school at the beginning of the school year, following their eleventh birthday.

#### 2.3.1 Allocation of Secondary School Places 3-16 at Middle Schools

In the case of both Ebbw Fawr Learning Community and Abertillery Learning Community, **pupils who are on roll in Year 6** at the primary phase will automatically transfer to/ be allocated a place at the secondary phase. In this

instance a separate admission application is **not** required. **\*Please note all other secondary settings require an application to be made in order for a place to be allocated.**

#### 2.4 In-Year Transfers (admission that is requested outside of the normal admission round)

In-year transfer/ admission refers to applications made in-year (during and not prior to the academic year commencing), and outside of the normal admission round, i.e. pupils moving into the borough, wishing to change schools etc. All In-year transfers are dealt with in date order of receipt. Where there are a greater number of applications received than the number of places available, the Council will apply their oversubscription criteria (see page 12) in order to determine place allocation and/or refusal.

Applications are processed within 7-15 working days of receipt, confirmation of a place is proved by the Council, and confirmation of a start date is provided by the school. Where possible the start date provided by the school is within 10 days of place allocation being confirmed.

In the following circumstances pupil allocation will be managed differently to that of a standard transfer request:

- **Complex Admissions** – an admission is considered to be complex, if the needs of the pupil fall outside of the standard admission and hard to place procedures (detailed below). In this case a working group co-ordinated by the Admissions Officer, will be convened in order to address the complex nature of the placement, ensuring that all of the pupils needs can be addressed within an appropriate education setting.
- **Hard to place pupils**– applicants who are considered hard to place, fall into one or more of the categories presented below. The 14 categories cover circumstances and/or needs which would deem or contribute to a learner being considered as hard to place:
  - Children who were permanently excluded from their last maintained school placement and are able / ready to integrate to an alternative school;
  - Children returning from the criminal justice system (secure estate);
  - Child victims of serious crimes (child cruelty, kidnapping, sexual or violent crime, FGM);
  - Children who are CLA;
  - Children who have been out of education for longer than two months;
  - Children with below 50% attendance;
  - Children with disabilities or medical conditions which have already impacted on their attendance or participation at school;
  - Children of carers, Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, children whose parents offend, asylum seekers and refugees who have been in

the UK less than two years and need a supported entry to school;

- Homeless children who have been placed in temporary housing;
- Children who are in a refuge due to domestic violence;
- Children of UK service personnel where a change of location ordered by the service leads to a need for a change of school and will have experienced multiple moves;
- Children who have received 10 days exclusions in the last twelve months; and/or,
- Children on the child protection register.

It may not be possible to process complex and hard to place admissions within the target timeframe outlined above. In such cases, the applicant would be informed of any increases to the processing timescales with regards to their application, and the process through which the application will be managed. The Additional Learning Needs Panel, Managed Move Panel, and/or the Complex Admissions Working Group; would be responsible for managing applications as outlined above (please refer to section 2.6 below for further information on the panel's).

As part of the transfer allocation process, the Council will contact the child or young person's current school to obtain information in order to support and ensure a smooth transition. This information will then be shared with the recipient school in order to make sure that they are equipped to meet the pupils' educational, learning and any other identified needs upon transfer.

It is the responsibility of the parent/ guardian or carer to notify the Admissions Officer if they no longer wish to transfer their child to the newly allocated school, as confirmed within the offer letter.

**\*Please note:**

**The admissions authority does not encourage transfers from one local school to another, due to the potential disruption that it causes to all parties. However, it does recognise that this process may be required in putting the needs of the child and/ or young person first.**

**Previous research has determined that the transfer process can impinge upon a pupil's educational achievement and success, unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as the transfer being in the best interest of the child/ young person. Transfers are also dependent (as with general admissions), upon place availability at the preferred school. Parents will be encouraged to discuss at length their reasons for wanting to change schools with the school and admissions authority.**

**Parents should also consider prior to making a transfer request, differences in curriculum offer available at the child's current school and requested recipient school, i.e. the schools may not offer the same subjects at GCSE level.**

## 2.5 Requests for Admission Outside of Chronological Year Group

It is the Council's policy that children are admitted into their chronological year group. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the Council will support admission into a year group that is not within the chronological year. For example, where there is an appropriate evidence base that suggests the chronological year group is not able to meet the needs of the child e.g. on medical grounds, due to ill health, additional learning needs and/ or if a pupil is new to the UK. Evidence of the placement being 'essential' will be required should a placement of this nature be requested.

