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Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Democratic Services



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

7th September 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, 14th September, 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 - 24

To receive the Minutes of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2021.

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

5. **ACTION SHEET - 22ND JUNE 2021** 25 - 30

To consider.

6. **VERBAL UPDATE - COVID 19**

To receive a verbal update from the Corporate Director Education.

7. **EDUCATION SERVICES - MAIN SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (SER)** 31 - 190

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

8. **INCLUSION STRATEGY AND REVIEW (2021-2022)** 191 - 196

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

9. **EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN REVIEW** 197 - 236

To consider the report of the Corporate Director

Education.

**10. HOME TO SCHOOL AND POST 16 TRANSPORT  
POLICY REVIEW 2022 - 2023** 237 - 280

To consider the report of the Corporate Director  
Education.

**11. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 19TH OCTOBER  
2021** 281 - 284

To receive the report.

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

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 – 22<sup>ND</sup> JUNE, 2021**

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

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. TROLLOPE (CHAIR)**

Councillors: J. Holt  
M. Cook  
M. Day  
L. Elias  
S. Healy  
J. Hill  
J.C. Morgan  
T. Smith  
B. Summers  
D. Wilkshire

**Co-opted Member**

T. Baxter

**AND:** Corporate Director of Education  
Head of School Improvement & Inclusion  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change  
Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships  
Press & Publicity Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

**ALSO: Aneurin Leisure Trust**  
Phil Sykes, Director of Operations

**Representative of EAS**

Hayley Davies-Edwards, Principal Challenge Advisor

| ITEM  | SUBJECT   | ACTION |
|-------|---|--------|
| No. 1 | <p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>  |        |
| No. 2 | <p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor Derrick Bevan<br/>Councillor Clive Meredith</p> <p>Service Manager Inclusion</p>   |        |
| No. 3 | <p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillor Stewart Healy declared an interest in item 10 - Aneurin Leisure Trust Performance and Monitoring Report (April 2020 – March 2021).</p>  |        |
| No. 4 | <p><b><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></b></p> <p>The Committee AGREED that future meetings be held on a Tuesday at 10.00 a.m.</p>  |        |
| No. 5 | <p><b><u>SPECIAL EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Special Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p> |        |
| No. 6 | <p><b><u>EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>                |        |

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| No. 7 | <p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2021</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Grants Awarded to Education Directorate</u></b></p> <p>A Member enquired why the amount of funding received for Tredegar Comprehensive School was nearly double the funding received for Brynmawr Foundation School and Abertillery Learning Community. The Corporate Director of Education said he would look into the variances and report back to the Committee.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding how PDG Challenge Advisors would interact and challenge Headteachers, the Corporate Director of Education explained that the Challenge Advisors would work closely with the schools to make sure that there was appropriate use of this funding across the schools and ensure that the resource was used effectively to support those learners who were targeted, in line with the grant criteria.</p> <p>A Member referred to the differences shown in the PDG amounts, these grants were based on the number of free school meal pupils within schools and felt that an item could be put forward on the interventions in different schools and how it was helping free school meal pupils progress. The Member referred to the percentage of free school meals in Blaenau Gwent and enquired if this could be looked at, as he felt that not all free school meal children were having what they were entitled to and this affected grants going into schools. He felt that information regarding free school meal entitlement was difficult to find on the Blaenau Gwent website and the link for applications should be more prominent. He also raised concerns that free school meal assessments were now carried out every 3 years.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Education said that in relation to the situation around free school meals and the way that is assessed within schools, a lot of work had been carried out during the pandemic which had resulted in a significant increase associated with eligibility around free school meals. The latest position was that in the region of 1,700</p> | Director of Education |
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| <p>children were now entitled to free school meals and the situation was being closely monitored. The Director advised Members that there was probably a 30 to 40% increase in terms of families and children entitled to free school meals due to the impact associated with COVID around the socio-economic status of the area. In relation to the Member's first point, one of the briefing notes outlined some of the areas for potential spend on the Pupil Development Grants so that Members were appraised of the way that resource could be used to support learners both from an FSM and CLA perspective across the school estate. The Director would provide anonymised information regarding this matter to Members and also ensure that the link for applications for FSM was made more prominent on the website.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding what percentage of families were claiming FSM, the Director reported that the percentage was in the region of 30% but stressed it was a fluid situation and subject to change. The Member commented it was important to engage with those families not claiming their entitlement as this was money that the families, the schools and the Education service was losing. The Service Manager Education Transformation &amp; Business Change said they were working closely with the schools in order to get the message out to parents and liaising with schools when new eligibility came online, they worked closely with both the Benefits and Performance sections and held discussions with schools who in turn picked up the discussions with parents around ensuring they take up their entitlement to apply for FSM. Regular messages around the eFSM application rounds were circulated via the schools directly, via their parent communication channels, the team also picked up a significant number of calls. She advised there was a lot of communication, information and plans in place to support those parents and to look to engage newly eligible families.</p> <p>A Member commented that with so much support in place why families were not claiming their entitlement to FSM, and enquired if it was due to the perceived stigma attached to FSM. The Director of Education said this could be an issue, however, there were services in place to try to address this issue such as the Catering service who work closely with schools around cashless catering so that the learner was</p> | <p>Director of Education</p> |
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|              | <p>not identified as being a free school meal pupil. There were also direct payments to families so there was no way of identifying directly those families that were receiving the entitlement.</p> <p>With regard to direct payments a Member enquired if checks were made that families receiving direct payments were actually paying for free school meals for their children. The Service Manager Education Transformation &amp; Business Change said that the eligibility was managed in partnership with the Benefits Section, then working with schools to ensure that those pupils were accessing free school meals. She advised that schools do provide additional support as do Catering when there were financial issues for families.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.</p>  |  |
| <b>No. 8</b> | <p><b><u>PROPOSED SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Chair advised that this was a fluid document and could be subject to change.</p> <p>A Member commented that the report on Section 106 Agreements was an information item and felt that this should be an agenda item for Committee so that Members gain a better understanding of the benefits of Section 106 Agreements, how the money was utilised and how they link with Education, Planning and Regeneration Directorates.</p> <p>The Chair proposed that the report on Section 106 Agreements be withdrawn from the information pack and be presented to a future meeting of the Committee as an Agenda item.</p> <p>This course of action was AGREED.</p> <p>A Member enquired if there were any reports on the Forward Work Programme regarding the large turnover of Headteachers in Blaenau Gwent and also home schooling</p> |  |

