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Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Democratic Services



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

13th April 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](mailto:committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Tuesday, 20th April, 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 - 20

To receive the Minutes of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee held on the 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2021.

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

5. **ACTION SHEET - 1ST APRIL 2021** 21 - 26

To receive the Action Sheet.

6. **BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION SERVICES SELF-EVALUATION AND BUSINESS PLANNING** 27 - 56

To consider the report of the Corporate Director of Education.

7. **EDUCATION DIRECTORATE - RESPONSE TO COVID-19** 57 - 80

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

8. **SCHOOL ORGANISATION POLICY (2021/24)** 81 - 100

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

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 – 9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2021**

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

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**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  
B. Summers  
D. Wilkshire

**Co-opted Members**

T. Baxter

**AND:** Corporate Director of Education  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Service Manager Inclusion  
Education Transformation Manager  
Youth Services Manager  
Partnerships, Funding and Contracts Manager – ALT  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

**ALSO:** Ed Pryce, Assistant Director EAS  
Hayley Davies-Edwards, Principal Challenge Adviser  
Liz Counsell, Estyn – Observer

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
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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>	
No. 2	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H. Trollope (Chair), G. Collier and T. Smith.</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Member</u></b> A. Williams</p>	
No. 3	<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.</p> <p>The Director advised Members that the amount of positive Covid-19 incidences experienced across the County Borough had reduced to 38 per 100,000 population. That was the stable position over the last 10 days and showed that all of the collective work had contributed to making a difference.</p> <p>In relation to the schools' update there had only been one positive case in a school setting and from a workforce perspective the number of staff that were either self-isolating or had been identified as being in the shielding category was just over 20, again that was a very stable position and no significant workforce and staffing issues were being experienced across education at this juncture. He was pleased to update Members that engagement with schools had continued to be very encouraging and schools had agreed strategic decisions and taken a common approach in terms of our response. The Executive Planning Group meetings with Headteachers were continuing on a fortnightly basis and recently there was a move towards foundation phase learners now returning to school settings</p>	

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for face to face learning from 22<sup>nd</sup> January. He advised Members that these arrangements had run smoothly with no real difficulties and this was a credit to the primary sector for the way they managed those arrangements as they move towards increasing numbers of face to face learning.

Over the spring term, there was continued hub provision for both vulnerable learners and critical workers. In the last admissions round there were approaching 460 children that continued to be supported. Slightly worryingly, from a free school meals perspective, direct payments had increased to 1,768 learners and that excluded Foundation Phase learners, he felt that this demonstrated the economic impact locally of Covid-19 on some families across the County Borough. The direct payments to those families had been working effectively and were reviewed on a weekly basis.

From a remote blended learning perspective, there had been close liaison with colleagues in the EAS on the Celebrate, Share, Support and Refine (CSSR) pilot initiative across southeast Wales and he was pleased to report that out of Blaenau Gwent's 25 schools, 13 were participating in that pilot, more than 50% and that was the highest proportion of any local authority area within the region.

From an ICT perspective the amount of devices and support for learners and families was now approaching 1,600 devices that had been issued to families where there was identified need. The Education Transformation Manager and the team had worked closely with the SRS to ensure that support for learners was comprehensive.

Vaccinations for staff in special schools and those teaching and non-teaching staff in resource bases had started. With regard to testing, lateral flow tests had been delivered over the last 10 days and the Director confirmed that the initiation of lateral flow testing for staff started on Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March.

Some extraordinary meetings had been held with Secondary, Primary and Special School Headteachers, following the Welsh Government announcement, that also included engagement with the Trade Unions so that discussion could take place on some of the planning arrangements for an increased level of face to face learning

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from 15<sup>th</sup> March. The current position planned with Headteachers involved all of the primary learners returning from the 15<sup>th</sup> March and would include Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2. Also from 15<sup>th</sup> March a return would include secondary year 11's and there would be one day per week set aside for year 10's as part of the examination assessment requirements over the next 18 months. There was a planned approach for years 7's, 8's and 9's all of whom would receive at least one full day check-in prior to the Easter holiday period. There had been some initial dialogue with Headteachers across the board around the post Easter provision, subject to Welsh Government review, but with a view to a potential move towards full return for all learners.

In response to a Member's question regarding flow testing for teachers, the Corporate Director of Education confirmed that lateral flow testing for all teaching and non-teaching staff was in place and that included ancillary staff such as catering and cleaning staff. Testing would take place twice weekly and were self-administered tests, if there was a positive case identified via the lateral flow testing arrangements then a PCR test, which was more robust, would be arranged to ensure that any potential positive incidences that arise could be managed appropriately.

A Member referred to Legionella testing in schools and enquired regarding an update on the consultants who raised the issue of different ways of testing for Legionella. The Corporate Director of Education said that revised arrangements were in place in line with the report presented to full Council on water testing. There were now weekly monitoring arrangements in place whereby schools had to confirm that, for example flushing arrangements were reported through to Technical Services in line with the latest Legionella guidance and there was monitoring within the Education Transformation team. Where there was any non-compliance, schools were contacted and any recourse was taken with prompt action. He confirmed that schools had responded positively to the new and enhanced flushing regimes that were expected from a local authority perspective.

A Member enquired regarding the use of personal electronic devices taken into school and used for school

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purposes. The Corporate Director of Education said that 1,600 reconditioned devices had been distributed to learners and many learning activities now took place by a 'bring your own devices' (BYOD). This was carried out in conjunction with the SRS to ensure that there were control measures in place to make sure that the activity was done in a safe environment so that the learners were not disadvantaged and not placed at any further risks through using their own devices. Moving forward he felt that this would become more of the norm especially in relation to blended learning.

The Member raised concerns regarding loss or damage to the devices. The Director of Education said that in relation to damage the Council had its own insurance arrangements. There would need to be localised arrangements within schools to ensure that those situations were kept to an absolute minimum and any personal devices were protected.

A Member raised concerns regarding the increase in free school meals and the effect this would have on the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) and enquired if the Welsh Government were looking at the redistribution of the PDG in line with the pandemic and the number of pupils that are now receiving free school meals. The Corporate Director of Education said that at this point in time it was difficult to give a strong indication on how the Welsh Government would respond to the increased levels of free school meals eligibility across Wales. FSM levels were measured at the annual PLASC level returns in January and that should be reflected in the PDG, he confirmed that PLASC returns were used to assess PDG grants.

The Member raised further concerns regarding the reopening of schools and felt that a report needed to be prepared for consideration by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee. The Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee had met in February 2020 and due to the pandemic had not met again until September 2020, he felt that a record should be kept and a report be prepared to consider any discussion or concerns that Scrutiny Members may have on the reopening of schools. He also referred to Legionella and water testing for schools. The Corporate Director of Education said that an education Covid-19

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	<p>update report had been presented in November that covered aspects of the water testing issues that were faced over the summer term and he was happy to bring forward a further Covid-19 update report to the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee in April.</p> <p>In response to a Member's questions regarding vaccinations and PPA, preparation, planning and assessment, the Director of Education said that discussions around a regional approach had taken place with Headteachers and Trade Unions and some schools had confirmed they had capacity to undertake PPA under normal arrangements and other schools may have some difficulty and were considering a slightly earlier finish on a Friday to accommodate PPA, but this would be a matter for the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors to decide and that would allow the facilitation of statutory requirements around PPA. In relation to vaccinations he clarified that they were only being issued to staff in Special Schools and in Resource Bases at this point in time.</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 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021 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 – 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2021</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Verbal Update – COVID-19 Pandemic</u></b></p> <p>A Member requested a progress update in relation to the funding from WG for extra PPE equipment for schools.</p> <p>The Education Transformation Manager said that new PPE guidance along with training had been issued to all schools in February. Requests for additional PPE were monitored fortnightly and all schools had sufficient provision in place</p>	

	<p>for the current phase of reopening. The training and guidance would be updated with any new or emergent updates from the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. WG funding had been received and allocated accordingly, and managed in line with the allocation of PPE in line with both the additional funding and the hardship fund.</p> <p>A Member commented that a number of additional grants had been received and requested a progress update on the ALN Covid-19 support grant, the PDG access clothing grants and the EdTech programme.</p> <p>In relation to the ALN Covid-19 support grant and the PDG access grant, the Service Manager Inclusion said that they were working with the EAS to allocate the ALN Covid-19 support grant to schools on a per pupil basis, this should be with schools shortly. The PDG access clothing grant had been extended until the end of June and the application process was now live on the Blaenau Gwent website. A letter was being prepared for schools to share with parents, and some schools had already included this information on their school social media account. Both grants were being made available either to schools or to parents.</p> <p>A Member commented that the WG had announced £72m for education and requested a report on what bids were being submitted to the Welsh Government.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education said that as there had been several additional resources and funding opportunities over the spring term, it had been agreed with colleagues in Finance to produce one document that would highlight the resource and how that resource would be used. A Briefing Note would be prepared to provide details of grant funding being received by the Directorate.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW - BLAENAU GWENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented to provide</p>	

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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.

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

A Member referred to page 32 of the report and requested an update on the number of vulnerable pupils who attended hub provision between March and July. The Service Manager Inclusion confirmed that the current number stood at 120.

The Co-opted Member provided a response to the thematic review from a Headteachers perspective. He said the last few months had been very challenging in relation to trying to maintain a good standard of education for pupils when so many of the staff had to isolate. There had been two areas of rapid progress in Blaenau Gwent, the first being the considerable progress in using IT more effectively to support pupils with distance learning, the second was the level of collaborative working with schools and Local Authority Officers. There had been clear consultation, and totally unified agreement on all major decisions. This provided greater clarity for parents because there was a consistent approach from all schools and felt that it had helped to limit the spread of the pandemic. It was pleasing to note that Estyn had recognised this level of support, collaboration and trust and hoped it would continue in the future.

A Member referred to the first paragraph of page 33 - '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'. He felt it was important to mention that the current Director had taken over on a temporary basis at the beginning of the pandemic and felt the Director and all his staff should be congratulated on the work they had undertaken since the start of the pandemic.

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The Chair and Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation and agreed with their colleague's comments.

A Member referred to the savings of £210,000. The Corporate Director of Education clarified that the report highlighted the portfolio underspend at that point in time linked to cost reduction, they were not revenue savings but just the financial position at that point in time. In relation to budget monitoring, the additional costs associated with Covid such as catering and cleaning were largely funded through Welsh Government support through the hardship fund, the Directorate would be in an adverse financial position.

A Member expressed his appreciation for the invaluable support for vulnerable learners from the Inclusion team and acknowledged the good work of the Youth Services team regarding the distribution of computers and dongles to allow youngster to get online. He welcomed the Thematic Review report which highlighted the approach during the early days of the pandemic and the reopening of schools, however, he had concerns that it was not evidenced based. The Member was pleased to note that as a Local Authority we had put forward the five recommendations highlighted in the report to the Welsh Government.

The Member referred to the recruitment, recovery, raising standards and accelerated learning grant funding to support pupils to catch up and with learning and enquired what progress had been made on monitoring the impact of the grant and what evidence was available to measure pupil outcomes. He also enquired regarding strategic planning around what would education in Blaenau Gwent look like in September, for example what were the expectations of each school, how would pupil progress be measured and what had schools learned from blended learning.

The Corporate Director of Education said that in relation to the recruitment and recovery element of funding from the Welsh Government there were stringent monitoring arrangements in place that measured the impact associated with that spend. He was now a participant of the Welsh Government led Recovery Group and felt this position could help Blaenau Gwent shape recovery at a strategic level. Moving forward he felt that recovery in terms of the Covid

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	<p>response was going to be more of a medium to long term arrangement and that was why managing pupil progression was the key priority put forward to the EAS business plan.</p> <p>The Member referred to promoting learning and quoted from the document 'Officers considered the EAS provided good support to schools and blended learning approaches' and felt that Estyn would need evidence in relation to this. The Corporate Director of Education said that work was being undertaken with the EAS around celebrating, sharing, supporting and refining and a pilot was underway. He felt that Blaenau Gwent was at the vanguard of doing that work and there would be the opportunity to share practice across the school estate. Presentations were taking place from 13 out of 25 schools that were part of the pilot, they were also committed for the other 12 schools to participate in the next round of CSSR initiatives which would bring forward elements of good practice and felt that they were in a reasonable place to roll out that learning across the whole of the County Borough.</p> <p>The Assistant Director EAS stated that a distance and blended learning session for Members had been held recently, the latest of a series of those where two schools in Blaenau Gwent presented what work they were doing to Members. It had been well attended and the EAS would continue, through the Local Authority, to offer similar sessions moving forward.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report be accepted as presented.</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>EAS BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022</u></b>  <b><u>(Draft for consultation)</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education which was presented 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.</p>	

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The new EAS Principal Challenge Adviser briefly introduced herself to Members. There had been a change in EAS arrangements Hayley Davies-Edwards was the new Principal Challenge Adviser attached to Blaenau Gwent from January 2021.

The Assistant Director EAS spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

The Co-opted Member stated that the EAS had adapted the way they worked and had adopted a more supportive role over the past year which had reduced the additional demand on how teachers provided additional support in delivering improved blended learning. He had one concern with the business plan that related to the ambitious aim in relation to the new curriculum for Wales and felt it would be a shame to rush to implement it now at the expense of ensuring that all pupils had caught up and sought assurances that moving forward would not be at the expense of catching up.

The Assistant Director EAS responded that as a region they were responding to the national interpretation requirements of moving towards curriculum for Wales and saw it as an opportunity. He acknowledged the sensitivity around the individual context of individual schools and the population they served, if pupils required different forms of support in order for them to re-learn some of the basics they may need, that would be appropriate within that individual school setting and the EAS and teams would support schools doing this.

In response to a Member's questions regarding how the EAS would assess where children's education was at present, and whether the Authority was getting value for money from the EAS. The Assistant Director EAS said in relation to the data for accountability, in summer 2020 there were no assessments at Foundation Phase or Key Stage 2, and Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 data was based on school assessments. In 2021 the Welsh Government were currently consulting on the reporting of data, the consultation closes at the end of March, so it was unlikely that there would be a full range of end of key stage data. Critically schools knew their learners and the progress they need to make to return to learning. The EAS would work

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with schools to support their understanding of where their learners are, he explained there were still, for example national tests available but the requirement to actually have to take those national tests on an annual basis had been modified, it was on a best endeavours basis during the year because learners had not been in school for much of the year to actually take those adaptive national tests. What was critical was when schools used tools like that they are used in a way to assess where learners were and to assess their needs rather than for accountability.

In relation to value for money, an annual value for money report had been delivered to every local authority and the conclusion provided at the time by the external consultant was that the EAS provided good value for money.

In response to a Member's question regarding what the EAS was doing to encourage schools that were not engaging, the Assistant Director EAS said that high levels of schools had engaged in the CSSR process and through the Principal Challenge Adviser process schools were approached where there were concerns around engagement to address any issues.

With regard to priority J on the EAS Business Plan a Member felt that the words 'celebrating success' should be added to the phrase '*To further develop a culture around accountability that identifies and values a broad spectrum of characteristics of effective schools and settings*'. The Assistant Director EAS hoped that 'celebrating success' permeated throughout the document. Priority J reflected on some of the statutory responsibilities that the local authority had, which the EAS deliver on as their partners in relation to the accountability elements.

The Assistant Director EAS confirmed that the recommendations coming from Estyn to the Welsh Government would be fully integrated into recommendations going to local authorities and schools.

In relation to value for money, the Corporate Director of Education said there were two variables; one was an assessment of whether or not performance was improving, and the second was whether that assessment could be done more efficiently with less resources. The current

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	<p>allocation of resource that the Council commissioned the EAS was just over £350,000 and he confirmed a 2% reduction in that budget for 2021/22. He felt this provided good value for money.</p> <p>A Member raised concerns regarding blended learning and how pupils' progressive progress was measured in relation to literacy and numeracy and how that data was analysed as this was the second year for pupil assessments. The Assistant Director EAS said there was no blueprint for how learning from home could be delivered, learners would have spent different periods of time at home, due to isolation etc. schools had learned from scratch and that was one of the key elements that was covered at the distance and blended learning's seminars. As learners return, schools would be in a position to assess learner's capabilities, abilities and future needs would be picked up. He felt that schools were developing their approaches now and the EAS would support schools and share best practice on how to address the needs of individual learners. He explained that no Consortia was involved with the GCSE or A level results, the EAS were never involved with the assessment, as it had to be undertaken by independent organisations such as the WJEC, the EAS only acted as a conduit between Qualifications Wales, the WJEC and the secondary schools. With regards to the business plan the EAS would continue to work with national organisations and school colleagues to communicate with clarity the messages that come at a national level on national assessments.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Business Plan be accepted as presented.</p>	
<b>No. 8</b>	<p><b><u>INSPIRE 2 ACHIEVE AND WORK PERFORMANCE REPORT JANUARY – DECEMBER 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Youth Services Manager which was presented 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).</p>	

	<p>The Youth Services Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to paragraph 6.1.11 and the reduction of staff from 6.5 to 4.5 this year as two members of staff had temporarily supported the youth homelessness team and enquired regarding future funding for the service. The Youth Services Manager explained that they had been successful in securing another years funding for the work linked to homelessness from the Welsh Government, the intention was that the two members of staff expressing an interest to remain within the youth homelessness team and recruit separately into the two vacant posts. In relation to ESF, this was highlighted as a risk within the report and the team were in discussions with regional partners to look at funding coming from the UK Government called Shared Prosperity Funding. There were also other avenues of funding being considered in the immediate short term but there were uncertainties regarding timings, however, the Youth Services Manager was fairly confident that funding would become available.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding training providers, the Youth Services Manager said they work closely with a number of training providers within the area, as part of the raising aspirations group partnership. They worked together to understand the needs of young people and to ensure that the training needed was available to them. There were also alternative curriculum sites established where the team worked with young people in those settings.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinised the information detailed within the report, and recommend to the Executive Committee that the report be accepted.</p>	
<b>No. 9</b>	<p><b><u>WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS (WPLS) ANNUAL RETURN 2019/20</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Youth Services Manager which was presented for Members to consider the attached report (appendix 1) received from the Museums,</p>	

	<p>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.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member referred to page 91, quality indicator 9 and commented that the Leisure Trust had failed to meet its measure regarding reading material and he felt that coming out of the pandemic it was important that a variety and quality of reading was available for all ages, and also for reading for pleasure and for study. He hoped that the investment shown in the report would come forward and there would not be a lack of provision for reading material and other media ways of learning.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education responded that they would report back on progress against the spend element of the book fund and also recognising the different access to reading and materials such as electronic versions. This report would be presented to the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding mobile libraries, the Partnerships, Funding and Contracts Manager said that currently two mobile library services were operational but during the pandemic only operated 3 out of 5 days per week. After Easter the mobile library service would be fully operational 5 out of 5 days per week.</p> <p>A Member commented that he welcomed a further report year on year to ensure that the book fund was utilised in the correct way.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinised the information detailed within the report and recommend to the Executive Committee that the report be accepted.</p>	
<b>No. 10</b>	<p><b><u>BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION ADMISSIONS POLICY FOR NURSERY AND STATUTORY EDUCATION 2022/23</u></b></p>	

	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the Education Transformation Manager which was presented 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 15th April 2021.</p> <p>The Education Transformation Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the policy document be accepted.</p>	
<b>No. 11</b>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 20TH APRIL 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 requested that due to the pandemic the report on Education Accessibility Strategy be moved to a future meeting to allow the Education Transformation team more time to prepare the document and suggested that this could be replaced on the agenda with a Covid-19 update report.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report on Education Accessibility Strategy be moved to a future meeting and be replaced on the agenda with a Covid-19 update report.</p>	

**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**Action Sheet**

**Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021**

Item	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
4	<b><u>Action Sheet – 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021</u></b>  <b>Welsh Government Grants – School Summer Activity Project (SHEP programme) – Outcome report to be provided.</b>	Claire Gardner	See attached.