Applicants submitting requests for admission into a year group that is not the chronological year for the child/ young person, will be given the opportunity to share their reasons for the application with the Council. The headteacher of the preferred school will be consulted during the processing of the application, and their views considered as part of the decision making process.

Parents, guardians or carers who have been refused a place at the preferred school will have a statutory right of appeal against the decision that has been made; however, there is no right of appeal against a decision to refuse a place into a non-chronological year group.

## 2.6 Managed Moves, Resource Bases, Special School and Complex Placements

The Council has a protocol in place which ensures that children and young people who may benefit from what is called a 'managed move' are able to move schools in an organised and coordinated way, ensuring that their needs are appropriately met. This protocol is called the Managed Move protocol and implemented via the Managed Move Panel. Where appropriate the Admissions Officer will consider the individual circumstances in line with the Welsh Government Admissions Code (2013), and if the school is over subscribed, utilise and implement 'excepted pupil' status (for more information please see the aforementioned Welsh Government School Admissions Code, 2013, page 27), in order to admit the pupil.

The Council has a number of Resource Base provisions throughout Blaenau Gwent to meet the needs of pupils with complex needs, social emotional and behavioural needs (SEBD) or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) needs that cannot be met within a mainstream environment.

The Council also has two special schools:

- Pen-Y-Cwm Special School, which caters for children and young people with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties throughout the 3-19 age range.

- River Centre 3-16 Learning Community which caters for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties throughout the 3-16 age range.

All placements into resource base and special school provision are agreed and managed by the Additional Learning Needs Panel, which is comprised of representatives from:

- School Admissions;
- **the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) team;**
- the Education Welfare Service
- Educational Psychology Service; and,
- Headteachers/ Senior Leaders and school ALNCOs as well as other professionals/officers as and when required.

Decisions are made based upon strict criteria to ensure placements are appropriate. Processes are managed by the **ALN** team to ensure that pupils with additional learning needs are admitted in a timely manner, whilst ensuring that all of their identified needs can be met by the recipient school. All processes are carried out in consultation with the Admissions Officer in order to inform the allocation and planning of school places.

A complex admission is characterised by the child or young person's needs and or circumstances, being unable to be met within the normal admissions round and general admissions arrangements. Cases characterised as complex often require careful consideration and involvement from a wider network of partners, in order to ensure that the child's educational needs can be met within an appropriate school setting/ placement. Where there is a complex admissions case outside of the remit of the Managed Move protocol and ALN Panel processes, the Admissions Officer will coordinate the development of a working group aligned to the needs of the pupil, in considering the prospective pupil's circumstances and ensuring appropriate school placement. Complex admissions will be managed and processed in accordance with the School Admissions Code (2013). Where appropriate Welsh Government advice may be sought in line with the decision making process.

### 3. **School Admission Criteria**

The determination of school admissions differs between Local Authority maintained and non-maintained schools. The faith schools, foundation school, and non-maintained early year's education providers within Blaenau Gwent, maintain their own policies and criteria. These differ to the standardised criteria of the Council. The faith and foundation schools are also responsible for administering their own transfer and appeal procedures. **Applications for pupil places at these schools need to be made directly to the preferred school.** Applications for pupils where a faith or the foundation school is a first preference, should only be submitted to the Councils' Education Transformation team in respect of second and third preference schools that are maintained by Blaenau Gwent. **\*Please note that the Council are**

**unable to allocate pupil places within the following non-maintained faith and foundation schools and non-maintained early year's education providers:**

- Acorns Nursery
- All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School
- Brynmawr Foundation School
- Mrs Tiggywinkles Day Nursery
- St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School
- St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School
- St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

**Additionally, the Council cannot allocate pupil places within schools outside of Blaenau Gwent. Out of county school admissions and placements are managed by the admission authority of the Borough within which they reside, and/ or the schools themselves, when they are not maintained by the Council.**

The Council works jointly with the faith, foundation schools and non-maintained early year's education providers; to ensure that all pupils applying either via the schools/settings directly or the Councils processes are allocated a place. Joint monitoring also takes place around transfers and appeals.