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as this impacted on pupil attendance. The Corporate Director of Education said that as part the Forward Work Programme there were reports on both school pupil attendance and exclusions that would feature as part of the Inclusion and Improving Schools reports, there would also be updates in terms of where we are with leadership, potential changes and recruitment in those schools that are a cause for concern.

The Member referred to the EAS and enquired regarding value for money. The Corporate Director of Education said there was a good working relationship with the EAS who worked closely with the School Improvement and Inclusion team. A report had been presented to Committee previously that highlighted value for money, which was based upon two key variables i.e. whether performance was increasing and standards improving and if that was being done with less resources. The Director felt that both the Authority and the EAS were improving standards with reducing budgets during the period of public sector austerity.

The EAS Principal Challenge Advisor reiterated the Director's comments and added that she was excited to be working with the new Education Directorate and Leadership team in Blaenau Gwent. She reassured Members that the partnership, which was how the Welsh Government saw the relationship moving forward, was healthy and strong. They held regular meetings and had excellent opportunities to look at the roles the Local Authority and the EAS played to ensure that the support for schools was tailored in the right way.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2021-22 be approved; and

FURTHER AGREED that the information item on Section 106 Agreements be presented to a future meeting of the Committee as an Agenda item for consideration.

No. 9

**EDUCATION DIRECTORATE – RECOVERY AND RENEWAL PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion and the Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change which was presented to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the Education Directorate's identified priorities for recovery and renewal, as part of the response to the COVID-19 situation.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member referred to pupil behaviour in schools and felt this should have been referenced in the report. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion said that learner's emotional states including their behaviour and the potential impact that could have on other learners was a key priority. The report contained overarching statements of the key areas and these would be broken down into much more detailed plans i.e. learner wellbeing, emotional, behaviour etc.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change reiterated this point and said that this linked into the learner theme and also the school operations and support for schools around behaviour in the form of risk assessments and staffing etc. and felt this was a cross cutting aspect that would feature as part of the detailed action plans around a number of these different impact areas.

A Member commented that it was good to see whole school wellbeing and mental health support being given priority, and also to see support for vulnerable learners and ALN reform feature so prominently, and that parental engagement, which he felt was absolutely crucial was also listed. He felt the plan accurately reflected the Local Authority responding to current and future changes.