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## **Blaenau Gwent Summer Activity Report**

### **Background and Context**

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the Welsh Local Government Association announced that funding would be made available to local authorities to deliver engaging and enriching activities, to help participating children and young people from economically deprived areas to re-engage with education. The Blaenau Gwent allocation was confirmed as £20,987, a proposal for which was submitted on Friday 17th July.

### **Blaenau Gwent Programme**

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, which operated throughout 4 school buildings in the most deprived areas of Blaenau Gwent (schools were selected on the basis of FSM entitlement, area/deprivation status and interest). Initially, we planned to engage 8 schools across the 4 Valley's within Blaenau Gwent, to establish provision over a 2 week period, with sessions running in 4 schools during the first week and 4 during the second week. We also sought to establish Welsh-medium provision via Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg. However, due to limited staff availability throughout August, only 4 of the 8 schools targeted were able offer the programme, these were:

- Willowtown Primary School
- Bryn Bach Primary School
- Rhos y Fedwen Primary School
- Blaen y Cwm Primary School

The schools identified pupils who they felt would benefit from the programme. Applications and letters were drafted and distributed by the Council, with the following number of children targeted in each school:

- Willowtown Primary School - 19
- Bryn Bach Primary School - 28
- Rhos y Fedwen Primary School - 45 (due to limited uptake/engagement in summer activities in previous years, a higher proportion of families were targeted with the option to extend over 2 weeks in line with the level of engagement)
- Blaen y Cwm Primary School - 26

Health and Safety and reopening site assessments, along with COVID Secure Risk Assessments were carried out at each school site prior to the activities taking place. Each external provider also risk assessed their activities, considered site access and other associated requirements prior to the programme being delivered. Numbers of children able to access the provision were capped and groups agreed during the programme development phase, along with staffing, cleaning, caretaking and catering arrangements.

The Summer Club programme was run over a 5 day period (in line with availability of staff and facilities), during the first week of August. Sessions were delivered between the hours of 8:30am and 12:30pm for up to 24, 8-11year olds per/school setting. The

8-11 age range was chosen in consideration of the availability of activities and childcare i.e. the Early Years Childcare and Play team, along with the Youth Service and Aneurin Leisure Trust, where providing activities and services for up to 8 and over 11 year olds. In addition, this age range has engaged well in holiday programmes historically, and was set to be a target group for the School Holiday Enrichment Programme, should it have gone ahead this year. Importantly, consideration was also given to health and safety, along with the age range of children who the schools identified as requiring engagement, provision and support.

A 5-day activity programme was established in each school inclusive of catering provision (healthy snacks). The programme of activities included sports, art, craft and science delivered by an array of providers in partnership with school staff. The school staff focused on re-introducing children to the learning environment, wellbeing and the delivery of complimentary education-based activities (please refer to **Appendix 1** for an example of the activity programme).

### **Outcomes**

In total, 53 children engaged daily across the 4 school sites. Surveys were undertaken with the children at the end of the programme, for which 47 responses were received (22 girls and 25 boys). Please refer to **Appendix 2** for a detailed breakdown of the survey data. All children fully engaged with the activity programme which was replicated at each school setting. Activities included the daily mile, arts, sports and science. A series of partners were engaged in the delivery of the activity programme including: Aneurin Leisure Trust who were also a key partner in establishing the programme, Eco Educational, the Skate Board Academy, Lucy Dance and Carl Betty Taekwondo. As detailed above, the school staff provided wellbeing support throughout, as well as assisting in the delivery of the activity programme etc. The external providers commented on how helpful the school staff were and felt that they really bought into, complimented and supported the activities being provided.

Feedback received from both the staff and children was extremely positive. The Catering Service were able to increase the snack provision to twice per/session due to surplus stock availability in school kitchens as a result of the school closure period. A significant number of children who engaged with the Summer Club had attended the School Holiday Enrichment Programme in 2019. The children commented that they missed the opportunity to engage in cooking activities; however, the risk and site assessments along with COVID-19 response requirements prohibited such activity.

A number of the children were returning to school for the first time since March 2020. The school staff took the opportunity to work closely with these children and offer them the opportunity to catch-up and check in, whilst also gaining an insight into the changes in school life and facilities. The sessions supported the children to re-engage with each other, staff and education by providing a series of fun and meaningful activities aligned to the curriculum, addressing their fears, anxieties and any concerns which they had. The activities also encouraged and facilitated expression, movement, healthy eating and lifestyle. Continuous indoor and outdoor play and learning underpinned the programme delivery. Outdoor play offered a perfect companion to the provision indoors, working in harmony and providing a complementary environment to enhance and extend experience and activity.



Both the indoor and outdoor activities offered the children:

- Access to space with opportunities to be their natural, exuberant and physical selves.
- Fresh air and direct experience of how the elements of the weather feel.
- Contact with natural and living things, to maintain their inborn affinity, curiosity and fascination for all things belonging to the natural world.
- Freedom to be inquisitive, exploratory, adventurous, innovative and messy.
- A vast range of real experiences that are relevant and meaningful.
- Opportunities to discover, play and discuss/talk about their feelings so that new experiences could be processed, understood and used.
- An environment that feeds information into all the senses at the same time.
- Involvement with the whole body, promoting improved physical and mental health.
- Emotional and mental wellbeing, where self-image and esteem grow.
- Social interactions that build relationships, social skills and enjoyment of being with others.
- Opportunities to set themselves challenges and to learn how to keep themselves safe during these ever changing and unprecedented times.
- A safe and inclusive space to promote learning and allow them to express feelings, thoughts and ideas via a variety of mediums.

In conclusion, despite the quick turnaround required to establish provision, the Summer Club was successful in engaging with 53 vulnerable children from economically deprived areas, who required additional provision to support and promote their wellbeing and ongoing engagement in education.

## **Appendices:**

### **Appendix 1 – Activity Programme**



schedule Clwb yr Haf  
2020 Willowtown.xlsx

### **Appendix 2 – Pupil Survey Data**



Questionnaire  
Survey data to Educa

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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: **20<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Education Services Self-Evaluation and Business Planning**

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

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

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	✓	08.04.21			20.4.21	FWP 2021/22		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the findings of ongoing self-evaluation and business planning processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Blaenau Gwent Education Services are committed to self-review and self-improvement and view these processes as being fundamental to securing ongoing improvement in outcomes, quality and effectiveness. The Education Directorate has adopted a standardised approach for self-evaluation (SE) that is now embedded into the day to day practice. This has been reviewed to align with Estyn's new inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES). This report looks at the emerging findings against the inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES), which will inform evaluations of progress against the key improvement priorities set out in business improvement plans.
- 2.2 The Summary Self-Evaluation Report (SER) attached as appendix 1 provides a high-level narrative and sets out the arrangements for effective self-evaluation. The findings from the SER are reflected as actions for improvement in the Directorate's Business Plans at Directorate, Service and Team level. Effective self-evaluation means that the Directorate remains focussed on improving the right things.
- 2.3 Over recent months, extensive work has been undertaken within the Education Directorate to align the governance processes to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation is taking place, avoiding duplication and enabling evidence to support a number of different planning processes. This 'golden thread' links:
- The Well-being Plan;
  - Corporate Plan;

- Council's Recovery Themes;
- LGES
- EAS Business Plan;
- Political Priorities;
- Education Improvement Plan;
- Tier 2 Business Plans; and
- Tier 1 Business Plans.

2.4 As part of this work, a review of the Education Improvement Plan (EIP) has been undertaken, which has resulted in a revision to the priorities of the Directorate:

- Improving educational outcomes and wellbeing for pupils at all stages of development, but particularly at KS4, through effective governance arrangements;
- Delivering the vision for education based on a school-led self-improving system and to support all learners in a modern and safe environment that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Transforming education in line with curriculum, qualifications and ALN reform that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Delivering effective community based learning and recreation provision to meet need; and,
- Creating a performance/business culture for Education and Leisure that delivers continuous improvement in service delivery and value for money.

2.5 A review is ongoing to fully align the Tier 1 and 2 business plans to the EIP. It should also be recognised that the recovery implications for learners associated with 12 months of teaching and learning disruption are far reaching. The Education Directorate's top priority in the EAS business plan linked to recovery is to:

*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.*

2.6 A comprehensive data set of school performance, coupled with evaluations of impact and effectiveness of Council based and brokered support feeds into the overall evaluation. It should be noted, however, that self-evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will consider the 2019-20 provisional KS4 and Post 16 results during the 2020-21, however, there needs to be acknowledgement of the relaxation of performance measures across the education sector.

2.7 A comprehensive self-evaluation process helps identify those areas where progress has been made and where further improvement is required. Emerging findings, via ongoing self-evaluation is captured every Autumn and Spring time as well as via quarterly performance and finance reporting mechanisms. Moreover, it is the high-level points only, which are presented in the narrative in this report shown under Section 6.

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

- 3.1 This report has been approved by Education DMT and CLT prior to submission to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

**Option 1:** to accept the report as presented.

**Option 2:** Members are requested to scrutinise the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

- 3.2 This report provides the Committee with important self-evaluation, 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 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan aims for every child to have the best start in life. Through effective self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, we seek to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress and performance 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 Council allocates approximately £45.1 million (2020/21) to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. The Council's total gross budgeted expenditure per pupil for 2020/21 was £6,628 which is the 3rd highest in Wales and £436 above the Welsh average of £6,192.

- 5.1.2 For 2020/21 the funding delegated to schools was 85.7% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of schools, (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2020/21). The Education Directorate has an improving position on a 'value for money' basis, in that performance and school categorisation has improved significantly and the overall central funding has reduced, in line with public sector austerity measures.

- 5.1.3 The Council commissions the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to deliver the statutory functions of school improvement. The annual financial costs being circa £350,000. Schools categorisation profile has improved over the last 5 years against a backdrop of decreasing financial contributions to the EAS: this therefore, effectively represents good value for money. The

Education Directorate holds the EAS to account for the impact and effectiveness of their work in schools in Blaenau Gwent.

## **5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions**

5.2.1 Risk is associated with weak self-evaluation that fails to accurately identify those areas where good progress has been made and where further improvement is needed. Strong self-evaluation helps services target resources at greatest need and hence bring about improvement precisely where it is needed.

5.2.2 Risk is associated with underperformance and ineffective processes to improve performance and progress in identified schools. Failure to raise standards is identified as a key risk to the Council, both in terms of reputation and pupil life chances. This is reflected in the Education Directorate and EAS risk registers.

5.2.3 Mitigating actions include:

- strong self-evaluation processes, which accurately identify those areas which need to improve the most;
- the routine monitoring of quantitative and qualitative information, regular quality assurance meetings between the Council and the EAS, regular quality assurance meetings within the Education Directorate and across teams, school inspection findings and school categorisation results; and,
- the progress schools make towards targets is also monitored on a termly basis. School safeguarding processes are also closely monitored.

5.2.4 Holistic support packages are devised via regular cross service meetings between OD, Finance, Health and Safety, Education and School Governor Support Services. School level performance data is regularly analysed and evaluated to identify emerging trends.

5.2.5 The quality of provision i.e. the quality teaching and learning in classrooms is monitored and supported via the EAS. The quality of school leadership is also supported extensively by the EAS via a range of programmes and school-to-school networks.

## **5.3 Legal**

This report provides information about statutory, end of Key Stage school performance underpinned by processes set out the School Standards and Organisation Act Wales (2013) support strategic and operational activity to improve pupil outcomes.

## **5.4 Human Resources**

None for this report.

## **6. Performance Information**

### **6.1 Performance**

**Areas where good progress has been made:**

- The Corporate and Education Directorate's response to COVID-19 has been effective and this is discussed in the Estyn Thematic Review commentary.
- School inspection and school categorisation profile has improved significantly with no primary schools in follow up and excellent practice identified in a number of schools;
- GCSE L2 English and Capped 9 improved, albeit the results in 2020 were provided through Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and not through external examinations;
- GCSE A\*/A grades improved in English and Maths;
- Planning arrangements for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform are well developed.
- The partnership with Schools, Coleg Gwent and Post 16 providers has strengthened through the establishment of the Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board. A-level A\*-C and A\*-E grades continue to be strong and were greater than all-Wales means;
- Value-added progress in English and Maths, reading and numeracy for our 7 and 11 year olds have improved in 2019-20;
- The Youth Service exceeded that of the all-Wales means for reach and accredited learning outcomes. The levels of NEETs at 1.5% are at their lowest levels i.e. 9 young people;
- Primary persistent absenteeism reduced to below that of the all-Wales means;
- The School Based Counselling Service provides good support;
- Permanent exclusions reduced;
- Strong progress through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools programme with robust programme management arrangements in place;
- Secure progress against the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), including the Welsh medium new school moving to Statutory Notice stage.
- Headteacher induction and support programme was very well received by aspiring and new Headteachers;
- The staff wellbeing survey results were good; and
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

**6.2 Areas where further improvement is required:**

- Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years. This will be a real focus of the recovery programme from COVID;
- Improved attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
- Improve school attendance;
- Progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
- Reviewing provision for pupils with additional learning needs e.g. Pen-y-Cwm Special School capacity requirements;
- Continuing the work with Schools Causing Concern (SCC), particularly the two schools in an Estyn category; and
- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE), which has seen an increase linked to COVID.

The Council will continue to work with partners across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also continue to work with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are changes that it is anticipated be introduced to the reporting and accountability framework for academic year 2020-21 linked to the COVID-19 emergency response, particularly a relaxation in the requirements for School and Council performance reporting arrangements.

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

The Directorate's self-evaluation processes are aligned with LGES and the regional policy for monitoring, supporting, evaluation and intervention in schools through the categorisation process is derived from the National Categorisation Framework. The categorisation process will be suspended in academic year 2020-21.

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

Analysis of individual school performance data is a key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need. Effective self-evaluation processes ensure that resources are targeted at greatest need and secure improvement in longer term.

**6.5 *Preventative focus***

Through effective self-evaluation processes, support and monitoring of school performance, early identification of emerging areas for improvement can be identified with consequent early intervention to secure improvement. The effectiveness of the Council's monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

**6.6 *Collaboration / partnership working***

The Council collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of school improvement services from the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and a range of pupil support services for specific groups such as visually and hearing impaired learners.

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

Effective monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention are fundamental to the Council's wellbeing objectives.

**6.8 *EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since there only a limited change of policy or practice. However, implementation of the Council's monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention practice in schools has a positive impact on children and young people and on staff within a particular



school. By improving the quality of education, standards and wellbeing are improved for all children and young people.

**7. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Monitoring of the emerging findings of self-evaluation is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Executive are sufficiently informed to enable them to make informed decisions regarding the quality of education provision and hence pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are well-established processes in place to ensure that self-evaluation is used to inform business plans to secure further improvement.

**Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Summary SER

REF: BGESDSEF.216

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# **Education Directorate Self-Evaluation Summary Report Date: Spring 2021**



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## **Blaenau Gwent - Context**

Blaenau Gwent has 25 schools and their status is detailed below:

- 2 are Maintained 3-16 Learning Communities,
- 1 Foundation Comprehensive,
- 1 Maintained Comprehensive,
- 1 x Maintained 3-18 Special School,
- 1 x Maintained 3-16 SEBD Special School; and,
- 19 Primaries (of which 4 are voluntary aided / faith schools)

There are currently circa 9,000+ pupils on roll across all Blaenau Gwent schools.

The organisation, End Child Poverty, released new data in October 2020 with findings showing that the highest rates of child poverty in Wales are in Pembrokeshire and Blaenau Gwent. Blaenau Gwent is one of 5 counties in Wales to have seen a rise in the proportion of children living in poverty since 2015. The impact of poverty on children is well documented, with children from low-income families more likely to experience worse physical and mental health; do less well in school; and have fewer opportunities in the future. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) captures the extent of deprivation as a proportion of residents living in each lower super output area (LSOA). The eight considerations of the WIMD are: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; geographical access to services; housing; physical environment; and community safety. Blaenau Gwent has the highest percentage of its LSOAs areas in the most deprived areas across Wales at 10%, for income (19.1%), education (27.7%), and community safety (23.4%).

The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals in Blaenau Gwent was almost 30% during 2010-16 and the highest of all LAs in Wales by a significant margin. The proportions declined during 2016-19, but BG remained the 2nd highest in Wales for all LA schools and highest for secondary schools during 2018-19. Given the evidential relationship between pupil performance and deprivation (using eFSM as a proxy indicator), pupil outcomes in BG would be expected to be among the lowest in Wales. However, within Blaenau Gwent we have high ambitions for all of our learners and our socio-economic standing is a challenge that we are working to overcome to the benefit of all of our children and young people.

Overall, the 2019 WIMD figures and high eFSM eligibility reflect very high levels of deprivation within the authority. They also indicate the significant consideration required to improve educational outcomes to levels within other similar LAs and to consistently match the all-Wales averages. 2018-19 performance figures show that Blaenau Gwent has achieved parity, and indeed, out-performed some LAs in a number of measures confirming the progress being made within its schools. The 2020 KS4 and Post 16 KS5 provisional results will be included in the Summary SER via the performance data pack during the Autumn term to inform the on-going self-evaluation process, however, there is recognition the outcomes were awarded via the Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and/or the awarding examination body's assessed grade.

## **Executive Summary:**

This Executive Summary is a high-level analysis of key strategic areas of progress, and importantly, aspects of work identified for improvement across the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. There are clearly more details in the Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER), however, the Executive Summary provides a high-level synopsis to enable the Education Directorate, the Council and key partners to understand and focus on critical strands of work to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people across the County Borough. The information detailed in this document regularly features in the self-evaluation reports presented to Scrutiny and Executive Committees. The Council will continue to work with partners across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also continue to work with partners, such as the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are changes that will be introduced to the reporting and accountability framework for academic year 2020-21 linked to the COVID-19 emergency response, particularly a relaxation in the requirements for School and Council performance reporting arrangements. Clearly, the Education Directorate will need to remain focussed on self-evaluation procedures, as outlined in the review of the SE Policy 2020, particularly an analysis of the provisional KS4 and Post 16 results during the autumn term 2020. This information will only be used for the SER and not for accountability purposes.

Blaenau Gwent's Education Services are committed to self-review and self-improvement and view these processes as being fundamental to securing ongoing improvement in outcomes, quality and effectiveness. The Education Directorate has adopted a standardised approach for self-evaluation (SE) that is now embedded into the day to day practice. This has been reviewed to align with Estyn's new inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES). This Summary SER looks at the emerging findings against the inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES), which will inform evaluations of progress against the key improvement priorities set out in business and improvement plans.