Each school has a limit to the number of children that it can accommodate per year group. This limit is called the published admission number (please refer to **Appendix 1** of this document for more information). The admission number takes into account the physical space within the school building relevant to each age group, as determined by the Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). There are two figures derived from this formula for primary school admissions, the admission number for nursery and the admission number for reception. The nursery area includes the available space for all pupils who are eligible to attend nursery, which includes rising threes (as detailed within the nursery section above). For those schools that run both morning and afternoon sessions, the admission number is applied to each session, and so can be doubled. For secondary the figure derived indicates the admission number for all year groups. Schools are asked on an annual basis each autumn-term, to confirm their sessional plans etc. for the admission round and capacity calculations, which are then presented within the admissions policy, two years preceding the academic year to which it applies. Schools will then be bound by the admission numbers for primary and secondary school places. In the case of non-statutory nursery admissions, the capacity calculation is advisory based on the guidance detailed above.

In the event of school reorganisation taking place, the admission arrangements will be determined and confirmed as part of the statutory consultation and transition process.



4. **How to apply for a School Place in Blaenau Gwent (excluding the Faith and Foundation Schools and non-maintained early year's education providers)**

Parents/carers are required to make an application for a school place. Completed forms with supporting evidence are to be returned by the closing date as detailed in Section 6 (below). In order to process an application linked to allocation of a school place, only **one** of the following types of evidence within each category below will be required for submission with the application form:

- **Proof of Residency (copies of one of the following)**
  - Valid driving licence including paper licence
  - Council tax bill (for the 2020/21 year)
  - Recent child benefit / child tax credit notification, naming the child for whom the application has been made
  - Utility bills (within the last three months)
  - NHS Medical card
- **Proof of Date of birth (copies of one of the following)**
  - Child's birth certificate
  - NHS medical card
  - Valid passport which displays your child date of birth

All completed application forms are then to be returned to:  
The Education Transformation team,  
School Admissions,  
Floor 8,  
Anvil Court,  
Church Street,  
Abertillery.  
NP13 1DB.

Applications to the Council can also be made online via the following link: <https://citizenportal.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk> . In making an online application applicants will receive immediate confirmation that their application has been submitted, then confirmation of pupil placement will be sent on the offer date. Alternatively, parents can request an application pack from the Admissions team on (01495) 355340 or via the following email address: [schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

As previously outlined the faith and foundation schools within Blaenau Gwent have additional criteria linked to their independent status, which needs to be fulfilled in line with the child securing a place. Applications to non-maintained early year's education providers are dealt with directly by the providers concerned.

Where a parent/ guardian or carer does not provide the relevant evidence, the application will be treated as **incomplete** until such time all supporting evidence is received. Consequently, should the supporting information be received after the closing date of the relevant admissions round, then this will

render the application **as a 'late' submission**. If the information is not provided upon initial request, the Council will then attempt to chase the parent/ guardian or carer for the information a further **three times only**.

In the case of a double allocation as a result of an administrative error, the Council would need to ensure that adequate places are available and follow the School Admissions Code and oversubscription criteria, in order to meet the 1<sup>st</sup> preference requested.

In instances where fraud is suspected, or accusations of fraudulent claims have been made, an investigation will take place. Places may be withdrawn if it is discovered that parents/ guardians or carers have knowingly provided false information in order to obtain the advantage of a particular school place.