With regard to PPE and face masks in schools a Member commented that the Authority needed to be clearer on the guidance as there was uncertainty on wearing face masks

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in classrooms and corridors. The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change stressed there was clear guidance that in all secondary schools in classrooms and in communal areas, where two metre social distancing could not be maintained, that pupils wear face coverings and this applied across the school estate. If there were significant issues which were presented and schools feel that under risk assessment that they could manage and put in place additional control measures, then the team could look to review that with the school. There had been significant engagement with primary and secondary schools, special schools and all through schools and that guidance had been clearly relayed and was reinforced at every opportunity. If there were any particular concerns the Member had the officer offered to discuss these outside of the meeting.

A Member referred to the identified key impacts on education on page 55 and said that in relation to safeguarding, voluntary third sector involvement, preventative health measures and Covid-19 control measures, the report stated there had been little or no engagement and he felt this was inaccurate as there had been a lot of engagement with youngsters and their parents during the pandemic i.e. ensuring free school meals were delivered, schools making sure that youngsters were engaging and enquiring after their wellbeing, making sure they had the right equipment etc. He raised concerns with the narrative in the report and that it did not pick up on the variances between schools, and that the improvements and good work that had taken place in schools had not been referenced in the report i.e. digital technology. He also referred to the curriculum for Wales and felt it was up to schools to progress this and look at how the curriculum fits within their own areas. He felt there was room for improvement within the plan.

The Chair agreed with the Member's comments and added that through personal experience delivering free school meals etc. he felt that community interaction had been strong and working together the community understood what schools were doing.

The Corporate Director of Education agreed with the Chair and Member's comments that the partnership working

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around Covid had been outstanding on a number of levels. However, in relation to the narrative on safeguarding it mentioned limited access to on-site school support and he explained that this related to occasions where there had been a move to blended learning and on-site support for learners throughout Covid had been limited. With regard to the Recovery and Renewal plan it would not be a one size fits all approach, there would be differentiated approaches based upon the needs of learners right across the school estate and would be a series of bespoke solutions based on schools and the individual learners needs. He added that the focus in the plan was not just about recovery, it was also about renewal and part of that would be learning from experiences in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Blended learning and the way learners were supported through ICT were a direct result of being in the pandemic situation, which had instigated significant positive digital change across the school estate.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change said it was a very high level impact assessment which was in its infancy and they were still working with schools to support the response. With regard to the key impact - voluntary third sector and charity work and engagement – this was based around engagement on school sites as opposed to the work around recovery that was undertaken during the course of the last academic session and prior to that. Community support had been invaluable particularly around delivery of free school meals etc. and felt this highlighted where there were gaps from a school community perspective, there was normally a significant level of engagement with various charities and voluntary third sector partners etc., however, they had been unable to go into school sites due to the restrictions around Covid.

For clarification the Chair said that the words ‘school based’ should be included in the key impact - voluntary third sector and charity work and engagement.

This course of action was AGREED.

Members felt that the overarching report should have included the good work that had been undertaken such as digital improvements etc. The Head of School Improvement

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and Inclusion reiterated these were high level statements and there would be action plans built around each of these focusing on the way schools move forward as well as the way the Local Authority can support schools and work with the EAS to move forward with all of the areas. She advised that the plan would be based on the needs of each individual school and Headteacher representatives from each of the clusters would also be working on the plans.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change added that they did capture within the impact assessment, areas of notable success and would continue to do this, the learning would inform the development of the plan going forward. She felt that the report reflected the stage at which the impact assessment and planning process were at and the detail was being progressed at this point in time.

In response to a Member's question regarding how the EAS would address the issue of looking at assessing where pupils were at the moment and where they needed to be in readiness to sit their GCSE's, the Principal Challenge Advisor said the Welsh Government had announced that Estyn inspections would not resume until the spring, performance measures had been suspended again and the EAS were seeking as much information as possible regarding the progress of learners. After Easter schools would make some baseline tests to try and look at progress children had made to see where they are now and where they needed to be and that would happen at individual school level. The EAS would have professional discussions with Headteachers in a very detailed and specialised way, about the systems that were taking place within schools to assure the Headteacher that assessment was accurate for the age and the stage of the child and that the right judgement was made about the child's progress. She advised that the Welsh Government had been out to consultation between January and April with a new working approach on school improvement and accountability systems, which explained and set out, in detail, the role of each tier within the system. The role of schools, within the system, was to ensure that self-evaluation and school development planning was accurate and so there were proposed ways of working based on overarching principles within the consultation document. For scrutiny, this would

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mean that the EAS were proposing to meet with every school in the autumn term, some in Blaenau Gwent, to trial a new professional dialogue i.e. a school's own self-evaluation accuracy, the systems for self-evaluating and how schools were generating the most important areas for improvement. A key part of that would be the accuracy of tracking and assessment within schools, and Headteachers and the Council could be assured that schools were holding accurate information on children and were able to identify any issues.