## **Key Strategic Areas of Progress**

### **Areas where good progress has been made:**

- The Education Directorate has Council approval to establish a new leadership and management structure that includes additional capacity for school improvement;
- The Corporate and Education Directorate's response to COVID-19 has been effective and this is discussed in the Estyn Thematic Review commentary;
- School inspection and school categorisation profile has improved significantly with no primary schools in follow up and excellent practice identified in a number of schools;
- GCSE L2 English and Capped 9 improved, albeit the results in 2020 were provided through Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and not through external examinations;
- GCSE A\*/A grades improved in English and Maths;

- Planning arrangements for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform are well developed;
- The partnership with Schools, Coleg Gwent and Post 16 providers has strengthened through the establishment of the Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board. A-level A\*-C and A\*-E grades continue to be strong and were greater than all-Wales means;
- Value-added progress in English and Maths, reading and numeracy for our 7 and 11 year olds have improved in 2019-20;
- The Youth Service exceeded that of the all-Wales means for reach and accredited learning outcomes. The levels of NEETs at 1.5% are at their lowest levels i.e. 9 young people;
- Primary persistent absenteeism reduced to below that of the all-Wales means;
- The School Based Counselling Service provides good support;
- Permanent exclusions reduced;
- Strong progress through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools programme with robust programme management arrangements in place;
- Secured progress against the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), including the Welsh medium new school moving to Statutory Notice stage;
- Headteacher induction and support programme very well received by aspiring and new Headteachers;
- The staff wellbeing survey results were good; and
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

### **Key Strategic Areas for Improvement**

#### **Areas where further improvement is required:**

- Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years. This will be a real focus of the recovery programme from COVID;
- Improve attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
- Improve school attendance;
- Improve progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
- Reviewing provision for pupils with additional learning needs e.g. Pen-y-Cwm Special School capacity requirements;
- Continuing the work with Schools Causing Concern (SCC), particularly the two schools in an Estyn category;
- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE), which has seen an increase linked to COVID; and
- Overall, the revenue financial position of schools is favourable; however, there are a few schools with a revenue budget deficit that needs to be redressed e.g. Abertillery Learning Community.

## **1.1 Standards and Progress Overall - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

### **Foundation Phase**

- Almost two-thirds of schools improved LLCE results in 2019, while a similar proportion of schools exceeded their targets in MD.

### **Key Stage 2**

- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in:
  - NC maths was above the national figure;
  - Language was a little higher than expected in 2019; and
  - Progress in reading was seen in about two-thirds of mainstream schools (about half in 2019) and numeracy reasoning was better than expected in most schools.
- The majority of schools had similar or higher L4+ results compared to their 2019 targets.
- School categorisation and inspection outcomes have improved in recent years.

### **Key Stage 3**

- Two out of four schools improved L5+ English outcomes and three schools improved their L5+ oracy and writing results in 2019.
- L6+ outcomes improved for English 2017-19 and particularly for 2019.
- Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language during 2019 and three schools improved their reading and writing results.
- At LA-level literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019 with modest improvements made in MFL & PE.
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in reading improved from the previous year.
- LA-level progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.
- Three of the four mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English.

### **Key Stage 4**

- Capped 9 points score improved in 2019 and achieved the LA target.
- The proportion of learners gaining A\*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019.
- The LA-level Welsh Bacc result was higher than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- Higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy and science. This was particularly so for the Skills Challenge Certificate result which ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of the 22 Welsh LAs.
- The proportion of learners attaining A\*-C grades in Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language increased in 2019 with an improving trend during the last 2 years. 17% of the Welsh-medium cohort attained A\*/A grades in Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language.
- Abertillery improved outcomes in all but one performance indicator in 2019.
- The proportion of learners gaining A\*/A grades in maths improved in every mainstream school in 2019 and in 3 out of 4 mainstream schools for English & capped 9 points scores.



## Post-16

- At A level and AS level, the proportions of learners attaining A\*-C and A\*-E grades were a higher than the all-Wales means in 2019.
- For vocational courses, attainment rates in 2019 were similar to or higher than in the previous year except for L3.
- Entry level learners were 100% successful.

## Youth Service

- In 2018/19, 2,010 (17%) of 11-25 year olds were registered as Reach and supported by the Youth Service (Wales 16%). Of these, 301 (15%) gained 456 nationally recognised accreditations.
- In addition, the Youth Service recorded 7,298 anonymous contacts during 2018-19 through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events, 1,000 more than previous year.
- Current data indicates 1.5% of learners being NEET (9 learners). The all Wales figure has not yet been published.

### 1.1 Standards and Progress Overall - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

#### Areas identified for Improvement and Action Required

##### Foundation Phase

- BG and national averages at LO4+ and LO5+ fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years with the fall being greater for BG in 2019, increasing the performance gap.
- LO6+ differences between BG and national means in 2019 were greatest for PSD.
- A majority of schools attained lower than target results in 2019 indicating inaccuracy and unreliability within school target setting procedures.
- **There is a need to develop value-added procedures for Reception Year to Y2 in order to determine the progress made by pupils within the Foundation Phase.**

##### Key Stage 2

- Welsh and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language outcomes fell to a greater extent in 2019 with the latter having a declining trend during the last 2 years.
- L4+ writing outcomes fell more noticeably in 2019.
- Underperforming schools (for NC assessments) the same as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to pupils' learning and standards achieved.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC language moved below the national figure.
- **A minority of schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores. This questions the accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within these centres.**

### Key Stage 3

- L5+ outcomes fell in 2019, particularly for maths, science, art, history and geography. All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. There is a concern regarding assessment reliability at two of the four LA schools.
- A majority of schools had results below their 2019 targets at both L5+ & L6+. Results also indicate target setting as generally unreliable in schools at KS3 (as in previous years).
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in NC English and maths fell considerably in 2019 and was well below the national figure in both subjects. Progress in NC maths was barely adequate and was unsatisfactory in NC English.
- A significant proportion of pupils regressed more than 10 SAS points in both reading and numeracy reasoning during 2016-19. An inordinate number of these pupils were from one centre.
- Some schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores. This questions the accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within these centres.

### Key Stage 4

- Results for the new National Measures and in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement were all lower than the national means.
- The proportion of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A\*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA targets and fell by about 2%, well below the national mean.
- L2 maths & numeracy outcomes fell in 3 out of the 4 mainstream schools in 2019.
- Learner outcomes for Tredegar fell in over one-half of performance indicators in 2019.
- KS3-4 value-added progress:
  - declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years; and
  - for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19. On average, pupils at Abertillery and Brynmawr made no progress or regressed in maths during 2017-19.
- For WG modelled estimates, all residuals were negative except for the Welsh Bacc Skills Challenge result.
- Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language full-course results fell for all grade indicators in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and were lower than the all-Wales figures for higher grade levels.
- The proportion of pupils achieving no qualifications doubled to 2.4% in 2019 and was over twice as high as the all-Wales average.

### Post 16

- The proportion of learners attaining higher level grades (A\*/A) at both A and AS level has increased in 2019, although is still below the Wales benchmark level so is an area for further improvement.
- There has been a small dip in vocational success rates in 2018-2019 and there is room for improvement at L2 courses, which is currently at 80% completion rate. Success rates across the board, however, remain relatively strong.
- Embed process initiated in October 2019, where Coleg Gwent provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals.

## **Risk Considerations**

- The risk of failure to continue to make progress on raising educational standards in two schools (ALC and BFS) features in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and risk mitigation is monitored by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Elected Members via Scrutiny and the Executive Committees.

### **1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

#### **Foundation Phase**

- All LO6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means and particularly so for LLCE.
- Almost one-third of statemented pupils attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD. Both results were higher than the 2018 national means.

#### **Key Stage 2**

- L4+gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means.
- Mean progress scores for boys & girls (as NC levels) were higher than expected during KS2. On average, boys had lower FP outcomes in 2015 but made similar NC progress to girls during KS2.
- Boys made greater progress in both reading and numeracy reasoning during 2015-19.
- Mean progress scores (as NC levels) for eFSM & non eFSM pupils were similar to or higher than expected.
- Over one-half of ethnic minority pupils attained L5 in both English and maths. The mean NC levels were higher than for the whole Y6 cohort in 2019 and national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher.
- All but one LAC progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths during 2019.
- The mean NC progress rates for LAC during 2015-19 were similar to those for the whole cohort in both subject areas.

#### **Key Stage 3**

- L6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject, lower than the previous year for most non-core subjects and lower than the national means for about one-half of non-core subjects. L6+ English results also improved in 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap compared with national outcomes.
- On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and so reversed the gender gap.
- eFSM and non-Efsm – 2019:
  - differences were lower than the national averages at both L5+ and L6+;
  - eFSM pupils made greater progress at reading and numeracy, narrowing the performance gap; and
  - Mean progress scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected.
- Statemented pupils made, on average, very good progress in reading & numeracy reasoning throughout 2016-19.
- All but 2 of the 16 ethnic minority pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Over two-thirds of EM pupils attained L6 or better in both subjects.
- 2 pupils reached L7 in English and 5 did so in maths.

- The mean progress rates for LAC in reading and numeracy reasoning during 2016-19 were notably higher than the whole cohort.

#### **Key Stage 4**

- KS3-4 progress for eFSM pupils during 2017-19 was similar to or better than that for non-eFSM pupils.
- MAT pupils made far more progress than the Y11 cohort as a whole in both English language / literacy and in maths / numeracy during 2017-19.
- The proportions of SEN pupils attaining A\*-C and A\*-G grades in English language and maths was relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.
- Ethnic minority pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language.
- In English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort:
  - Young offenders generally had higher outcomes;
  - LAC had similar outcomes; and
  - Low attenders had similar or higher outcomes.

### **1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

#### **Areas identified for improvement and Required Action**

##### **Foundation Phase:**

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. However, girls' higher level (LO6+) results have fallen noticeably more than for boys during the last 2 years.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in nearly all performance indicators in 2019 and the differences generally increased during 2017-19.
- Except for LLCW (attributable to just one Welsh medium school in BG), LO6+ outcomes were lower than for Wales as a whole during the last 4 years.
- BG pupils on SA and SA+ had lower outcomes than those seen nationally (in 2018).

##### **Key Stage 2**

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. While L5+ gender gaps closed in 2019, this was due to girls' results falling more than for boys.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in all performance indicators in 2019. The differences were higher than the national means for most indicators and increased during 2017-19.
- eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2.
- About 6% fewer BG pupils attained L5+ in English and about 7% fewer in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- Only one BG pupil was recorded as attaining L6+ (in English) in 2019.
- About 4% fewer BG pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 7% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

- The proportions of pupils attaining L4 or better in language fell for all SEN groups in 2019. All outcomes were below the 2018 national means.
- SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and, on average, made much less progress during KS2.
- SA pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and, on average, regressed in in this skill area during KS2.

### Key Stage 3

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in a majority of performance indicators. While L5+ & L6+ gender gaps closed in 2019, this was predominantly due to girls' results falling more than for boys.
- Boys' mean NC progress scores were lower than for the girls in both English & maths.
- Boys made less NC progress than girls in both subjects during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in all performance indicators in 2019 (but the differences were lower than the national means).
- eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so widened the performance gap.
- L6+ outcomes in maths and particularly science fell during the last 3 years and decreased a little more than that observed nationally.
- About 10% fewer BG pupils attained L6+ in English and in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- About 7% fewer BG pupils attained L7+ in English and about 12% fewer in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- Except for statemented pupils, SEN results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- On average, SEN pupils made less NC progress than non-SEN pupils during KS3 and particularly so for SA+ pupils in maths.
- On average, SA and SA+ pupils made much less progress in reading and numeracy reasoning than non-SEN pupils during KS3.
- NC and national test scores of young offenders were much lower than mainstream averages. Progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils. A significant proportion of YOs failed to progress in either NC English or NC maths during KS3.
- Both NC and national test outcomes were, on average, lower for LAC than for other mainstream pupils.

### Key Stage 4

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. Where the performance gaps between boys and girls narrowed, it was usually due to a fall in girls' outcomes rather than an improvement in those for boys.
- The proportion of pupils attaining 5 A\*/A grades fell by about 2% in 2019 and was well below the national mean.
- KS3-4 progress rates for boys and girls in English language / literacy during 2017-19 were just about adequate while those for maths / numeracy were unsatisfactory. The weak progress in maths was a main contributing factor to low school and LA performance at GCSE.
- River Centre pupils had lower outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort.
- Ethnic Minority pupils had lower outcomes and KS3-4 progression rates in maths / numeracy than in language. This suggest that support for language development is generally effective at KS4 but that EM pupils may find more difficulty in transposing their language skills within a mathematical context.

## **Risk Considerations**

- The risk of failure to continue to make progress on raising educational standards in two schools (ALC and BFS) features in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and risk mitigation is monitored by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Elected Members via Scrutiny and the Executive Committees.

### **1.3 Well-being and Attitudes to Learning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- Standards of wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in most primary and secondary schools. High proportions of both primary pupils and their parents expressed positive views about their children's wellbeing in schools.
- All pre-schools and schools participate in effective Healthy School and Pre-School programmes with exemplar work being recognised nationally and there are effective sport and physical activity programmes e.g. swimming programmes with high levels of achievement for learners in place. The proportions of CYP attending sports centres and enjoying PE in school on a weekly basis is higher than the national averages.
- An effective 11-18 counselling service is in place with very positive feedback from attendees, with an extended service for 18-25 year olds.
- BG is one of only a few Councils to have a fully compliant 3<sup>rd</sup> School Sport Survey to inform more targeted work.
- Three out of four BG secondary schools exceeded the WG modelled figures for attendance in 2018-19.
- Relatively low rate of fixed-term exclusions compared with other LAs in Wales.
- Improving procedures for tracking Children Missing Education (CME).
- An improving trend of increased opportunities for *pupil voice* in BG schools and greater learner participation in decision-making.
- Accredited outcomes for registered young people with the Youth Services are strong and above the Welsh mean.

### **1.3 Well-being and Attitudes to Learning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

#### **Attendance and persistent absenteeism - Primary:**

- To improve primary school attendance in BG from 94.2% to equate at least to the all-Wales mean of 94.6%.
- To improve primary unauthorised absence in BG from 1.4% to above that of the all-Wales means which is 1.4%.
- To work to reduce PA in the primary sector to well below that of the all-Wales means i.e. Wales= 1.8%, BG=2.0%.

#### **Attendance and persistent absenteeism - Secondary:**

- To improve secondary school attendance from 92.9% to 93.8% (all-Wales means).
- To reduce unauthorised absence in the secondary sector in BG from 2.2% to below that of the all-Wales means (1.7%).
- To reduce persistent absenteeism in the secondary sector in BG from 5.0% to below that of the all-Wales means which is 4.6%
- To continue to reduce the numbers of pupils excluded in primary and secondary sectors.
- To continue to improve pupil behaviour in one school in particular and staff response to pupil concerns.

- To further enhance pupil voice activities to inform self-evaluation planning activities.

#### **Risk Considerations**

- The risk is that low school attendance has an impact on pupil progression and learning, particularly in light of the COVID-19 emergency.

### **2.1 Support for school improvement - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- The LA has established a Head of School Improvement and Inclusion post in the new structure to add capacity in this area of work.
- The LA has improved and detailed knowledge of individual, class and school performance particularly in relation to value-added progress.
- Improved coordination of support to schools via good partnership working between the LA and EAS.
- Improved School Categorisation and School Inspection profile over the last 3 years.
- Good outcomes / progress for identified vulnerable groups in recent years.
- The Council is swift in its use of statutory powers which are kept under review.
- The process for the appointment of LA Governors is now well established and there is evidence of improved governance in a majority of schools.

### **2.1 Support for school improvement - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- Partnership work between BG Inclusion Services and EAS Challenge Advisers needs to develop further.
- Support to improve early language acquisition and general skill development in the early years.
- Support to improve the effectiveness of learning & teaching of English / reading & maths / numeracy within KS3 & 4 with a particular focus on eFSM pupils and vulnerable groups.
- Support to improve the effectiveness of PDG grant planning and implementation.
- Increasing the number / proportions of learners who achieve higher level outcomes at each key stage, but particularly in the Foundation Phase.
- Support for assessment and target setting procedures within schools, with a particular focus on formative (assessment for learning).
- Increasing opportunities for schools to share good practice.

#### **Risk Considerations**

- The risk is that the COVID-19 emergency response has impacted upon learner progression across the board, but particularly in KS4 and early year's skill development e.g. language acquisition.

### **2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

Good progress has been made through the comprehensive ALN provision:

- A report to consider Pen-y-Cwm capacity will be presented to Scrutiny Committee in the Spring 2021;
- Readiness for the implementation of the ALN reform to support learners presenting ALN is strong;
- The ALN Service has been established, providing strategic support to the Education Directorate and to schools;
- ASD provision is in place;
- The Service has undergone a review and is being reconfigured to meet the diversity of present need;
- Resource Base provision has improved, particularly for pupils who experience Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD);
- Excellent practice has been secured in Pen-y-Cwm Special School; and
- Estyn judgements in school inspections for care support and guidance remain good or better.

Practice to identify pupil progress using matched data (also for specific pupil groups) is now in its second year and is helping to identify where further improvement in provision is needed, for example:

- in KS3 in particular and in identified schools;
- in the progress rates between KS 3 and KS 4 in English and Maths; and
- to secure improved progress for all vulnerable groups, including eFSM and particularly during and between KS3 and KS4.

## **2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

### **Areas identified for improvement and Required Action**

- The quality and effectiveness of support to increase attainment of young pupils in the early years and at the end of the Foundation Phase (particularly eFSM but not solely) needs to improve so that progress rates going forward for these learners is accelerated significantly.
- The quality and effectiveness of support provided for all vulnerable learners needs to improve so that attainment and progress increases significantly both during and between KS3 and 4. The quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management of inclusion, in these Key Stages, needs to improve, particularly in identified schools and settings, and for the specific groups in this report.
- Exclusions: Monitoring of pupil level exclusion data by all Inclusion teams has improved and is effective, informing the quality of Officers' work and dialogue with individual schools. The establishment of the Safer Schools Partnership approach is beginning to support improved partnership work which will help reduce exclusions in the longer term. Work is currently focussed on two secondary settings in particular to reduce exclusions.
- Revolving Door Approach: there needs to be effective support in the River Centre provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school. Further developments are needed to develop capacity within mainstream settings to enable pupils to remain in, and return back to their host schools, particularly for KS3 pupils. There is a pre-warning notice letter in place for the school and a service agreement is required between the River Centre and the Council to formalise the arrangements.



- ALN: the LA and EAS need to work more closely to support schools in improving analysis of pupils with SEN who perform below expected levels to ensure that all pupils show good progress in line with their ability from their individual baselines, particularly for those pupils in KS3 at SA and SA +level. Such analyses are to include the impact of targeted interventions
- ALN in Early Years: Panel arrangements are effective in providing support for EY pupils with ALN. However, developing ALN capacity-building in EY is in the early stages of development and needs to be accelerated.
- EHE practice by schools for those on the cusp of EHE needs to be more targeted.
- Young People who offend: all children involved with YOS to have access to 25 hours of education. At KS3 and 4, teachers and schools need to improve levels of support for pupils in line with required improvements for mainstream pupils. Schools and the LA will review their current methodology for SEN categorisation in KS4 to ensure pupils receive the required support necessary for them to attain outcomes aligned to their ability, with a particular emphasis on improving progress and outcomes of pupils in GCSE maths. Ensure the YOS fully implement their Literacy & Numeracy Strategy. Ensure that the recommendations made by ESTYN via their thematic report are fully implemented.
- EPS Service: to secure further improvements in blended working with Children's Services, exploring how the EPS can work more effectively within Early Years settings and with the Early Years ALNLO. Work with colleagues in the wider Inclusion team and regionally to continue to provide support and challenge for schools in line with the ALNET Act. In particular, this will need to look at developing ALNCo's role to become more strategic, while also building the skills of the wider workforce to meet the needs of vulnerable learners. Work to develop more consistent practice within and between schools around behaviour management, in its widest sense, to include a clear focus on the high quality research undertaken by the EPS around SEBD, literacy and assessment as well as developing schools' understanding of the ACEs agenda (with awareness training provided via EAS on a cluster-basis) and further attention to schools supporting the work of their ELSAs.
- Pregnant School Girls and Young Mums: To ensure that as an LA we are made aware of these pupils in a timely basis, so that exclusions, attendance, support and any alternative provisions are monitored and reviewed on a monthly basis and in compliance with the policy.
- Review the Pen-y-Cwm capacity to meet the increasing demand for places.