Information provided within the application in respect of additional learning needs, will require further consultation with the SEN team. This will ensure effective, suitable provision and placement in line with additional educational needs and/ or a successful transition for the pupil.

**5. Oversubscription Nursery, Primary and Secondary Criteria for the Normal Round of Admissions**

The admissions authority will consider each individual application received by the published closing date. If the number of applications for an individual school is greater than the admission number, the allocation of places will be carried out using the following criteria, which are listed in order of priority below:

**i) Children Looked After**

Priority to be given to children looked after/previously looked after (children under Local Authority care); following consultation on the appropriateness of the named school.

Children in care means children who are in care of a Local Authority in accordance with Section 22 Children Act 1989.

**ii) Catchment School**

Children who live in the catchment area of the school on or before the published closing date.

**iii) Social/Medical**

Children who the Authority accepts have an exceptional medical or social need for a place at one specific school. Applications will only be considered under this category if they are supported by a medical consultant's report. The information must specify the medical advantage of the child attending the preferred school. Please note that reports from family doctors are NOT accepted for this purpose.

**iv) Brother or Sister**

Children who will have a brother or sister at the school to which the parent is applying, after the date of admission, will be given a higher priority than those who do not. Please note however, that having a sibling at the school does not guarantee admission for any other children in the family. Where there is more than one such case, priority will be given to those children closest in age to the sibling already attending the preferred school as of the admission date. Brothers and sisters whether half, full, step or foster will be considered relevant where living in the same household.

**v) Distance**

Children living closest to the preferred school measured by the shortest recognised permitted walking route between the pupils' front door of the home and school gate using a digital mapping system.

It should be noted that a child with a statement of special educational need or equivalent (i.e. individual development plan) which names a specific school, will be admitted in accordance with Section 343 of the Education Act 1996.

**Deciding Factors associated with prioritising Admissions**

In the event of oversubscription and/or the requirement to prioritise admission based on distance, places will be allocated on the basis of distance between the shortest recognised walking route between the pupils' front door of the home and the main school gate. Distance is calculated using a digital mapping system. Children living closest to the school are given the highest priority.

**Shared residency**

In the event that the residency of a child is shared between two parents, the address where the child concerned resides for the majority of the school week will be used for allocation purposes. This is the address that should be declared on the application.

However, if the residency with both parents during the school week is equal, the address for where the child benefit is paid will be used for allocation purposes.

**Person making the application form**

Only persons holding parental responsibility for the named child are able to make an application and they will be required to make a declaration to this effect as part of the application process. Ordinarily it is expected that this

person resides at the same address as the child and is referred to as the parent for admission purposes.

Where parental responsibility is equally shared, the Council will ask the child's parents to determine which parent should submit the application.

It is expected that parents will also agree on school preferences for a child before an application is made. The Council is not in a position to intervene in disputes between parents over school applications and will request that these are resolved privately.

If parents cannot agree and neither has obtained a court order stating who should be making the application/what the preference should be, the Council will accept an application from the parent in receipt of Child Benefit for the child.

### **Multiple births**

In the case of multiple births relating to a single family, if only one place is available at the school and the second child who qualifies for a place is a sibling, the school will exceed their published admission number to accommodate both pupils.

## **6. Timeframe for Processing Admissions as Part of the 2022/23 Admission Round**

### **Nursery**

For places to be allocated in spring summer and autumn term of 2022;

Admission round commences on	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2021
Closing date for applications	5pm on 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2021
Offer date	22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2021

### **Reception**

Admission round commences on	3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2022
Closing date for applications	5pm on 25 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
Offer date	18 <sup>th</sup> April 2022

### **Secondary**

Admission round commences on	27 <sup>th</sup> September 2021
Closing date for applications	5pm on 15 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
Offer date	1 <sup>st</sup> March 2022

## 7. **Arrangements with Neighbouring Admissions Authorities and Neighbouring Local Authorities**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has made arrangements with the following neighbouring Councils' and schools, in order for parents to express a preference to attend a school outside of the borough. The Council's schools and admissions team would then liaise with the relevant admissions authority to secure a pupil place along with transition arrangements:

- **Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council**

Parents can express a preference to attend;

- Bishop Hedley High School (children living in Ebbw Vale, Beaufort and Tredegar)

- **Torfaen Borough Council**

Parents can express a preference to attend;

- Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw children from the whole of the borough.
- St. Albans R.C. High School (children living in Abertillery and Brynmawr)

## 8. **Late Applications**

Applications received '**after the closing date**' will be classed as late. These will be considered as a secondary priority to applications received on time. Incomplete applications and those without relevant supporting evidence will also be considered as late, if the information requested is not received by the closing date for admission round to which the application relates.

Late applicants are unlikely to be offered a place at their preferred school, due to places being allocated to on-time applicants, particularly where there are high levels of demand.

## 9. **Change of Preferences**

Should a parent/guardian or carer wish to change their preference, they will need to do so in writing. Letters expressing a change of preference are to be directed to the admission authority. Any request of a change in preference received after the closing date will be treated as a late application.

## 10. **Waiting Lists**

Following the allocation of places during the normal admission round, children will remain on the waiting list for their preferred school until 30<sup>th</sup> September the following academic year. Thereafter, parents/ guardians or carers will be

required to make a new application for admission. If additional places become available, they will be allocated to children on the waiting list on the basis of the published oversubscription criteria. **Waiting lists do not give priority to children based on the date the application was added to the list.**

11. **Notifying Parents, Guardians or Carers of the Outcome of the Application**

The Council will inform parents/ guardians or carers of the outcome of their application on the published offer date (please refer to pages 13 and 14 for more information). If the application is rejected, parents will receive written confirmation informing them of the outcome and will also be provided with the 'Appeals Guidance for Parents' document, which provides details of the appeals procedure. As part of the refusal letter the Council will allocate a place at the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> preference school, if a 2<sup>nd</sup> and/or 3<sup>rd</sup> preference has been indicated within the application. A place will be allocated at the next nearest available school, should all preferences be unavailable or if an alternative preference has not been specified.

12. **Admission Appeals for Primary and Secondary School Places**

The Council endeavours to fulfil parental preference wherever possible; however, where there are more applications than places available at a school it is not always possible to fulfil parent preference.

The 1996 Education Act provides parents with an opportunity to appeal against the decision of a Local Authority in the matter of **statutory** school admissions - **\*please note appeals cannot be made for non-statutory nursery admissions**. The appeal will be heard before and considered by an independent appeal panel.

Post receipt of the offer letter detailing the outcome of an application, should a parent/ guardian or carer wish to appeal against the decision of the admissions authority, they will need to complete the form issued with the letter and return it to the:

Head of Law and Standards,  
General Offices,  
Steelworks Road,  
Ebbw Vale,  
Blaenau Gwent.  
NP23 6DN

Parents will have 10 working days to submit an appeal and their appeal will be heard within 30 school days from the specific closing date indicated within the refusal letter.

**On the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020 Welsh Government introduced legislation which temporarily disapplies or relaxes certain requirements relating to admission**

appeals to allow appeals to take place despite the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Education (Admission Appeals Arrangements)(Wales)(Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020:

- Expressly provide the flexibility for panels to meet virtually or by telephone.
- Disapply the normal requirements relating to the venue for admission appeals where they are happening remotely or on paper instead of in person.
- Relax the rules with regard to what happens if one of the members of a panel of three withdraws to make it permissible for the panel to continue with and conclude the appeal as a panel of two.
- Amend the deadlines relating to appeals for the time that the regulations are in force.

The Amendment Regulations are due to expire on 31 January 2021. However, the pandemic and restrictions to reduce its spread are likely to continue to impact on the ability to undertake appeals beyond 31 January. With this in mind Welsh Government propose to introduce new Amendment Regulations which extend the current disapplications and relaxations until the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021. It is expected that the new Regulations will come into force during the early part of 2021. The regulations aim to support continuity within the appeals process, allowing appeal panels to complete applications received during the admission round.