With regard to the consultation document the Principal Challenge Advisor said there was a move away from the hard edged data in looking at provision in schools to a more qualitative triangulated range of multi-dimensional data, including children's voice, parents voice and lessons. This was the steer from Welsh Government and the auspice in which the EAS would be working towards in the coming months. She would share the consultation document with Members for their information.

A Member referred to the new ALN Bill due in September and the Service Manager Inclusion leaving the Authority and enquired how this would be managed moving forward. The Corporate Director of Education said that a report had previously been presented to Scrutiny outlining the preparedness for ALN reform and that this report had given Members assurances that the Authority was well prepared for the September implementation. He expressed thanks to the Service Manager Inclusion for all the work he had undertaken in preparing the Authority for ALN reform and also his work around the inclusion agenda. There was now an opportunity for recruitment, and building on experiences from appointing the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion an approach had been agreed to offer the post on a secondment basis across the school estate. The benefits of this approach would be that it would provide a CPD opportunity for a member of staff and also give the Local Authority the opportunity to see how the member of staff settled into the role. The Director was looking to initiate the recruitment process in the near future to ensure capacity for the move towards implementation from September 2021.

The Member referred to the timing of the secondment as the school would need to replace the successful candidate

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which could be a Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher for the secondment period and this could take a considerable amount of time. The Director said it may not necessarily be a Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher that applied for the position, it could be for example an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator or specialist in the Inclusion field. There was no intention to destabilise any school arrangements with this appointment and they would work closely with the schools to ensure there was continuity.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion said that with regard to capacity and to be able to support schools, in particular senior leadership, to ensure they had everything in place to meet the needs of the new ALN Bill, Tredegar Comprehensive School had received some additional funding for extra capacity to go out and work specifically with schools in this regard.

A Member raised concerns that with school inspections no longer taking place, how the improvements made to the two schools that were categorised as a cause for concern would be acknowledged moving forward. The Principal Challenge Advisor said categorisation had been suspended for another year and gave assurances that schools would continue to receive the right level of support, the EAS were proposing as a region that they would still have that professional discussion with the Headteachers and the levels of support the school would have for the coming year would be determined in those discussions. The local Authority, the EAS, the Headteachers and senior leaders would all look at the school's needs to ensure that the right number of days were agreed, this could be in the region of 5 days with additional days added if the school needed more support.

In relation to the schools causing concern categorised as red, this was still a statutory process and the EAS would need to follow this process to ensure that those schools were supported and that their progress was reported to Members and to all stakeholders. However, the colour categorisation would no longer be reported as one of the limits of categorisation was that a school could be improving in the background, but actually it could still be categorised as red without those improvements being recognised by the community. She felt there was now an opportunity for the

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schools in Blaenau Gwent that were improving to showcase their improvements by working with parents, the Council's Corporate Communications section and local press to get their school improvement information into local forums to keep the community informed. She referred to the literacy festival at Brynmawr Foundation school and said that was exactly the kind of news that needed to be out in the community.

The Corporate Director of Education said that progress was being made particularly with the two schools that were currently in an Estyn category. With regard to communication and the improvements that were being made for both of these schools, Corporate Communications worked closely with these schools to get positive messages out in the community. He referred to the fantastic literacy festival at Brynmawr Foundation school which had received national TV coverage and said that was one strand of the work that Corporate Communications were supporting. He advised that Estyn had recently announced that core inspections were being suspended but Monitoring Visits would continue to take place and that was the opportunity for the Inspectorate to assess the progress that was being made. This would give those schools the opportunity to demonstrate progress and provide encouragement for their respective improvement journeys.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion commented that there had been weekly meetings with schools to ensure that as much information as possible was in the local press and also that the literacy festival was shared with all the Headteachers in the last joint Headteachers meeting and all of the schools were able to participate and join in with a number of the activities. She felt this was another way of promoting across the school estate the fantastic work that was going on.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager said that changing perception can be very challenging and a number of strategies had to be involved and through the work of Corporate Communications they were working to support the schools to engage better with their parents. She gave an example that Abertillery Learning Community had requested that they facilitate a meeting in relation to launching their school prospectus.