### **Risk Considerations**

- The strategic risk relates to meeting the increasing demand for places in Pen-y-Cwm and provision at the River Centre.

### **2.3 Support for Other Services - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- The Council's 21st Century Schools investment objectives are clearly aligned to the Vision for Education in improving educational standards and this is evidenced in a positive Gateway Review in 2019. Preparations for the Band B programme are well structured and deliverable.
- The Youth Service is good, taking account of its statutory duties and meeting them effectively, providing a wide range of universal and targeted opportunities for young people aged 11-25. NEET's levels are at their lowest levels i.e. 1.5% (9 young people). Effective participation structures are embedded across the Youth Service. The Independent 11-18 Counselling Service is very effective. The service is line managed by the Youth Service, which allows a co-ordinated approach to wellbeing between all projects.

- The Council has an enhanced knowledge of school capacity linked to the effective annual monitoring processes that are in place; along with an on-going facilities review/management protocols and effective admissions processes. This is evidenced by the annual review and publication of the School Admissions Policy.
- Strong progress is being made in relation to surplus places reduction, with the Council seeing an overall reduction in both the primary and secondary sectors over the last 6 years; with a continued decrease projected for both primary and secondary over the next 2 years, taking the primary percentage to 11% and secondary to 9%, by the 2021/22 academic year – with the overall combined projected status as 12%. There are very few sufficiency issues within Blaenau Gwent schools at present.
- Blaenau Gwent's Post 16 provision is provided in partnership with Coleg Gwent at the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone in Ebbw Vale. The Learning Zone's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) recognises that there is an effective partnership approach between the Council and Coleg Gwent, which is resulting in improvements to the participation rates of Post 16 learners, a broadening of the learning offer and increasing attainment levels for both academic and vocational learners. The 'A' Level A\*-E pass rate is approaching 99% and well above the national average and the vocational learning success rate (retention/attainment) is over 80% against all levels. The ALIS tertiary benchmarking data places the Learning Zone in the top 8% of Post 16 learning institutions for added value across the UK.
- The Council have a highly effective system in place linked to forecasting and monitoring pupil place requirements; this is evidenced pupil projection accuracy, which was at 97% for primary and 94% for secondary during the 2019/20 academic session and has been continually high over the last 3 academic years.
- The Council has good arrangements in place to support the co-ordination of early years, childcare and play to ensure sufficiency. Childcare is a rapidly developing sector in Blaenau Gwent and has grown from 142 registered places in 2002, to 1332 places currently. The sector continues to develop in response to emerging needs.
- The Welsh medium proposal is at Statutory Notice stage (Spring 2021).

### **2.3 Support for Other Services - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- The delivery of the WESP targets is dependent upon the Welsh medium seedling proposal.
- The ET and Youth Services are very dependent upon external funding and sustainability is a key consideration. Therefore, continued monitoring of team capacity is required in order to assess capacity requirements and secure/ sustain the positive progression of service priorities. The ESF Inspire funding risk is escalated.
- There is a need to consider the management of the home to school and college transport operations and/or how the Environment/Regeneration and Education Directorates develop procedures, and agreements that are able to more effectively address identified gaps in reviewing the policy.
- A review of online admissions is required, in order to further improve parental engagement with the admissions process, and address the current ineffective online system. A business case is under development, in line with the use of Capita One's online module, which is the system used within current neighbouring and other Councils throughout Wales. This will require investment, which will be beneficial in the long-term and could enhance partnership working and data monitoring with other Council.

### **Risk Considerations**

- There are risks associated with the revenue implications associated with the Youth Services Inspire initiative, which is currently funded through European (ESF) funding.
- Responding to the COVID-19 emergency to ensure that learner progression is maintained in safe and blended learning settings.

### **3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- The improving School Categorisation and School Inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates the increased effectiveness of leaders and managers in Local Government Education Services in Blaenau Gwent.
- The Council considers all evidence and implements its full use of statutory powers, where applicable.
- The impact of good, effective leadership is demonstrated through programme completion for example, the opening of Six Bells. There is strong progress through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band A programme and approval of Band B programme for 2019 to 2025 period.
- Regional leadership is being exercised well by senior officers.
- Appointment of a Corporate Director of Education post during the autumn term 2020. This has been followed with a review of the Education Directorate's structural requirements, including securing school improvement capacity.

### **3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- To continue to develop officer expertise through the Professional Learning offer.
- To further develop member led self-evaluation activity across key service areas located within Local Government Education Services, for example via the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.
- To continue to develop Member understanding and effectiveness via the Member Development Programme.

### **Risk Considerations**

- There are risks associated with securing appointment to the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion role for the Education Directorate, with recruitment initiated in the Spring term.

### **3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- The Self-Evaluation Policy (reviewed September 2020) and the SE Toolkit clearly sets out the ongoing cycle for self-evaluation processes and reporting. The FADE approach to writing evaluations is now embedded into routine practice. Processes are totally aligned with corporate

policy. The Education Directorate is confident in its SE processes and their ability to sustain continual improvement. The Council is swift in its action and use of full statutory powers where applicable, to secure the improvement required.

- Partnership working between the Council and the EAS is strong and is subject to significant joint working and quality assurance. Impact evaluations reveal that the EAS and direct work of Challenge Advisers is having a positive impact on outcomes, provision and the quality of leadership. The School Categorisation and School Inspection profile has improved significantly over the last 3 years effectively evidencing the effectiveness of our self-evaluation processes. Improvement has been secured in EFLC (out of SI), in Glyncoed Primary School and to a certain degree in ALC (ESTYN monitoring visit summer term 2019). Progress in ALC will continue to be monitored.
- The Post 16 Partnership Board established formally during the Autumn term 2020.

### **3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- To continue to engage Members in meaningful self-evaluation activity, for example the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.
- To continue to ensure that business plans bring about the improvement required.
- To continue to engage with a wider stakeholder group when undertaking evaluations, particularly Headteachers and Children and Young people.

#### **Risk Considerations**

- The risk is that self-evaluation and improvement planning fails to deliver improved outcomes for learners.

### **3.3 Professional learning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- Senior Officers now hold Chair positions across a number of all Wales groups; this supports their ongoing professional development.
- 121 coaching sessions are embedded as routine practice.
- PDR underpinned by an effective 360 process is now also an embedded process. This also includes contributions from Headteachers for senior Officer's PDR i.e. the Corporate Director for Education and Head of Education Transformation.
- New Headteacher and aspiring deputy induction learning offer is in place and led by an experienced Headteacher.

### **3.3 Professional learning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- To engage in more formal evaluations of the impact and effectiveness of CPD for Directorate officers.
- To develop further cost neutral ways in which officers can continue to engage in professional development activity set against a backdrop of Council austerity measures.

## **Risk Considerations**

- The risk is that there is less resources to support professional learning and this impacts on the Directorate and schools' improvement journeys.

### **3.4 Safeguarding - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- All education services including commissioned services have an up to date safeguarding policy in place, as appropriate the safeguarding policy is cross referenced in other policies
- In all school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils' needs meet statutory requirements
- A review of school inspections for the last three years demonstrated that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirement and give no cause for concern.
- The matrix has been instrumental in collating data on safeguarding
- There is an effective working relationship in place between the Corporate Director for Education, Strategic Safeguarding lead, Deputy Strategic Safeguarding lead, and Professional Lead for Community Safety in discharging the PREVENT duty and emergency planning procedures
- Established and effective systems are in place to monitor vulnerable groups e.g. gypsy traveller, EHE, pregnant mums, MARAC, EHE and monitoring child performance
- The Operation Encompass work has progressed very well and supports schools in this regard.
- The 360-degree safe Cymru Policy has been agreed by the Executive and is in the process of being implemented in all schools
- The training offer for education settings is now embedded as part of a corporate professional learning framework

### **3.4 Safeguarding - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- Continue to develop policy and practice that is responsive to emerging school concerns in line with the Vision for Education of school led improvement in a contextual safeguarding approach.
- Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability, including the roll-out of MyConcern now that the Council has secured a revenue budget.
- Provide greater flexibility in the training offer to increase the uptake of safeguarding training by school governors with specific reference to the COG and Safeguarding Governor
- Reinvigorate business as usual practices to inform routine business working arrangements such as the collection of data to inform performance reports to Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny

### **Risk Considerations**

- There is a risk that the roll-out of the safeguarding package MyConcern is not implemented fully across the school estate.

### **3.5 Use of Resources - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know**

- The school's Individual Schools Budget (ISB) has been prioritised. Schools have been given a 3.6% uplift for 20/21. Capital has been secured to match fund the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme. Overall, schools have healthy balances across the school estate.
- Strategic Education Improvement Manager and Service Manager for Inclusion now in post and fully functional.
- Staffing review of officers without line management responsibility completed.
- Financial Efficiency Savings: devised, approved and budget agreed for 2019/20. No savings are required for FY 20/21.
- SENCOM Review completed – BG contributed extensively to the review and supports the findings.
- GEMS provide good value for money.
- Arrangements with the regional Education Achievement Service (EAS) provide good value for money.
- There is good engagement of Blaenau Gwent elected members in the governance arrangements of the EAS; thereby effectively holding the EAS to account.
- Use of resources i.e. Education staffing have been significantly streamlined to ensure greater value for money.
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Band B Programme has been approved.
- The Education Transformation, Youth Service and Inclusion Services provide good value for money.
- Schools have worked strategically with the Directorate to establish a Premature Retirement Contribution budget for staff terminations.
- Majority of schools have signed up to the 3 year SLA arrangement for support services with the Council.

### **3.5 Use of Resources - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it**

- The corporate 'Bridging the Gap' programme continues to facilitate greater effectiveness and efficiencies, where available.
- To review the Education Directorate Professional Learning Programme so that it provides an effective, overarching strategy; which links professional learning with the findings of self-evaluation and the broad aims of the Directorate.
- Continue to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of staff professional learning on outcomes, wellbeing, provision and the quality of leadership of LGES e.g. FADEs.
- The viability of other SEWC regional services needs to be kept under close review to ensure sustainability and value for money going forward.
- Schools' deficit balances in the secondary sector have increased in one school and needs to be kept under close review going forward; timely support to be provided by the LA through the ALC Corporate Group.

- To escalate the risk level for Youth Service's funding position as ESF comes to an end in 2022. The Shared Prosperity Fund is being explored.
- There will need to be close monitoring and support for schools predicting surplus and deficit budgets, particularly for the two all-through schools.
- Effective monitoring of the out of county placement revenue budget is required.
- Facilitating robust Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and partnership arrangements with key partners, such as the EAS to ensure effective and sustainable provision for schools.

#### **Risk Considerations**

- The revenue financial position of Education is likely to be impacted by the continued response to the COVID-19 arrangements.

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# Agenda Item 7

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **20<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Report Subject: **Education Directorate - 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)
25.03.21	01.04.21	08.04.21			20.04.21	FWP 2021/22		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 Members will be aware that the Corporate Director of Education provides a verbal update to Scrutiny Committee regarding the response to the COVID-19 emergency. This report provides the background, context and a current view of the response, in particular how the Council has and will continue to support schools during the pandemic. The report reflects on the activity covering both the Autumn and Spring terms.
  - 2.2 **School Re-opening - September 2020**

The Council's corporate response during the Autumn term focussed on preparing for all of our learners returning to whole school settings. The Blaenau Gwent Whole School Re-opening Guidance document outlined the local approach and is a key source of reference for implementation in schools. It provides schools with a strategic framework for a safe and effective return to whole school working. It continues to be a dynamic emergency response situation, and therefore, the Council has continued to work with the schools to review the planning arrangements and amend the guidance accordingly e.g. the use of face masks and social distancing requirements. A summary of the main considerations that were most pertinent to the whole school re-opening is provided below:

    - Blaenau Gwent adopted a strategic approach to whole school re-opening (September 2020) for consistency purposes;
    - Executive Headteacher School Planning Groups for secondary, primary and special schools are established;
    - Re-opening from 1<sup>st</sup> September involved a common approach across the school estate;
      - 2 planning days
      - 2 transitional year group planning days

- Whole school reopening from the 7<sup>th</sup> September (WG expectation 14<sup>th</sup> September)
- Re-opening was relatively successful e.g. pupil attendance is in range of 85%-80%, but some pupil learning regression has been identified;
- School support services - cleaning regimes further enhanced, a flexible catering offer and transport in place;
- Blended learning was put in place for learners who were self-isolating through identification of positive cases;
- FSM direct payments continued for learners not in school;
- There was initially a relatively stable position on school based workforce, however, increasing cases were experienced amongst school based staff, especially following the Autumn half term break;
- Positive COVID-19 cases for pupils increased significantly towards the end of term that resulted in many classes, year groups and one school closure on health and safety grounds; and,
- The Council took a decision to move to remote learning for all learners with the exception of vulnerable learners and support for critical workers in mid-December 2020.

### 2.3 **School Provision – Spring Term 2021**

Following the Christmas break, nationally it was determined that due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic that schools would initially only provide direct face to face provision for vulnerable learners and support for critical worker families. All learners, however, were engaged through remote learning. Blaenau Gwent's schools participated in a regional survey in relation to remote and blended learning and the results of that survey are shown in appendix 1, which provides a useful insight into the effectiveness of the offer and areas for further consideration e.g. parental skills to support learners in home settings. This position changed in February 2021 with the move for Foundation Phase learners returning to face to face teaching and learning.

2.4 Recently, the recent Welsh Government announcement confirmed arrangements for more pupils to return to face-to-face teaching, subject of course to COVID-19 data continuing to move in the right direction. The Welsh Government's plan includes a return for the remainder of primary pupils (years 3 to 6); Year 11 secondary pupils and some 'check-in' provision for all other year groups. As always, the top priority for the Council and all our schools is to consider safety and minimise the disruption to learning for our children and young people. The Council has worked closely with our Headteachers to agree a common approach to this wider return for learners across Blaenau Gwent. This included:

- From Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 all primary pupils will attend at their school full time.
- Year 11 learners will primarily attend at their school from the 15<sup>th</sup> March, but with the flexibility for an element of remote learning, which will be determined by the individual school and communicated to parents.

- There will also be provision for Year 10 pupils and this will be largely one day per week prior to the Easter break.
- The Minister for Education has also confirmed that schools should look to offer some limited provision for all remaining secondary pupils (years 7, 8 and 9) in order for them to catch up with their teachers prior to the Easter holiday. Therefore, during the week commencing 22nd March learners in these year groups were offered a full day 'check in' session at their school. There was a flexible localised approach to the days and times the pupils attended their school. These arrangements are to ensure that we can safely manage the numbers of pupils on site following this extended period away.

## 2.5 **Planning Arrangements – Spring Term 2020**

A Planning Group with representation from Education, Environmental Health, Health and Safety, Community Services, Civil Contingencies and SRS; are continuing to work with schools to oversee school reopening arrangements. Remote/blended learning continues where children are not in school on any given day, or where they are shielding or self-isolating.

The Council and our schools continue to offer provision for the children of critical workers where they are eligible and where required (up to the age of 14). This provision should only be accessed in line with the Welsh Government criteria and as a last resort where no other childcare options are available to parents. Support for learners eligible for Free School Meals continues. In circumstances, where children were learning from home; self-isolating; shielding or no onsite catering is available, that support will continue to be via direct payments. The following number of direct payments were issued over a week during March to eligible pupils in school years 3 and above, no payments were sent to Foundation Phase pupils:

- w/c 8/3/2021 – 1,768 payments; and,
- the application process is now initiated and closed on a weekly basis, to provide support to newly eligible families.

School based staff that have agreed to participate in twice weekly testing and at the time of drafting this report, Lateral Flow Testing is in the third week of implementation.

- There have been newly identified positive cases in schools since the relaxation of remote learning all resulting in class closures with the class contacts being required to self-isolate for a period of 10 days.
- ICT device requirements for digitally disadvantaged learners are being reviewed with schools on a weekly basis, with a view to identifying, rebuilding and distributing devices within a 7-day period (dependent on device and associated resource availability).
- The Executive School Planning Groups for both Primary and Secondary (including Middle and Special Schools), continue to take place on a fortnightly basis.

## 2.6 **Recovery – Priorities**

It needs to be acknowledged that the impact of 12 months disruption to teaching and learning is far reaching. Recovery will need to be planned in the short, medium and long term for learner development and progression. The Council has established a corporate recovery framework (appendix 2) and a key strand of this work will be a learning sub-group that will be led by the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion, with regular reporting into Corporate Leadership Team. The Education Directorate's top priority in the EAS business plan is to;

*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.*

The Estyn Thematic Review report previously presented to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee provided a positive overview of the Council's response in supporting our schools during the pandemic. Moreover, a full School Operational Guidance review is underway, along with additional training packages and information sessions for school leaders.

## 3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 This report has been discussed by Education DMT and CLT prior to submission to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

Option 1: to accept the report as presented.

Option 2: Members are requested to scrutinise the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

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 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 £290,000, 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 are increasing cases amongst the workforce, but this 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 effective, 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;
- Preparing for academic year 2020/21, particularly whole school re-opening from September 2020, in line with WG expectations;
- Spring term arrangements and the move to more face to face learning.

### **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 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.

**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 – Blended Learning Survey

Appendix 2 – Response and Recovery Structure

## **Blaenau Gwent Primary Schools – Blended Learning Survey – February 2021 (Follow-up)**

### **Context**

- This additional survey was circulated to all primary schools on behalf of the LA
- The questions focused on a qualitative response to the following questions on Blended and Distance Learning within each school.