### **13. Home to School and Post 16 Transports**

Blaenau Gwent Council will provide free transport 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 but of statutory school age; and,
- more than 2 miles from home for children aged 8 years and over.

Distances are measured by using the Council's Digital Information Mapping System, to determine the shortest available safe walking route between the home address and the main gate of the school to be attended.

Parents are able to choose an English-medium, Welsh-medium or a denominational school for their child. The child will qualify for home to school transport to the appropriate catchment area of the school. When the catchment area school is full and unable to admit a pupil, free transport will be provided to the next nearest available school that has room to take the child, as long as the home is 1.5 miles or more away from the school for pupils under the age of 8 years, or 2 miles for pupils aged 8 and over.

The provision of free school transport will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day and shall be provided during the school term time. Home to School transport is not provided for breakfast clubs, after school clubs or summer schools. Transport will be provided from pick-up points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner's home, where possible.

### **Post 16 Travel**

All students living in Blaenau Gwent will be provided with a discounted bus ticket or travel grant to the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, Ebbw Vale Campus as their designated Post 16 provider; or, the nearest institution where their course is available depending on the following criteria:

- students must be between the ages of 16 to 19 (under 19 prior to the 1st September of the commencement of their course) to qualify;
- students shall reside in the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent;
- students must reside 2 miles or over (nearest walking distance) from their nearest college campus; and, the students should attend a full time course which requires attendance of 16 or more hours per week or a minimum 4 days attendance per week at the institution.

Students and pupils aged 19 or over at the commencement of the course are not eligible for travel assistance from the Council and in these circumstances they are advised to contact their respective college for details of any available transport provision.

All transport for Post 16 pupils including those with additional learning needs is agreed on a case by case basis by the SEN team in consultation with the Transport Officer. The Council may provide transport up to a maximum of three years.

### **Travel Grant**

The Council's present policy is to provide travel assistance to those who meet the criteria up to a maximum of £150 per academic session. This will be paid termly as follows: £50 autumn, £50 spring and £50 summer.

### **Welsh Medium / Faith Education**

Pupils who wish to undertake their Post 16 studies via the medium of Welsh or attend a Faith school are required to travel further distances for their education, with no direct public service bus routes. These students have the opportunity to utilise the existing contract bus provision in lieu of the Travel Grant, if appropriate.

All awarded transport will be reviewed periodically. For more detailed information on home to school and post 16 transport, along with details on how to apply, please refer to the Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy (2021/22) via the following link: <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/schools-learning/school-transport/>



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## Appendix 1 – Published Admission Numbers

**\*Please note in order to apply for a place in one of the following schools/early years education providers, an application will need to be made directly to the school of your choice:**

- **Acorns Nursery**
- **All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School**
- **Brynmawr Foundation School**
- **Mrs Tiggywinkles Day Nursery**
- **St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Primary School**
- **St Mary’s Church in Wales Primary School**
- **St Mary’s Roman Catholic Primary School**

### Published Admission Numbers for 2022/23

School *The school highlighted in <b>red</b> are responsible for their own admission arrangements and as such, applications need to be submitted directly to the school.	Nursery Admission Number	Session	Statutory Admission Number (Reception or Year 7)
<b>All Saints R.C. Primary School</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>26</b>
Beaufort Hill Primary School	<b>30</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>30</b>
Blaen y Cwm Primary School	<b>26</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>38</b>
	<b>26</b>	<b>pm</b>	
Brynbach Primary School	<b>30</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Brynmawr R.C. Primary School</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>Full time places</b>	<b>30</b>
Coed y Garn Primary School	<b>30</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>30</b>	<b>pm</b>	
Cwm Primary School	<b>52</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>52</b>	<b>pm</b>	
Deighton Primary School	<b>30</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>30</b>	<b>pm from April-term</b>	
Georgetown Primary School	<b>30</b>	<b>am</b>	<b>60</b>
	<b>30</b>	<b>pm</b>	
Glanhowy Primary School	<b>65</b>	<b>am</b>	

	65	pm	42
Glyncoed Primary School	52	am	45
	52	pm	
Rhos y Fedwen Primary School	26	am	25
St. Illtyd's Primary School	30	am	30
St. Joseph's R.C. Primary School	41	full time	15
St. Mary's Church-in-Wales Primary School	30	am	30
Soffryd Primary School	19	am	23
	19	pm	
Willowtown Primary School	30	am	60
	30	pm	
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg	60	full time	30
Ystruth Primary School	37	am	42
	37	pm	

	Nursery Admission Number	Session	Statutory Admission Number (Reception or Year 7)
<b><u>Secondary School</u></b>			
Brynmawr Foundation School			151
Tredegar Comprehensive School			154
<b><u>Middle School</u></b>			
Abertillery Learning Community – Primary Phase	141		140
Abertillery Learning Community – Secondary Phase			150
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community - Primary Phase	58	am	40
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community - Secondary Phase			238

## Appendix 2 - Blaenau Gwent Schools Catchment Area Overview Map



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## Analysis:

### School Admissions – 2020/21 Admissions Round Analysis

The Admissions team have successfully implemented the School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2020/21, which is evidenced by the following assessment:

- 100% of applications were processed within 48 hours and 100% of standard in-year transfer requests were processed within 15 days of receipt in accordance with the WG School Admissions Code (2013) and Blaenau Gwent's School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2019/20.
- Transfer rates have fluctuated over the last 4 academic sessions, from 140 in 2016/17, up to 343 in 2017/18 and then a slight increase of 355 in 2018/19. The rate of **229 in 2019/2020 – 151 primary transfers, 78 secondary transfers. Figures are much lower due to covid.** The primary reason for in-year transfer has been inward migration of families into the Blaenau Gwent area.
- Complex transfers were received on a weekly basis and referred to the SEN team for consideration at ALN Panel.
- The admissions officer has attended all ALN Panel meetings and/ or liaised directly with the SEN team on pupil placement.
- There were 3 appeals held for the reception year group during the summer period 2020, which is less than the number of appeals held in 2019. All 3 appeals were upheld in favour of the Council due to them being class size appeals.
- The numbers of in-time applications received for pupils who applied for a school place during the 2020/21 admission round, increased slightly for nursery and reception but decreased for secondary when compared to 2019/20, this was due to the birth rate for that year being lower. Please refer to Figure 1 overleaf for the in-time percentage comparisons:

Figure 1: In-time Application (%)

Percentage of In-time Applications 2018/19	Percentage of In-time Applications 2019/20	Percentage of In-time Applications 2020/21
Nursery – 58%	Nursery – 51%	Nursery – 60%
Reception – 79%	Reception – 74%	Reception – 75%
Secondary – 71%	Secondary – 89%	Secondary – 79%

- The Council were able to sustain 100% of parental first preferences for a 4 years period in respect of both nursery and secondary place allocation, and 99% of first preferences were met for the reception year group (please refer to **Figure 2** below). This is attributable to the effective monitoring and management of school capacities and pupil places along with the continued achievement of surplus place reduction, whereby school admission numbers for primary schools with a high surplus have been reduced over the last year and in turn the admission number has also been reduced.
- First preferences met for late applications are also extremely high due to effective pupil place management processes

Figure 2: First Preferences Met %

<b>% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2017/18</b>	<b>% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2018/19</b>	<b>% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2019/20</b>	<b>% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2020/21</b>
Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%
Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%
Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%
<b>% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2017/18</b>	<b>% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2018/19</b>	<b>% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2019/20</b>	<b>% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2020/21</b>
Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 99%	Nursery – 100%
Reception – 97%	Reception – 96%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 100%
Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%

The Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) dictates that Councils must review their admissions policies annually for consultation and publication by April 15<sup>th</sup> in the academic year preceding the admissions round. Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy outlines the arrangements, criteria and relevant legislation that underpin school admission processes and methodology. The primary changes to the policy document for the 2020/21 academic session were as follows:

- A review of the nursery, primary and secondary admission numbers in line with the annual capacity review. This is an annual process which reviews changes to school plans and physical space within the school, which affect the provision of teaching and learning. This is carried out in line with the Welsh Government Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). The final agreed capacity calculations are then used to inform admission numbers.
- A review of the dates for the admission round(s), associated processing and offer deadlines.