### **Questions**

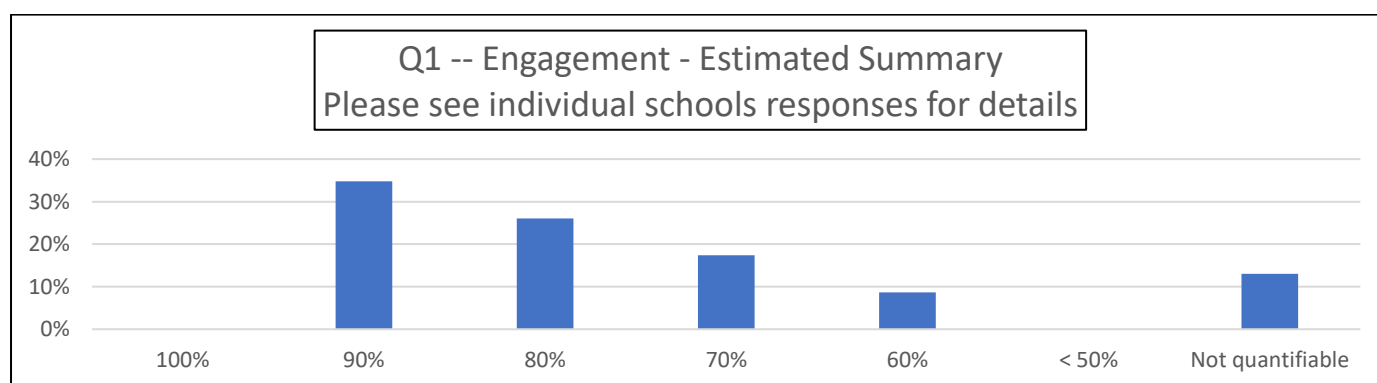
1. How would you describe the current level of engagement with the distance and blended learning offer in your school?
2. What strategies have proved successful in engaging those hard to reach?
3. Where pupils can't access learning on line, what provision has been made?
4. What strategies have proved successful in providing face to face wellbeing check-ins with all learners?
5. Within the current context, what approaches have you used to evaluate current provision?
6. Have you identified concerns re workload on staff? If so, what have you been able to do to alleviate these?
7. What is the general feedback from parents? Have there been any particular compliments or concerns?
8. Since September, please identify an example of an area of particular good practice in your school.
9. When engaging with PL, which activities / approaches have been especially effective?
10. Would the school benefit from any bespoke support? - in which area?
11. What do you envisage are the major challenges for your school in regard to full return?

### **Responses**

- Full responses to each question have been shared with both the LA and Principal Challenge Adviser in an accompanying sortable and searchable Excel Spreadsheet.
- For selected questions it has been possible to provide a quantitative summary, using estimation in some cases and for others counts of references. Where this is possible this is included below

## Q1 - Engagement

Engagement (Summarised by school and quantified by EAS)	Number of Schools	Percentage Schools
100%	0	0%
90%	8	35%
80%	6	26%
70%	4	17%
60%	2	9%
< 50%	0	0%
Not quantifiable	3	13%
	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>



## Q2 – Strategies

Strategies	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Telephone	18	22.8%
Loan of IT	13	16.5%
EWO	6	7.6%
Live Lessons	6	7.6%
Paper workpacks	6	7.6%
Communication	5	6.3%
Support for Vulnerable Pupils	3	3.8%
Class Dojo	2	2.5%
EWS	2	2.5%
Wellbeing	2	2.5%



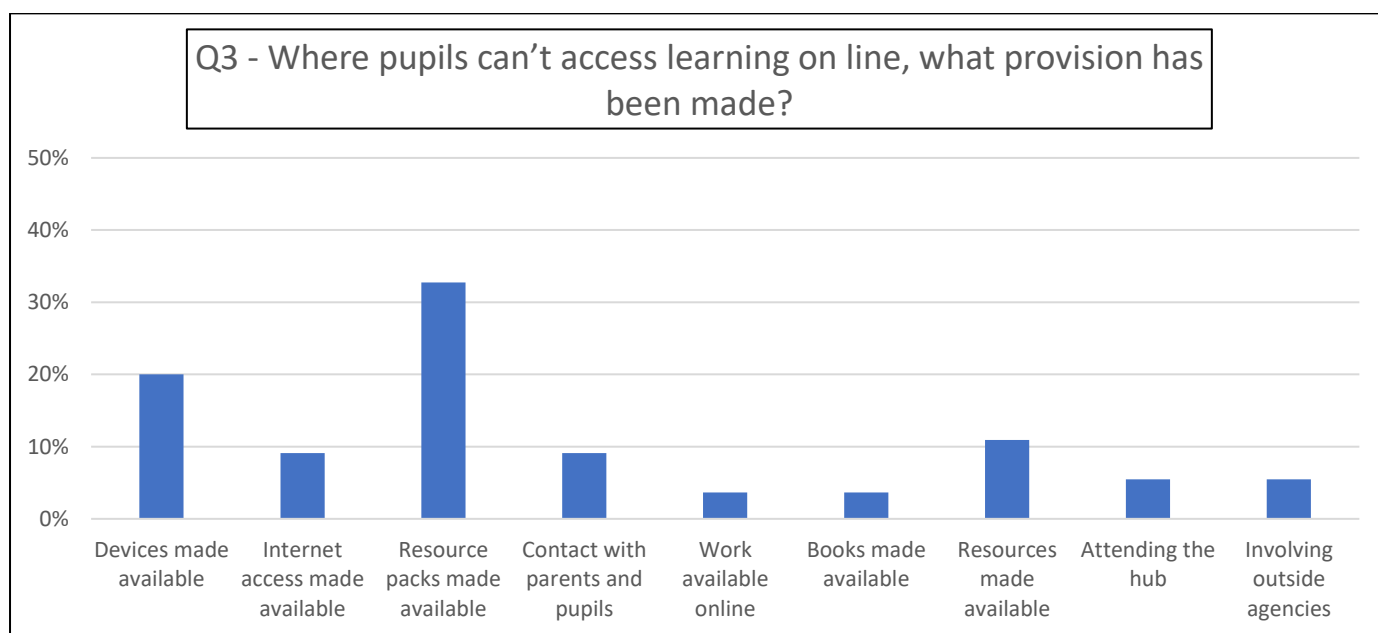
Adaptation for Needs of Pupils	1	1.3%
Engagement with External Agencies	1	1.3%
Family Engagement Officer	1	1.3%
Flexibility of expectation	1	1.3%
House visits	1	1.3%
Live check in for lessons	1	1.3%
Offer of Alternative Methods of Engaging	1	1.3%
Online Teaching	1	1.3%
Process for non-engagement	1	1.3%
Rewards	1	1.3%
Support with IT	1	1.3%
Text messages	1	1.3%
Tracking of Engagement	1	1.3%
Vulnerable Learner Lead	1	1.3%
Weekly Check-in	1	1.3%
Y11 email hotline	1	1.3%
	79	100.0%



### Q 3 – Provision

Provision	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Devices made available	11	20.0%

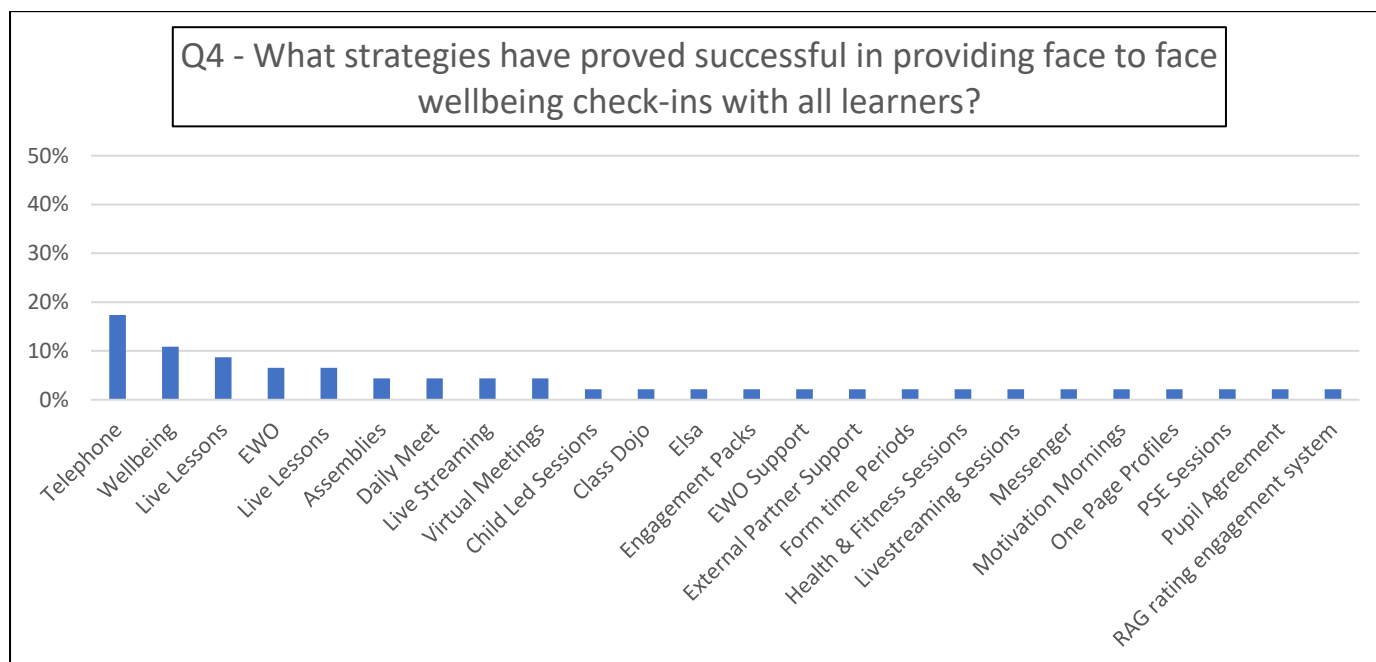
Internet access made available	5	9.1%
Resource packs made available	18	32.7%
Contact with parents and pupils	5	9.1%
Work available online	2	3.6%
Books made available	2	3.6%
Resources made available	6	10.9%
Attending the hub	3	5.5%
Involving outside agencies	3	5.5%
	<b>55</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



#### Q4 – Strategies for wellbeing

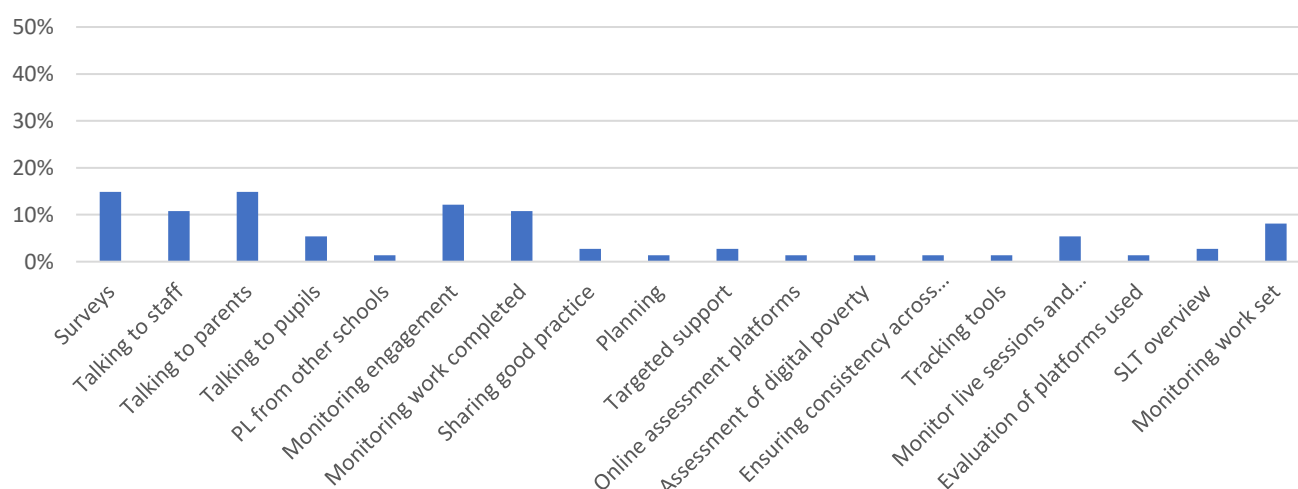
Strategies	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Telephone	8	17.4%
Wellbeing	5	10.9%
Live Lessons	4	8.7%
EWO	3	6.5%
Live Lessons	3	6.5%
Assemblies	2	4.3%
Daily Meet	2	4.3%
Live Streaming	2	4.3%
Virtual Meetings	2	4.3%
Child Led Sessions	1	2.2%
Class Dojo	1	2.2%
Elsa	1	2.2%
Engagement Packs	1	2.2%

EWO Support	1	2.2%
External Partner Support	1	2.2%
Form time Periods	1	2.2%
Health & Fitness Sessions	1	2.2%
Livestreaming Sessions	1	2.2%
Messenger	1	2.2%
Motivation Mornings	1	2.2%
One Page Profiles	1	2.2%
PSE Sessions	1	2.2%
Pupil Agreement	1	2.2%
RAG rating engagement system	1	2.2%
Referral to EWO in no contact	1	2.2%
SAP sessions	1	2.2%
Thrive	1	2.2%
Virtual Check-ins	1	2.2%
Welfare Sessions	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Check-ins	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Hub	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Sessions	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Wednesday	1	2.2%
	46	100.0%

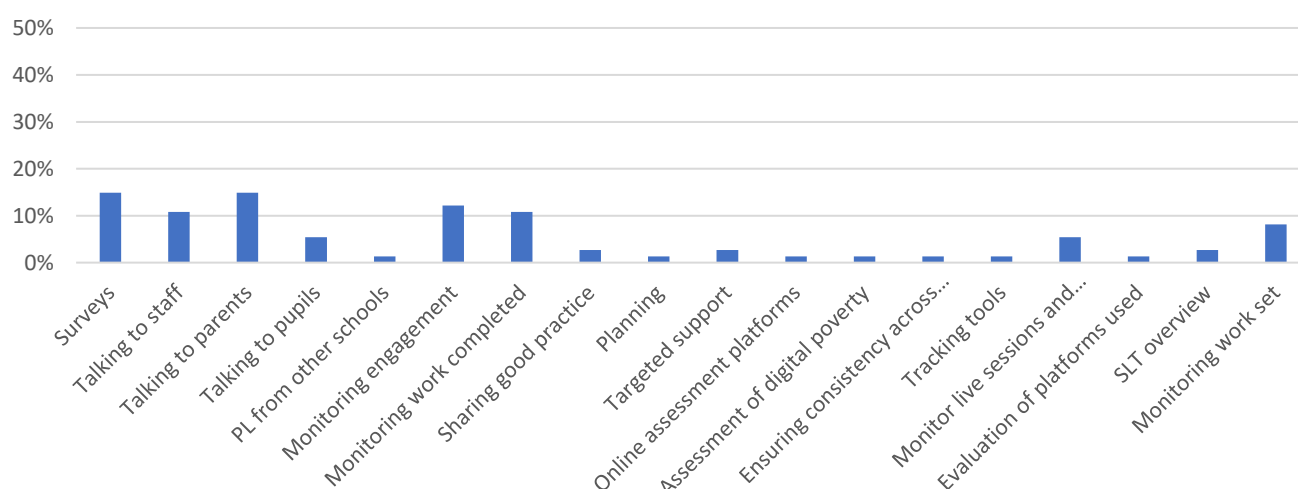


## Q5 – Approaches to evaluation

**Q5 - Within the current context, what approaches have you used to evaluate current provision?**

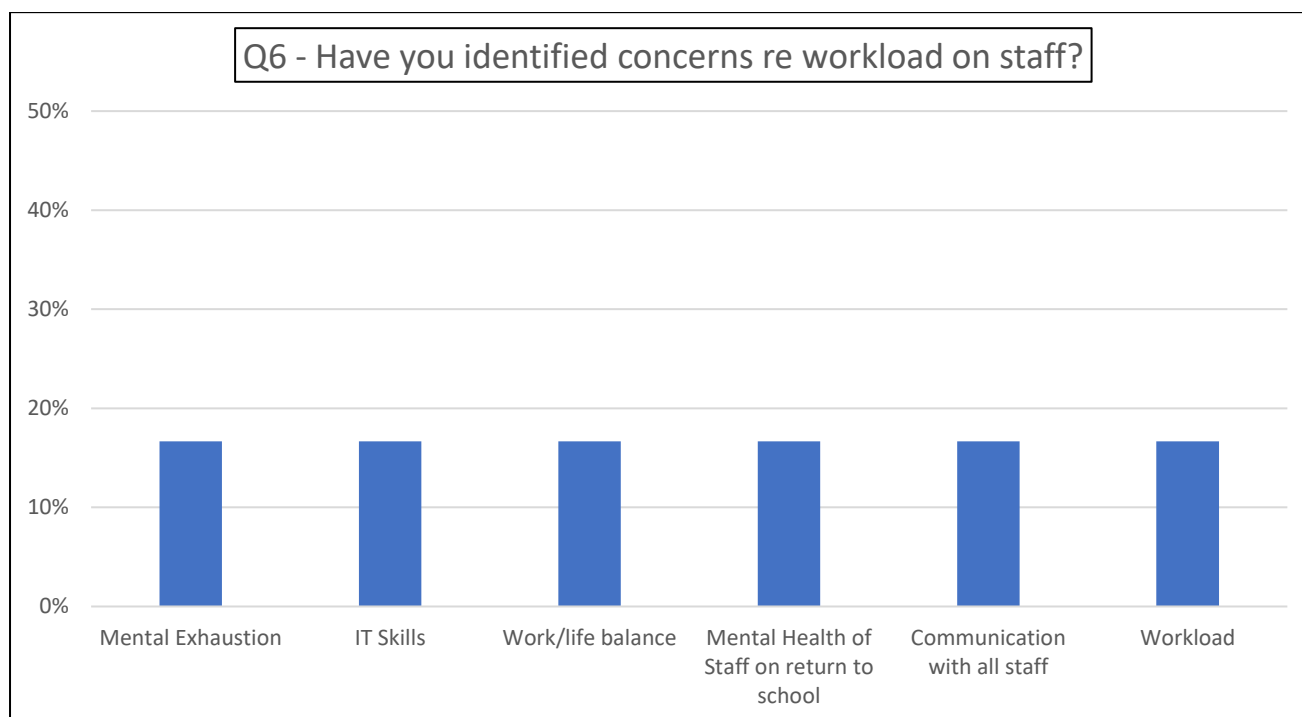


**Q5 - Within the current context, what approaches have you used to evaluate current provision?**



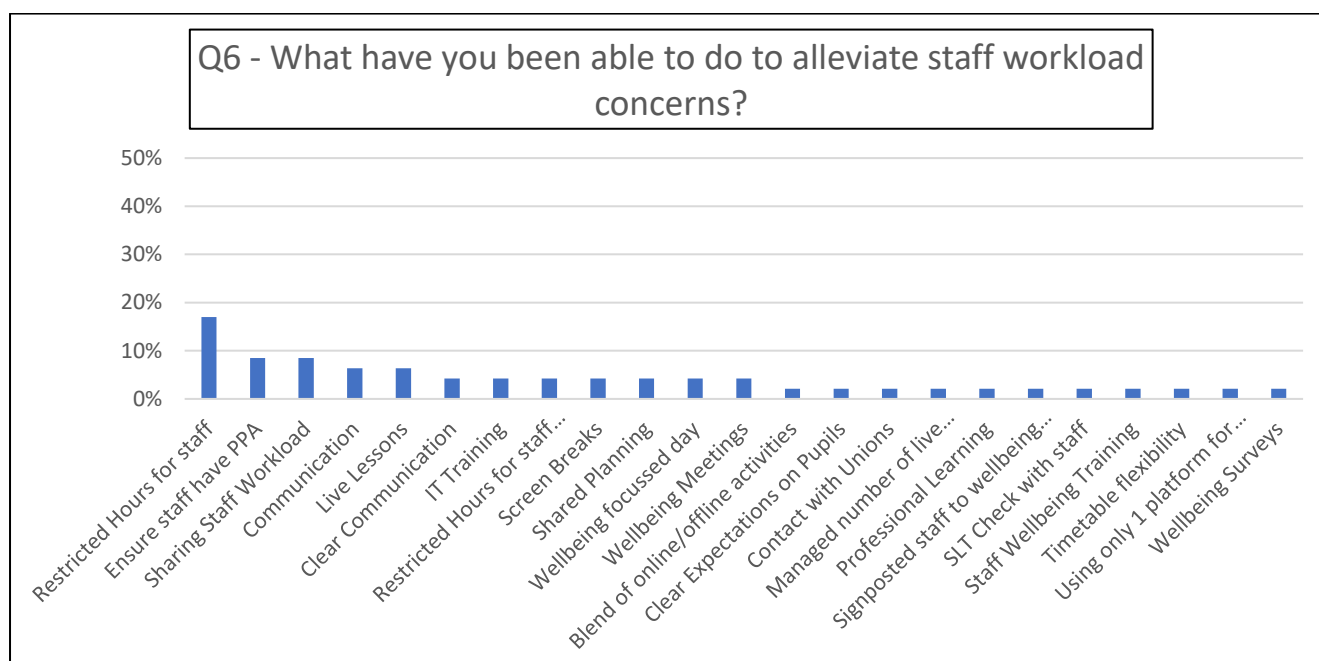
**Q6 – Workload Concerns and Solutions**