The Admissions Policy for 2021/22 was consulted upon and published in line with the Welsh Government's deadline (April 2020). The pilot phase of on-line admission arrangements was launched on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. Online applications have increased overall within the last academic session as outline below:

#### 2017/18

- 158 out of a possible 976 applications received online for nursery;
- 6 out of a possible 796 applications received online for reception; and,
- 16 out of a possible 685 application received online for secondary.

#### 2018/19

- 94 out of a possible 705 applications received online for nursery;
- 93 out of a possible 586 applications received online for reception; and,
- 58 out of a possible 770 application received online for secondary.

#### 2019/20

- 205 out of a possible 659 applications received online for nursery;
- 186 out of a possible 676 applications received online for reception; and,
- 161 out of a possible 654 application received online for secondary.

#### 2020/21

- 248 out of a possible 519 applications received online for nursery;
- 216 out of a possible 559 applications received online for reception; and,
- 185 out of a possible 426 applications received online for secondary.

The aim of the team is to become completely paperless in preparation for the 2022/23 admission round, with the team now being in the process of organising training for Capita One Online System.

The Admissions Forum met twice times over the last year (September 2019 – August 2020), with the minimum number of meetings required being 3. The Forum has sustained a good level of attendance at each meeting. The Forum has worked closely with the Education Transformation team in order to:

- improve school and Council awareness and partnership approaches in respect of the implementation and monitoring of the admissions round;

- improve tracking processes from live birth to secondary education (whilst ensuring alignment with Inclusion);
- address issues i.e. ensure that when in-year transfers are allocated a place a start date is offered within 10 days; and,
- explore a wider ranging data set i.e. Flying Start, placement outside of the chronological year group, home tuition and attendance data etc. Ensuring that there is a holistic approach to the management of pupil places.

# Agenda Item 11

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**  
Date of meeting: **9<sup>th</sup> March 2021**  
Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member Education**  
Report Submitted by: **Cllr Haydn Trollope, Chair of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	22.2.21			09.03.21			

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To present to Members the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021 for discussion and agreement.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
  - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's revised Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
  - 2.3 Effective work programmes are essential to ensure that the work of scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
  - 2.4 The Committee's Forward Work Programme was agreed in September 2020, recognising the fluidity of the document to enable the Committee to respond to urgent and emerging issues, and included timescales when reports will be considered by the Committee. The work programme is managed and implemented by the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer under the direction of the Chair and Committee.
  - 2.5 The forward work programme for the forthcoming meeting will be presented to Committee on a 6 weekly cycle in order that Members can consider the programme of work; request information is included within the reports, as appropriate and / or make amendments to the work programme.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
  - 3.1 **Option 1:** The Scrutiny Committee consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021, and
    - Make any amendments to the topics scheduled for the meetings;

- Suggest any additional invitees that the committee requires to fully consider the reports; and
- Request any additional information to be included with regards to the topics to be discussed.

3.2 **Option 2:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021, as presented.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Date / Deadlines	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council
<b>Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021</b>  Deadline: 2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2021	1. School Organisation Policy (2021-2024)	<b>Pre-Decision</b> To engage Members in the development of the Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021-2024.	Lynn Phillips	Executive
	2. Self-evaluation (SE)	<b>Performance Monitoring</b> Members to contribute to the development of the SE report for LGES and to determine the actions arising from the SER are appropriate and aligned to the service needs for children and young people.	Lynn Phillips	Executive
	3. Education Accessibility Strategy	<b>Pre-Decision</b> To consult with Members on the draft Education Accessibility Strategy 2021-2024.	Claire Gardner	Executive

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