Workload Concerns	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Mental Exhaustion	1	16.7%
IT Skills	1	16.7%
Work/life balance	1	16.7%
Mental Health of Staff on return to school	1	16.7%
Communication with all staff	1	16.7%
Workload	1	16.7%
	6	100.0%



Workload Solutions	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Restricted Hours for staff	8	17.0%
Ensure staff have PPA	4	8.5%
Sharing Staff Workload	4	8.5%
Communication	3	6.4%
Live Lessons	3	6.4%
Clear Communication	2	4.3%
IT Training	2	4.3%
Restricted Hours for staff outside school hours	2	4.3%
Screen Breaks	2	4.3%
Shared Planning	2	4.3%
Wellbeing focussed day	2	4.3%
Wellbeing Meetings	2	4.3%
Blend of online/offline activities	1	2.1%
Clear Expectations on Pupils	1	2.1%
Contact with Unions	1	2.1%
Managed number of live lessons per day	1	2.1%
Professional Learning	1	2.1%
Signposted staff to wellbeing resources	1	2.1%
SLT Check with staff	1	2.1%
Staff Wellbeing Training	1	2.1%

Timetable flexibility	1	2.1%
Using only 1 platform for classes	1	2.1%
Wellbeing Surveys	1	2.1%
	47	100.0%

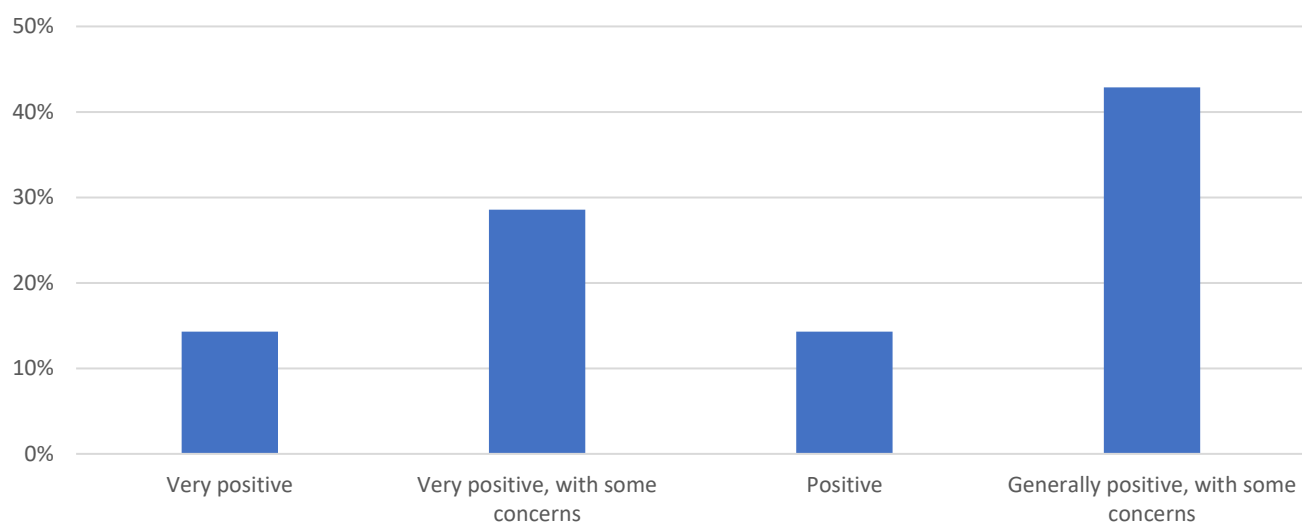


## Q7 – Feedback

Q7 - Feedback	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Very positive	1	14.3%
Very positive, with some concerns	2	28.6%
Positive	1	14.3%
Generally positive, with some concerns	3	42.9%
	7	100.0%

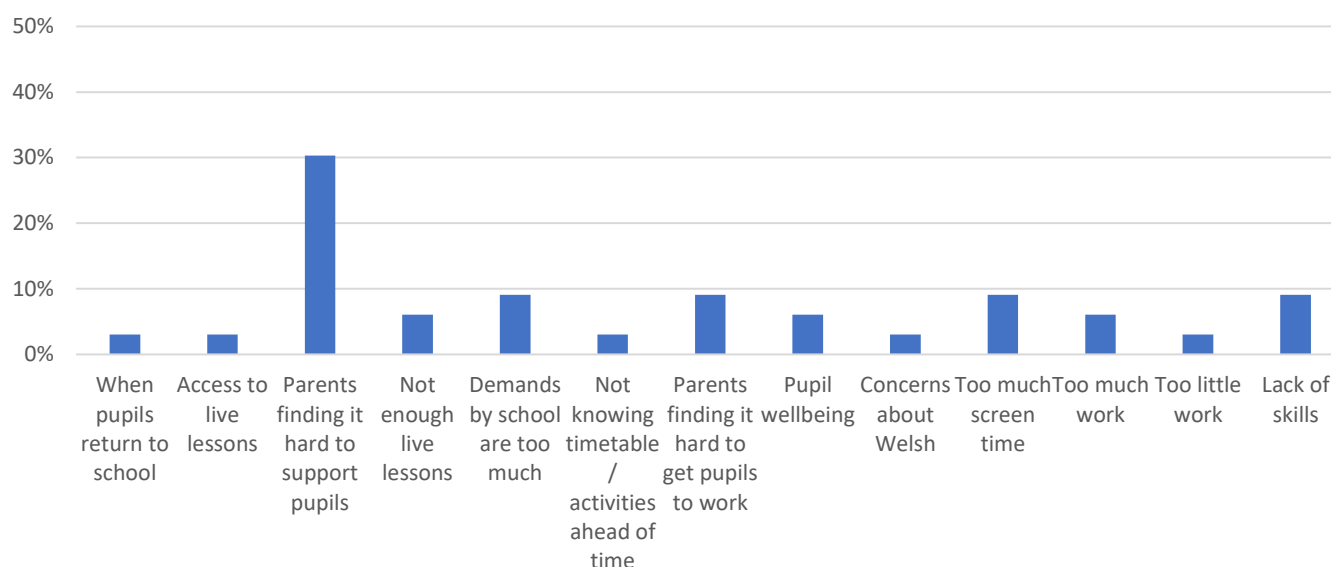
Of the concerns listed:	No. of mentions	% of mentions
When pupils return to school	1	5.9%
Parents finding it hard to support pupils	6	35.3%
Demands by school for work engagement	1	5.9%
Parents finding it hard to get pupils to work	2	11.8%
Pupil wellbeing	1	5.9%
Concerns about Welsh	1	5.9%
Too much screen time	1	5.9%
Too much work	1	5.9%
Too little work	1	5.9%
Parents lack of skills	2	11.8%
	17	100.0%

### Q7 - What is the general feedback from parents?



Of the concerns listed:	No. of mentions	% of mentions
When pupils return to school	1	3.0%
Access to live lessons	1	3.0%
Parents finding it hard to support pupils	10	30.3%
Not enough live lessons	2	6.1%
Demands by school are too much	3	9.1%
Not knowing timetable / activities ahead of time	1	3.0%
Parents finding it hard to get pupils to work	3	9.1%
Pupil wellbeing	2	6.1%
Concerns about Welsh	1	3.0%
Too much screen time	3	9.1%
Too much work	2	6.1%
Too little work	1	3.0%
Lack of skills	3	9.1%
	<b>33</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

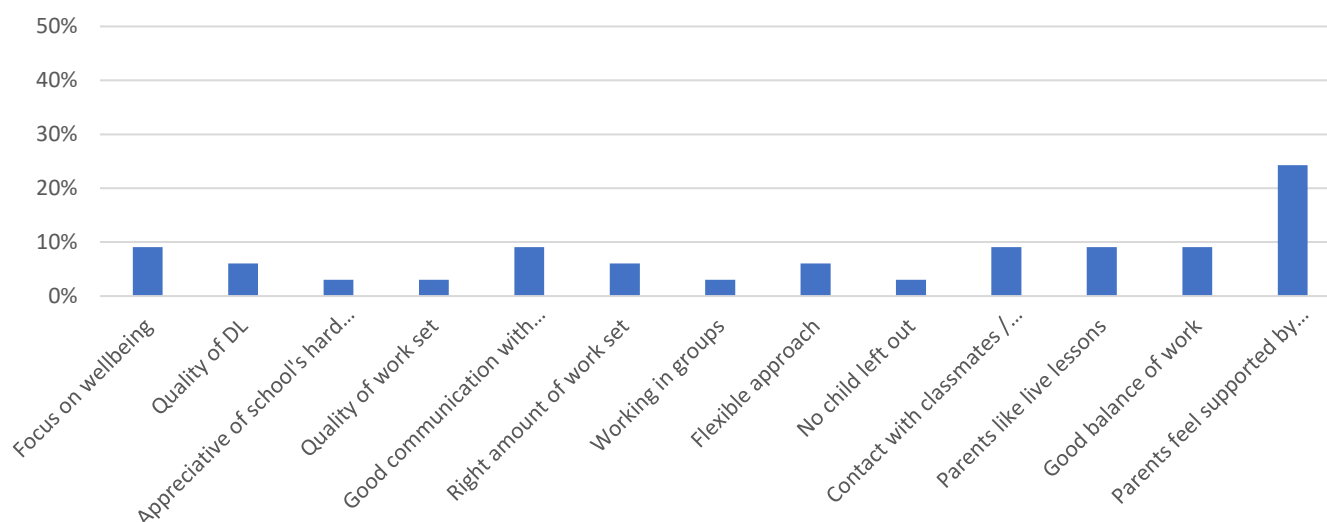
### Q7 - Have there been any particular concerns?



Of the compliments listed:	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Focus on wellbeing	3	9.1%
Quality of DL	2	6.1%
Appreciative of school's hard work	1	3.0%
Quality of work set	1	3.0%
Good communication with parents / pupils	3	9.1%
Right amount of work set	2	6.1%
Working in groups	1	3.0%
Flexible approach	2	6.1%
No child left out	1	3.0%
Contact with classmates / teacher	3	9.1%
Parents like live lessons	3	9.1%
Good balance of work	3	9.1%
Parents feel supported by school	8	24.2%
	<b>33</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



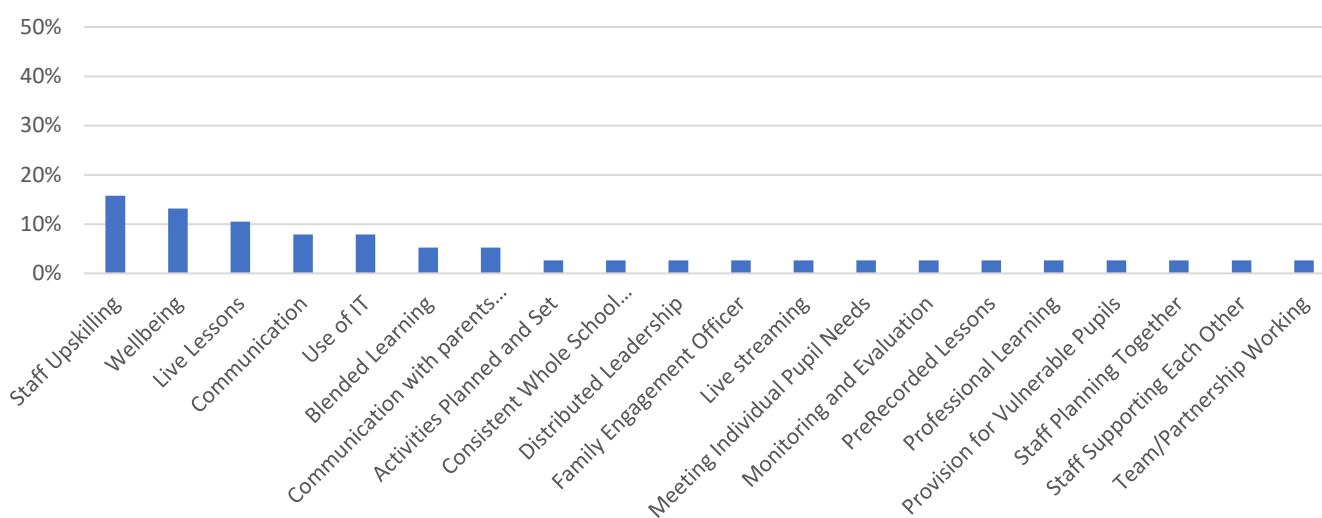
### Q7 - Have there been any particular compliments?



### Q8 – Examples of Good Practice

Examples of Good Practice	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Staff Upskilling	6	15.8%
Wellbeing	5	13.2%
Live Lessons	4	10.5%
Communication	3	7.9%
Use of IT	3	7.9%
Blended Learning	2	5.3%
Communication with parents and stakehodlers	2	5.3%
Activities Planned and Set	1	2.6%
Consistent Whole School Approach	1	2.6%
Distributed Leadership	1	2.6%
Family Engagement Officer	1	2.6%
Live streaming	1	2.6%
Meeting Individual Pupil Needs	1	2.6%
Monitoring and Evaluation	1	2.6%
PreRecorded Lessons	1	2.6%
Professional Learning	1	2.6%
Provision for Vulnerable Pupils	1	2.6%
Staff Planning Together	1	2.6%
Staff Supporting Each Other	1	2.6%
Team/Partnership Working	1	2.6%
	38	100.0%

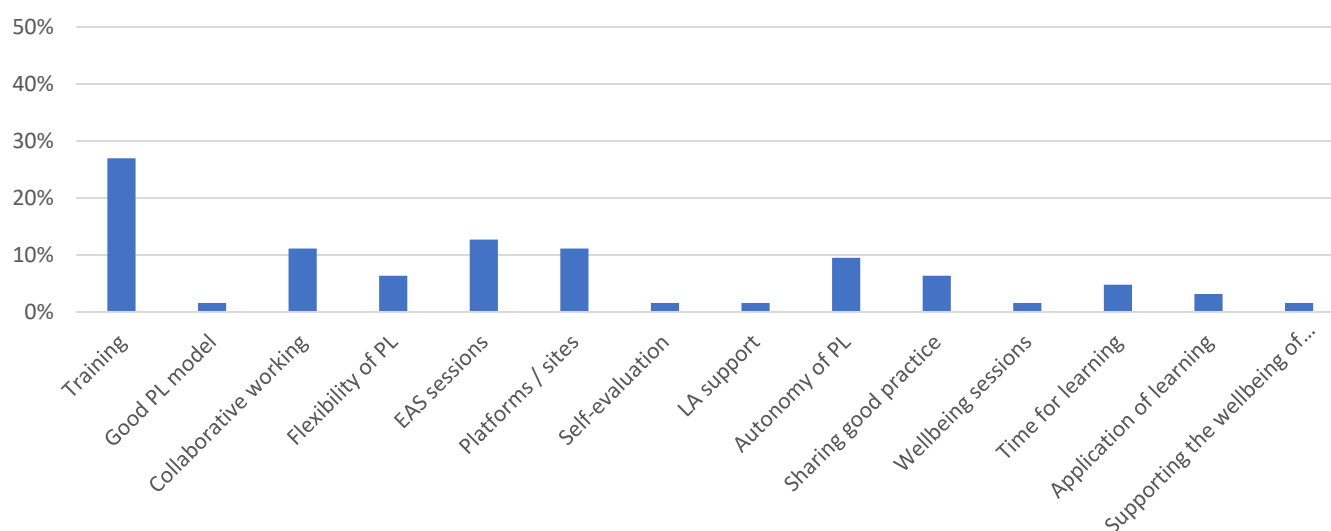
**Q8 - Since September, please identify an example of an area of particular good practice in your school.**



### Q9 – What's been effective?

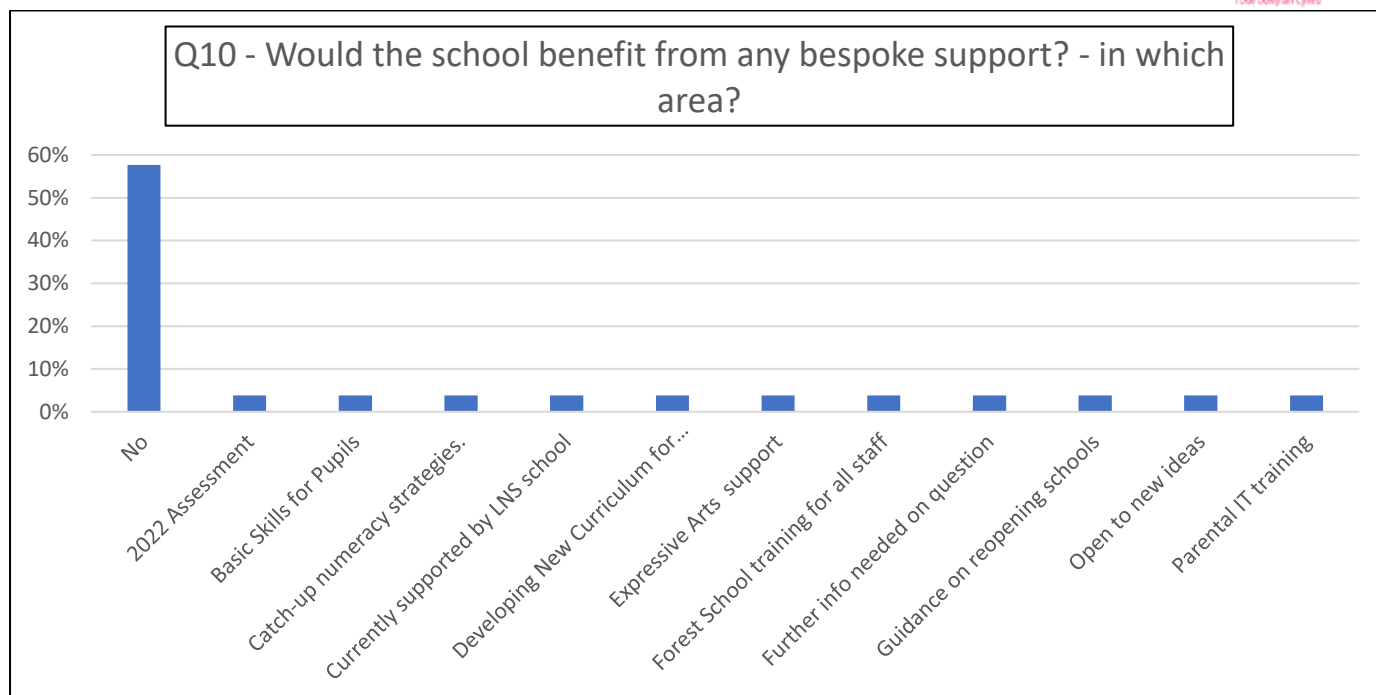
Q9 - What's been effective?	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Training	17	27.0%
Good PL model	1	1.6%
Collaborative working	7	11.1%
Flexibility of PL	4	6.3%
EAS sessions	8	12.7%
Platforms / sites	7	11.1%
Self-evaluation	1	1.6%
LA support	1	1.6%
Autonomy of PL	6	9.5%
Sharing good practice	4	6.3%
Wellbeing sessions	1	1.6%
Time for learning	3	4.8%
Application of learning	2	3.2%
Supporting the wellbeing of pupils	1	1.6%
	<b>63</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Q9 - When engaging with PL, which activities / approaches have been especially effective?**



**Q10 – Support Needed**

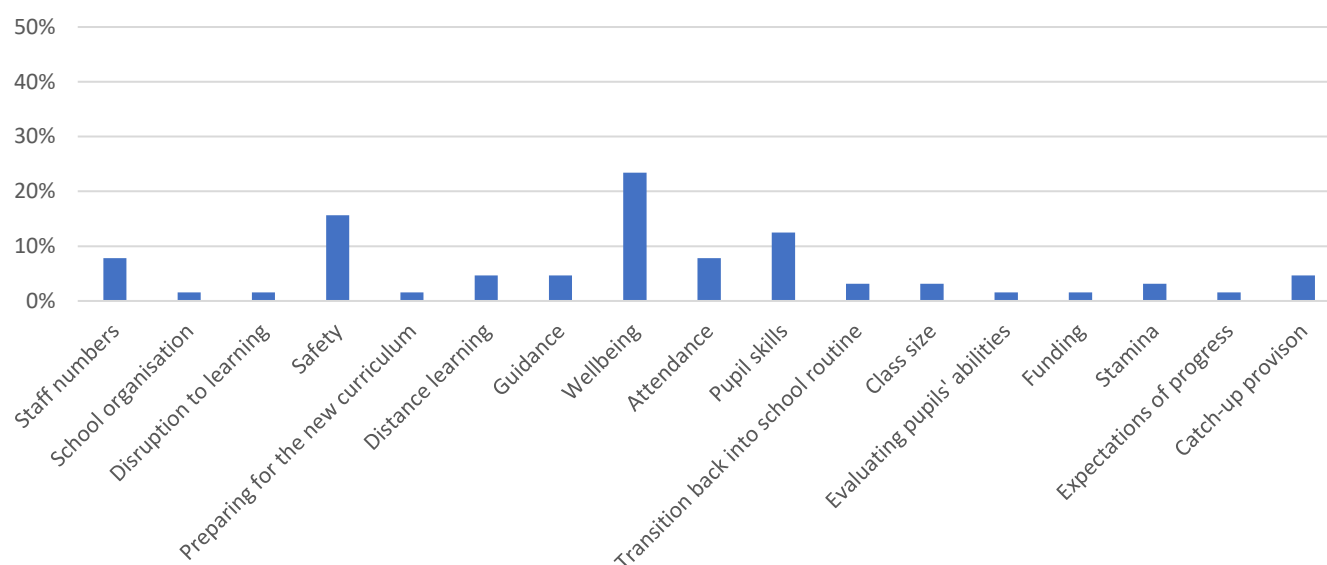
Type of Support	No. of mentions	% of mentions
No	15	57.7%
2022 Assessment	1	3.8%
Basic Skills for Pupils	1	3.8%
Catch-up numeracy strategies.	1	3.8%
Currently supported by LNS school	1	3.8%
Developing New Curriculum for Wales	1	3.8%
Expressive Arts support	1	3.8%
Forest School training for all staff	1	3.8%
Further info needed on question	1	3.8%
Guidance on reopening schools	1	3.8%
Open to new ideas	1	3.8%
Parental IT training	1	3.8%
	<b>26</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



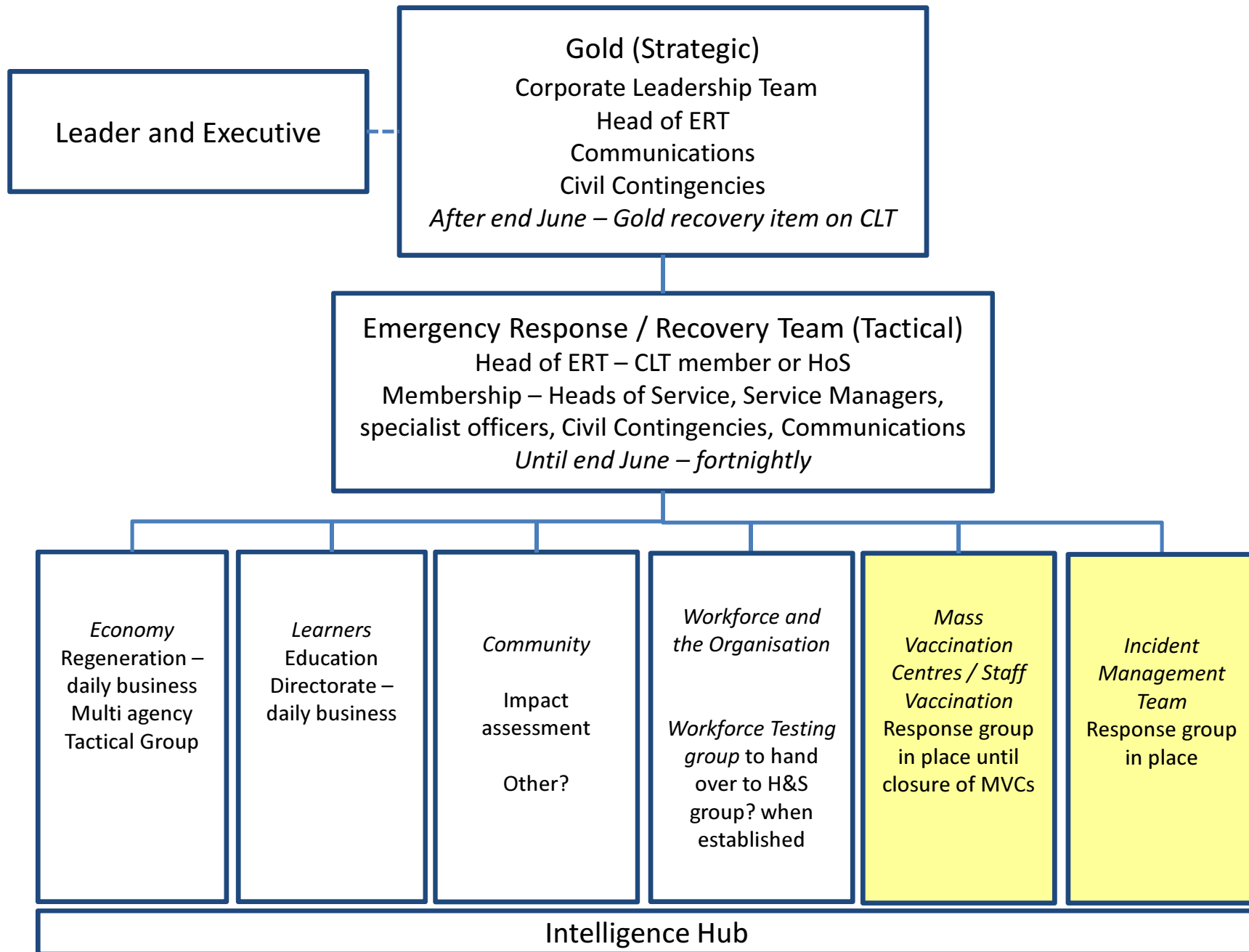
### Q11 – Major challenges to full return

Q11 - Major challenges to full return	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Staff numbers	5	7.8%
School organisation	1	1.6%
Disruption to learning	1	1.6%
Safety	10	15.6%
Preparing for the new curriculum	1	1.6%
Distance learning	3	4.7%
Guidance	3	4.7%
Wellbeing	15	23.4%
Attendance	5	7.8%
Pupil skills	8	12.5%
Transition back into school routine	2	3.1%
Class size	2	3.1%
Evaluating pupils' abilities	1	1.6%
Funding	1	1.6%
Stamina	2	3.1%
Expectations of progress	1	1.6%
Catch-up provision	3	4.7%
	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Q11 - What do you envisage are the major challenges for your school in regard to full return?



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# Agenda Item 8

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Education and Leisure Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **20<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Report Subject: **School Organisation Policy (2021/24)**

Portfolio Holder: **Education Portfolio – Cllr. Joanne Collins**

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

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
31.3.20	31.3.20	08.04.21			20.4.20	FWP 2021/22		

## 1. **Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek the views of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee in relation to the review of the School Organisation Policy (2021-24), prior to presenting the policy to the Council's Executive Committee. It is proposed that the revised policy is adopted and implemented from the start of new academic year 2021/22.

## 2. **Scope and Background**

- 2.1 The Council's Education Directorate and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board take the view that well-planned changes of the school estate contributes to raising standards. The Council initially developed and adopted the School Organisation Policy in January 2015, which provided the strategic blueprint for managing the school estate. In 2017, the document was reviewed and approved by the Council's Executive Committee. It is now time to carry out a further review to reflect the policy, especially in light of key strategic developments over the last 4 years and the impact of COVID-19.
- 2.2 Blaenau Gwent CBC has a proven track record of delivering significant school transformational change, such as Abertillery Learning Community, the Works developments and Home to School and Post 16 Transport consultations. The Education Directorate remains focussed on improving educational performance. Blaenau Gwent's schools have untapped potential to improve themselves, and there is significant potential to transform the current approach into a model that is determined by schools for schools; where the reliance on external agencies to improve is reduced and the capacity for schools to work with others in order to improve is increased.

2.3 The School Organisation Policy (2021-24) reflects the changing national, regional and local landscape and strategic developments, which shape and inform school organisation. The changes that have been made are indicated within the red text (please refer to **Appendix 1** for further information). The revised School Organisation Policy (2021-24) sets out 8 strategic priorities in line with the future direction and associated areas of development, which will inform and underpin school organisation and planning processes. The policy and associated priorities will be subject to annual review. These include:

- 2.4
1. Duty – Planning and Provision of School Places
  2. School to School Support and Collaboration
  3. Management of the School Estate – School Organisation
  4. School Size, Suitability, Condition & Operation
  5. Promoting Access to Education
  6. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
  7. Information and Communication Technology in Schools

2.5 The Council remains committed to providing children and young people with high quality education and training to contribute to the economic regeneration of the County Borough in line with the Corporate Plan vision and outcome statements.

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

There are two options presented for consideration:

- 3.1 **Option 1:** Members of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee agree with the proposed changes to the Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** Members of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee provide feedback/contributions relating to improvements that can be made to the policy, prior to the policy being considered by Executive Committee in May 2021.
4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 There is a statutory requirement upon the Council to ensure that all relevant school organisation proposals are compliant with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018, version 2). For proposals requiring a business case, all such documents are developed in accordance with the HM Treasury Green Book, Five Case Model.
- 4.2 Education is a strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Plan and the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan, of which school organisation is an essential component in securing: improved access to education, education facilities (including condition and suitability), provision and standards throughout the school estate. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme also features as a priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and

consequently, has generated a high-level of support from the capital programme.

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

### **5.1 *Impact on Budget***

There are no direct budget implications associated with this report.

### **5.2 *Risk***

5.2.1 Raising educational standards is a strategic risk on the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). Effective school organisation will contribute to mitigating this risk. Moreover, there are robust risk management arrangements in place whereby school organisation priorities and associated identified risks are regularly monitored, reported and escalated via the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board, Department Management team and Corporate Leadership team.

5.2.2 The high-level risks associated with programme delivery at present, include: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with financial, resourcing and programming implications. Effective monitoring and reporting processes have been established have been established for all priorities. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board monitor policy implementation, with core groups established to monitor and review resourcing, progress, timelines and finance on a monthly basis.

### **5.3 *Legal***

5.3.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report, other than the requirement for the Local Authority to follow the statutory processes set out within the Welsh Government School Organisation Code. Education are supported by the Council's Legal section, along with Clarks Legal as required, in fulfilling the obligations associated with regulated activity.

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

The School Organisation Policy has been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee implementation and review of the policy within Blaenau Gwent.

The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, will have a key role in ensuring the key human resource-related actions and activities are effectively supported and delivered.

## **6. Supporting Evidence**

### **6.1.1 *Performance Information and Data***

Education has a track record of successfully delivering significant school organisation proposals.

6.1.2 To date the following outcomes have been achieved in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme:

- All 4 projects have been delivered, securing successful conclusion of the Band A Programme, on programme and profile.
- The Band A programme has been subject to internal review and evaluation, internal audit, along with 4 external Gateway Reviews.

The latter demonstrates excellent progress and strong programme/project management arrangements are in place. Learning from the Band B Programme has been used to inform Band B development and implementation.

- Welsh Government have approved all Business Case submissions to date in line with delivery of the Band B Programme.
- Band B projects are currently on profile and programme.

6.1.3 Capacity calculations were determined for each of the schools in November 2019, which informed the final admission numbers published within the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy 2021/2022. The School Admissions Policy consultation, review and capacity assessments for 2022/23 admission round have been successfully implemented.

6.1.4 Surplus places in both the primary and secondary sector are projected to decrease further over the next 2 years, taking the primary percentage to 9% and secondary to 12%, by the 2023/24 academic year – with the overall combined projected status falling from 14% in Jan 2020 to 10% in 2024.

6.1.5 The Division of Responsibilities Guidance and associated procedure were successfully implemented during the 2019/20 academic session.

6.1.6 Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2019/20 self-assessment is based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment overall RAG rating has been sustained at Amber, with the rate of completion against the 2019/20 action plan as follows:

- 84% (or 49 actions) are complete;
- 7% (or 4 actions) ongoing; and,
- 9% (5 actions) actions in development.

6.1.7 In relation to ICT developments, to date the following outcomes have been achieved:

- Over 1,500 devices and 141 Mi-Fi units have been distributed to digitally disadvantaged learners.
- 2,247 devices have been ordered to replace end of life devices throughout the school estate. Set-up and distribution is programmed throughout the autumn-term 2020 and spring-term 2021 in line with Welsh Government procurement timelines.
- All school sites have been fully migrated and their connectivity addressed under the ICP
- Infrastructure upgrades have been completed in all school sites.
- Device and infrastructure audits have been completed and updated for all schools.

6.1.8 Excellent progress has been made overall, with school organisation priorities on track for 2021/22.

- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***  
Ensuring equality of access to quality education opportunities and facilities for all children and young people.
- 6.3 ***Involvement***  
Partner, stakeholder and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance and a key focus of both policy development, ongoing school organisation priorities and associated processes. Consultation and statutory processes in line with school organisation priorities and proposals, seek to ensure that all decisions are informed by the views, opinions and needs of stakeholders and those affected by the proposals.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term***  
The policy seeks to provide a medium to long-term strategic direction for school organisation, ensuring a sustained focus on key priorities and activities, whilst also securing appropriate resources to support effective delivery.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***  
The policy seeks to ensure that key priorities are determined and achieved, to ensure that Blaenau Gwent has the right schools, in the right place at the right time; to effectively facilitate high quality provision and outcomes for staff, children, young people and communities. There is a key focus on collaboration and improvement to support development and growth within each school setting.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***  
The Vision for Education is based upon a school led, self-improving, collaborative approach. The School Organisation Policy plays a fundamental part in improving partnership arrangements with the schools and their respective communities. In addition, the Policy details key priorities which will be delivered via a team officers from across all Council directorates, along with external partners such as the Shared Resource Service Wales.
- 6.7 ***Integration***  
Service integration is essential to ensure effective policy implementation, particularly between the Council and its schools. The Policy established a framework for systematic integration.
- 6.8 ***EgIA***  
6.8.1 An equality impact screening assessment has been undertaken, the results of which indicate that there is no adverse impact upon the protected characteristics, but a positive in terms of disability, whereby provision is set to be reviewed and improved.
7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***  
7.1 Policy implementation will be the responsibility of the Education Transformation team, overseen by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board and Education Directorate Management team, with assurance

provided by Corporate Leadership team. The Policy will be subject to annual review.

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

- **Appendix 1** – Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021-24

# Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy

(March 2021)

DRAFT



Version 2

## Strategic Overview

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has undertaken a review of the School Organisation Policy (2015), which was last reviewed in 2017, along with the associated Education Transformation Strategy. The review takes account of key strategic developments that have taken place between 2017 and 2021, influencing the landscape and implementation of school organisation throughout Wales, the South East Wales region and ultimately Blaenau Gwent. The purpose of this document is to set the strategic direction for the organisation of the school estate within the County Borough from 2021 onwards - subject to annual review.

### *The Welsh Context*

Over the Course of the last 4 years, there have been a number of significant and impactful developments within the field of Education, influencing progress, delivery, future plans and objectives.

In March 2021, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant changes within both school operation, access to and the delivery of education. Local Authorities and schools have been through an extensive emergency response period over the course of the last year. This has included, the closure and repurposing schools to support childcare for key workers and vulnerable learners in line with the emergency response; planning for recovery in line with the reopening of schools partially towards the end of the summer-term 2020, with full reopening from the start of the autumn-term 2020. The emergency response is ongoing with recovery planning being a key focus over the course of 2021 and beyond.

During the pandemic, schools and settings have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working and delivering meaningful learning experiences, through a creative blended learning approach. Leaders have placed high priority on the wellbeing of learners and staff, whilst simultaneously being engaged in reflecting upon and refining their approaches to teaching and learning. Moving into uncharted waters in terms of international understanding of what constitutes effective distance and blended learning, it has been important for schools to collaborate and learn together.

The Curriculum for Wales Framework is being developed for settings and schools in Wales. Following a consultation period which ended in July 2019, the refined version became available in January 2020, with schools trialling their planned approaches. The new curriculum will be implemented throughout Wales from 2022, and is based on the following principles, resulting from the Donaldson Review - an independent review of Curriculum and Assessment arrangements in Wales – Successful Futures (2015):

- The new national curriculum should be organised as a continuum of learning from 3-16 without phases and key stages;
- Progression should be described in relation to a continuum of learning in each area of learning and experience from where a child enters education to the end of statutory schooling; and,



- There are clear expectations that primary and secondary schools would have to work together much better, rather than secondary education being seen as a 'new beginning'.

Welsh Government subsequently developed the Digital Competency Framework (in line with the Donaldson report, and 'A Curriculum for Wales – a Curriculum for Life', 2015). The DCF establishes a framework for the delivery of ICT across the curriculum that will enable the development of a digitally skilled pupil population in the use of technologies, whilst preparing them for future progression routes and career pathways. It is recognised that supporting digital skill building will potentially stimulate the local economy and economic activity.

In December 2017, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) was passed by Welsh Government. The aim of the ALN Act is to create a unified process for children and young people 0-25 that will improve outcomes with a single statutory framework. The ALN Act provides the legislative framework to improve the planning and delivery of additional learning provision, through a person-centred approach to identifying learner needs earlier, putting in place effective support and monitoring, and adapting interventions, ensuring the desired outcomes. From September 2021, all Councils have a responsibility to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act and accompanying Code are in place to support learners aged 0-25 and that they work effectively with other agencies such as Health to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.

Prior to the pandemic, schools in Wales were showing signs of improvement in terms of attendance, Foundation Phase outcomes, Key Stage 2/3 performance and importantly the proportion of learners achieving 5 A\* - C grades (L2+). There has also been some evidence in recent years of an improvement in the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals. These improvements have been brought about through the hard work of pupils, teachers and school leaders who have worked effectively in partnership with Local Authorities and other key partners.

The National Model for Regional Working has effected two significant changes to the school improvement landscape;

- i) The model defined school improvement more clearly, and placed clear responsibilities on Local Authorities to work through formally established regional services to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and the quality of school leadership.
- ii) Underpinning the structural change was a fundamental change in the methodology for school improvement across Wales since 2014; stakeholders have been working towards creating a self-improving school led system. This is defined as a model where the key players in the education system take shared responsibility for their own improvement and for the improvement of others.

Welsh Government, in Qualified for Life and the National Model, has identified this as its ambition for the education system in Wales. The self-improving school led system is part of a whole system approach involving clear roles for Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Consortia and Schools.

The National landscape, however, for regional services and the extent of school to school collaborative working varies across Wales. **Local Authority based services have**

been placed under increasing pressure during a significant period of financial austerity, also more recently, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is, however, an exciting time for Local Authorities and Schools, as there is a greater sense of ambition and a clearer focus on the future. It has been important for schools and Local Authorities to take a self-help approach to developing greater resilience to change. Schools require well developed systems in place to support sustainable progress, in order to continue to improve pupil outcomes in the years ahead.

The national picture is clearly advocating a more collaborative working agenda for all partners in the self-improving school system. Blaenau Gwent is well placed to respond to the changing landscape at a national level.

### ***The Blaenau Gwent Context***

Blaenau Gwent is the most economically challenged Local Authority area in Wales and there is a determination to improve educational performance across the board, but particularly at Key Stage 4. The Education Achievement Service deliver a wide range of school improvement services via an agreed Business Plan on behalf of the Council. The Business Plan supports the role Local Authorities have in delivering their statutory function, addressing their individual improvement priorities and promoting improved pupil outcomes. The strategic priorities for Blaenau Gwent contained within the Post COVID Recovery Business Plan April 2021 – March 2022 are to:

- 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; and,
- Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.

Blaenau Gwent schools have demonstrated that they have significant potential to move to an improvement model that is determined by schools for schools, in turn securing the capacity for collective improvement across the system.

The Council's policy advocates the all-through schooling approach. This model and approach is not unique to Blaenau Gwent and has historically focussed upon school re-organisation as a means of creating unified governance and leadership arrangements to consolidate the relationships between schools. Indeed, Blaenau Gwent has created **3 all-through learning communities** during recent years. This approach, however, is at the more formalised end of the spectrum of school to school working and responds to key strategic drivers, such as the need to significantly improve standards and/or sustainability of the school estate.

Education has initiated a schools funding review for implementation over the next 3 years, with a key focus on securing appropriate financial resource for schools across the 3-16 age range.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council remains committed to providing children and young people with high quality education and training, to contribute to the economic regeneration of the County Borough. The vision set out within the Corporate Plan (2020-2022) is:

- Proud heritage
- Strong Communities
- Brighter Future

In addition, the Education Directorate's vision (2017-21) is:

***'Securing excellent achievement and wellbeing for all learners through a partnership, school-led self-improving system'.***

Over time, within the self-improving school system, responsibility and control would be transferred through schools collaborating, which operate in a spirit of mutual challenge and support between school leaders and their colleagues who are committed to achieving more ambitious and better outcomes for all learners.

Blaenau Gwent acknowledges the key components of a self-improving school system are broadly agreed as:

- Autonomy
- Accountability
- Capacity building
- Choice/diversity
- System leadership

The Council accepts that such a transformation will create challenges and it is likely that organisational, structural and cultural barriers will need to be removed, however, the following benefits can be delivered:

- a shift in much of the responsibility for school improvement moving from Local Government/Consortia to Blaenau Gwent's schools over time;
- Blaenau Gwent's schools commit to developing a professional learning culture by commissioning and leading on the school improvement agenda;
- school leaders and governors sharing collective responsibility and accountability for the continual improvement of the schools working in partnership;
- partnerships of schools working collaboratively to challenge and support each other to achieve ambitious outcomes for all learners; and,
- a primary focus on teaching and learning; progression and continuity; and reducing variation in and between schools.

### **School Organisation – the Strategic Direction**

The revised School Organisational Policy (2021-24) sets out 8 strategic priorities in line with the future direction and associated areas of development, which will inform and underpin school organisation and planning processes. The policy and associated priorities will be subject to annual review.

## 1. Duty – Planning and Provision of School Places

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient provision of school places to meet the anticipated demand for education. Parents can apply for their child to be educated at a school of their preference. The Council has to manage the allocation of places to its schools in line with the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education.

All children in Wales between the ages of 5 and 16 are entitled to a free place at a state school, whilst nursery children are entitled to a free part-time educational places from the term following their third birthday. The types of school provision in the County Borough are:

- Community maintained schools, managed in partnership with Councils;
- Faith Schools such as Voluntary Aided schools; and
- Foundation School, which have more autonomy than maintained schools.

Blaenau Gwent has a track record of managing school places effectively, and the position on surplus places is an improving picture. **The position in line with the latest all-Wales dataset (January 2018/19) is as follows:**

- 13<sup>th</sup> (out of 22 Local Authorities) for primary;
- 10<sup>th</sup> (out of 22 Local Authorities) for secondary; and,
- 11<sup>th</sup> (out of 22 Local Authorities) in terms of the combined primary and secondary position.

**The School Organisation Policy (2021) sets a target for surplus places of less than 15% for both primary and secondary sectors.**

**In addition, Education are working to facilitate effective pupil place planning within the special school sector, inclusive of resource base and other specialist provision for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The first phase of this work involves a proposal which seeks to secure increased capacity at Pen-y-Cwm Special School. A detailed review of ALN provision will be undertaken over the course of the next 3 years. As part of this review consultation and engagement with key stakeholders will be key to ensuring that informed decisions are made based upon the needs of learners.**

## 2. School to School Support and Collaboration

There are two main elements of legislation, which are supported by regulation and code that govern the process for changing the organisational arrangements of schools. These are:

- School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, **which is supported by the by Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018, version 2);** and,
- Federation of Maintained School (Wales) Regulations 2014, which is made under the Education Wales Measure 2011.

**In 2015, Estyn reported on school to school collaborations and identified ‘nearly all’ schools are involved in some form of partnership working with the other schools. In**

most schools in Wales there are cluster collaborative working arrangements in place, and approximately 50% have other school to school working arrangements that are self-generated. This level of engagement with collaborations within the Local Authority and the region has developed considerably since this time, with a strong culture of partnership growing amongst school leaders, and an outward-facing approach to development and improvement. Engagement in regional professional learning programmes and networks is very strong within the Borough. This was exemplified in Spring 2021 by Blaenau Gwent having the highest number of schools within the region taking part in the Celebrate, Support, Share and Refine EAS pilot, which focused on schools' development of provision and practice in distance and blended learning.

As per the Welsh Government's School Organisational Code (2018, version 2) Councils can use their powers for school re-organisation. Whilst the powers remain, the use of school organisation powers is not the preferred option presented in this policy, as the Council is advocating a self-improving schooling system. The spectrum of school support and collaboration includes:

- Self-generated collaboration;
- Brokered support;
- Collaboration or 'soft' federation, which can involve a 'soft governance' model
- 'Hard' federation; and,
- School re-organisation

The term 'federation' describes a formal and legal agreement by which a number of schools (between two and six) where governance arrangements. The key drivers for considering federation should be the benefits that such an arrangement would bring for children and young people in the federating schools to enhance provision. There is no single blueprint for federation and the design and operational workings of a federation will depend entirely on the circumstances of the individual schools and the focus or the purpose of working together. Federation models, however, can offer distinct advantages to collaborative working between schools. The main characteristics of the range of collaborative working options are shown in **Appendix 1**. The Council's Education Directorate is committed to supporting schools considering greater collaboration through the change process, and consequently, has developed a 'Governors Guide' to progressing school to school working. The Guide covers some key points for consideration, including;

- School to school collaboration, partnerships or federations are bespoke arrangements. It is not a 'one size fits all approach';
- Federation models can be led by Governing Bodies or the Council;
- 'Hard federation models require a formal consultation process and can take up to 125 days to implement.
- The Education Directorate will support schools throughout the process.

The Education Directorate will continue to engage schools in the County Borough in the collaborative working agenda seeking to establish opportunities for greater collaboration. School to school working has advanced over the course of the last year, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Management of the School Estate – School Organisation

The management of the school estate seeks to secure improved condition and suitability of education facilities in line with the creation and management of sustainable education system in Blaenau Gwent. This process not only informs key school organisation priorities and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, but facilitates effective access to education throughout the Borough in line with key developments such as housing.

Since the establishment of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (1996), there has been a substantial change across the school estate, which has resulted in significant improvements in the quality of school learning environments.

In 1996/97 there were 32 primary schools, 1 special school, 1 pupil referral unit and 6 secondary schools. The position as of 2021 has been reconfigured to:

- 2 secondary schools (inclusive of 1 Foundation school)
- 2 3-16 Learning Communities (All through school model)
- 2 Special schools
- 1 Welsh-medium primary school
- 18 primary schools (4 of which are Faith schools)

The 25 schools serve a pupil cohort of 9,279 including nursery age pupils. Post 16 provision is provided in partnership with Coleg Gwent through the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone.

### 4. School Size, Suitability, Condition & Operation

The position for building suitability and condition as at September 2019/20, based on categorisations ranging from A (good) to D (Bad) is shown in **Appendix 2**. The overall status and quality of the school estate is improving, mainly from significant capital investment and the rationalisation of aging school buildings.

The size of a school and its capacity is influenced by a range of factors. The School Organisation Policy (2021) advocates the following school size framework principles:

- Schools, where numbers on roll are forecast to be less than 90 pupils should be reviewed
- Nursery provision to be co-located and part of the governance structure of statutory school provision
- Primary schools with a minimum capacity of 210, other sizes to include 360, 420 and 630 places.
- Secondary schools being no smaller than 600 places
- Middle schools – all through school and provides continuity for students in one organisation with a single leadership and management structure and the size of the school will be flexible.

The Council has a minor works, maintenance and planned works programme to improve the condition, suitability and operation of Education assets/facilities, with the



2021/22 programme currently underway. The capacity of each school is reviewed annually throughout the autumn-term in line with pupil numbers, operation and changes in the use of school facilities. This process informs the admissions policy arrangements for the preceding year.

## **5. Promoting Access to Education**

In 2018, the Council consulted upon their home to school and post 16 distance limits in line with the award of free transport. The Council's agreed limits are more generous than those set out within the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 ("the Measure"), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the "Regulations"). As a result of the consultation and associated outcomes, it was determined by the Council's Executive Committee that the distance limits would remain unchanged for the term of office of the existing Council, with elections scheduled to take place in 2022. Blaenau Gwent Council reviews the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy on an annual basis, with the last review having taken place in 2020, for implementation from September 2021.

The School Organisation Policy advocates greater school to school collaboration and this is likely to have implications for Home to School Transport. This policy, therefore, sets out a principle that any school organisation/collaborative arrangements between schools is subject to a full transport impact assessment prior to determining the proposal. The transport impact assessment may also consider changes to existing school catchment areas, which could require consultation processes to be followed.

The Blaenau Gwent Accessibility Strategy is also scheduled for review, with a view to securing continued improvement and access for those in greatest need. The Strategy and associated Action Plan will undergo review in 2021, for implementation from 2022. Access to education is also facilitated by the Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education, which was last reviewed in January 2021, for publication on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April and implementation from September 2021.

## **6. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme is a long-term strategic investment in the education estate throughout Wales. The Programme is broken down into phases of investment, categorised as Bands. The Band A Programme in Blaenau Gwent, successfully concluded on programme and on profile in the autumn-term of 2019. The Council works closely in partnership with the Welsh Government, to secure funding in line with the delivery each project within the Programme, via the HM Treasury 5 Case Model.

The Band A programme which concluded in 2019, resulted in an investment of £20.25m into the school estate, and consisted of:

- 2 new build primary schools in the Southern Ebbw Fach Valley
- 2 remodelling projects of a comprehensive school in Tredegar and remodelling of a Primary School in the Ebbw Fach North valley.

The Band B programme will result in £19.6m into the school estate, with more emphasis on remodelling, consisting of:

- 1 New build primary along with remodelling of 3 primary schools in the Ebbw Fawr Valley

- 4 Secondary school remodelling projects to include transition into Band C
- Remodelling of the exiting Welsh-medium Primary School in the Northern Ebbw Fach Valley

The Blaenau Gwent Band B Programme investment objective are as follows:

- **Investment Objective 1:** to raise standards and achievement in line with localised targets at foundation phase, KS2, KS3 and KS4; and secure improved transition into post 16 learning.
- **Investment Objective 2:** to create a sustainable model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century school estate in consideration of both capital and revenue investment, along with the condition and suitability of buildings.
- **Investment Objective 3:** to establish effective management and provision of school places, by having the right schools in the right place at the right time.
- **Investment Objective 4:** to implement the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme in line with local, regional and national school organisation policy; ensuring synergy between progression, development and implementation.
- **Investment Objective 5:** meeting the needs of vulnerable learners.

In addition to the Band B funding envelope, Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million via the Welsh-medium Capital Grant, along with £200,000 from the Capital Childcare Grant. The grants were awarded in line with the proposal to create a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility in the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley. This proposal is currently subject to statutory processes.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme is instrumental in securing delivery aligned to the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan (2020/22), the outcome statements associated with the plan are:

- Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities
- Support a fairer sustainable economy and community
- To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme (Band A) features as a key priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

## 7. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

In 2017, Welsh Government carried out a rapid review of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans throughout Wales. The review acknowledged the need for change, not only in terms of individual plans' ambitions, but also in terms of the legislative framework set out by Welsh Government. The review also highlighted a need to change the regulations and guidelines, along with a significant change in the Welsh Government and local authority approach to planning. Consequently, Welsh Government reviewed the legislative framework associated with the WESP, with the key focus being the creation of a framework which enables local authorities to develop long-term strategic plans.



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government required Local Authorities to submit their first draft 10-year plan to the Welsh Ministers by 31 January 2021; however, in light of the pandemic and associated emergency response requirements, the submission timeline has been updated. Following the drafting and subsequent consultation period, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019, along with the draft guidance were laid on 5 December 2019 and came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020. Local Authorities must submit their first draft 10-year Plan to the Welsh Ministers on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022, with the plan operational from September 2022.

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Forum has already begun working on a draft 10-year plan for consultation and approval by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022. Within Blaenau Gwent and throughout the South East Wales Region, there is a focus on the growth of Welsh-medium education. The Council are currently at statutory notice stage on a proposal to develop a second Welsh-medium primary school. A key priority going forward, will be to work with neighbouring authorities to secure Welsh-medium provision at secondary, ensuring effective and sustainable progression opportunities for Blaenau Gwent learners from 2028 onwards.

## **8. Information and Communication Technology in Schools**

In 2017, Education and the Shared Resource Service (SRS) worked in partnership with schools to review the status of and to enhance ICT infrastructure and connectivity throughout the school estate, whilst also addressing gaps and consistency issues. As a result, the Education Infrastructure and Connectivity Project was established implemented between 2019 and 2021. The project sought to improve the delivery of teaching and learning, whilst also facilitating delivery in line with the Digital Competency Framework, and effectively contributing to the overall curriculum aspirations for Wales. This work also built upon the outcomes realised as a result of the Living in Digital Wales (LiDW) Programme, 2014.

During 2019, the Welsh Government launched the Hwb EdTech (HET) initiative, which over a 3-year period, will realise an investment of over £2 million throughout the school estate, with future Waves of the programme currently under development. The status of the Infrastructure Connectivity Project placed Blaenau Gwent strong position to further enhance the infrastructure in line with the Hwb EdTech initiative. Strong progress has been made to date in line with infrastructure, connectivity and device upgrade throughout the school estate. The key focus for 2021/22 will be the development and implementation of an Education ICT Strategy, which establishes a clear vision for school's ICT, whilst enhancing the delivery of teaching and learning, and positively influencing pupil outcomes.

## Appendix 1

### Differences between types Federations (NFER)

Characteristics	Informal Loose Collaboration	Soft Federations	Soft Governance Federation	Hard Governance Federation
Statutory/non-statutory	Non-statutory – schools can form informal collaborations without having to follow regulations.	Non-statutory – schools can set up soft Federations without having to follow regulations.	Statutory – soft governance Federations are established using Collaboration Regulations made under Section 26 of the Education Act 2002.	Statutory – hard governance Federations are established using Federation Regulations made under Section 24 of the Education Act 2002.
Governing body	Each school has its own governing body, with representatives on a joint committee that meets informally on an ad hoc basis.	Each school has its own governing body, with representatives on a joint committee that meets.	Each school has its own governing body, with representation and delegated powers on a joint governance/ strategic committee.	Single governing body, shared by all schools in the Federation.
Common goals and plans	All schools share common goals and work together on an ad hoc basis and through informal agreements.	All schools share common goals; joint committee recommendations, but it is up to the individual governing bodies to authorise decisions/ plans.	All schools share common goals through the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and protocol; Joint committee can make joint decisions/ recommendations in specified agreed areas, but not all.	All schools share common goals through SLA and protocol; having a single governing body allows for efficient, streamlined decision-making in all areas.
Common budget	No, but if the schools want to commit to a budgetary decision affecting all schools, each individual school's governing body would need to approve this.	No, but it could make budgetary recommendations for the group which in turn would have to be approved by each individual school's governing body.	No, but if the joint/strategic committee has budgetary powers delegated to it, it can make prompt budgetary decisions on behalf of schools in the Federation.	No (technically), but whilst each school receives and must account for its own separate budget, there is considerable scope, through the single governing body, to use the pooled budgets across the schools in the Federation.
Shared Staff	Unlikely to have common management positions, but if they do exist, they would have to be agreed in a protocol or contract.	Common management positions and appointments but need to have a protocol or contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Common management positions and appointments but need to have a protocol or contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Common management positions and appointments agreed by single governing body in a simple and effective manner. Schools can agree to have a single executive head teacher responsible to the schools in the hard Federation.

## Appendix 2

**Overall Building Condition and Suitability Ratings** - The 2019/20 position for building condition and suitability is categorised as A (good) to D (bad) and summarised below:

	A	B	B/C	C	D
<b>Primary (19 Schools – 19 buildings)</b>					
<b>Condition</b>	0	11	0	7	1
<b>Suitability</b>	3	7	9	0	0
<b>Secondary (2 schools – 2 buildings)</b>					
<b>Condition</b>	0	1	0	1	0
<b>Suitability</b>		1	0	1	0
<b>Middle (2 schools - 6 buildings)</b>					
<b>Condition</b>	4	1	0	1	0
<b>Suitability</b>	4	1	0	1	0
<b>Special (2 schools- 4 buildings)</b>					
<b>Condition</b>	1	1	0	2	0
<b>Suitability</b>	1	2	0	1	0

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