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The Chair referred to the recruitment of the Service Manager Inclusion and suggested that the Education Directorate liaise with the Social Services Directorate as this post linked in with the Social Services Directorate. The Corporate Director of Education said there was a good relationship between the Directorates and he was looking to build on this collaborative work e.g. through the Bridging the Gap work on early intervention and prevention.

A Member referred to the two weekly involvement in shaping the Curriculum for Wales on page 75 and enquired how they would ensure that this was implemented in the correct way. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion said the new curriculum gave schools the freedom to shape the curriculum to meet the needs of their local school communities. They were working closely with the EAS to ensure they had the right training to put in the support for school to school working and to broker that support that different schools would need. This ensured that provision was in place to enable schools to be empowered to develop the curriculum in the way they wanted.

The Principal Challenge Advisor said the EAS had a national programme to deliver on behalf of the Local Authority. The Local Authority, Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and senior leaders had all been part of the national programme and that programme was now being delivered to middle leaders within Blaenau Gwent. She referred to the professional discussions and the information gained from these discussions such as what are the schools strengths, what are the areas for development etc. and most of that would be delivered via a school to school delivery model whereby one school supported another.

The Member commented that school to school working was working well with schools helping each other. He felt that self-evaluation had made a massive difference in education.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report, associated documentation and proposed course of action be accepted; and

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|               | <p>FURTHER AGREED that the words 'school based' be included in the key impact - <b>Voluntary/Third Sector/Charities work and engagement</b> - Opportunities to engage partners have been restricted significantly due to operational implications associated with COVID-19.</p>   |  |
| <b>No. 10</b> | <p><b><u>ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING REPORT (APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021)</u></b></p> <p>Councillor S. Healy declared an interest in the following item and remained in the meeting.</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and the Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships which was presented to update Members on the performance of the Aneurin Leisure Trust and to clarify the future performance monitoring arrangements.</p> <p>The Service Manager Young People and Partnerships spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>The Chair commented on the improved relationship between the Council and the Trust and said this was beneficial to the community. The Director of Operations of the Trust said there had been a team effort all round, Blaenau Gwent Council had openly engaged with the Trust to get a better relationship. He added that the Trust's staff had done outstandingly well in supporting the Council's response through the Covid period.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding hubs in Libraries, the Director of Operations said they had worked closely on this project from start to finish and he felt there were no disadvantages as local residents could now use the service on their doorstep, it was also good for libraries as it opened up a whole new audience.</p> <p>The Chair enquired regarding the possibility of leisure centres so that the service could open more than one day a week. The Director of Operations said this could potentially present a problem in relation to staffing. The decision for only opening one day a week was only for the first month,</p> |  |

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from 21<sup>st</sup> June until 24<sup>th</sup> July and this was due to occupancy numbers with social distancing in place, from the 25<sup>th</sup> July they would move to the new phase and reopen fully.

A Member commented that it was an excellent report and was pleased to note that staff had been redeployed to help with the Covid response and wanted to put on record his thanks that Bedwellty House had been opened as a Covid vaccination centre for the residents of Tredegar as the new hospital was still under construction. He was also pleased to note that the Trust were now accessing grant funding and hoped this would help to bring the facilities up to standard and be successful going forward.

Another Member commented that he felt the Trust was now in a different place from 2-3 years ago and gave credit for the work undertaken in the turning the Trust around. He said that staff morale was much better and the relationship with schools had also improved.

The Corporate Director of Education agreed with the Members comments on the progress that had been made and said he had attended the sport centres recently to look at the recent developments that had taken place within the fitness areas and felt the work undertaken there was cutting edge and the developments places the ALT well for the future. He felt there was professionalism and commitment from staff across the board and expressed his appreciation to the Director of Operations and the Service Manager Young People and Partnerships for building the improved relationship between the Council and the Trust.

The Director of Operations thanked the Corporate Director for his comments and said that the Service Manager was an outstanding link between the Trust and the Council and had been a real help throughout the whole process. He felt that the new alignment with education was working really well and the Trust was very excited about the future.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinised the annual performance and the report's proposals for future reporting arrangements be accepted.



**No. 11**

**IMPROVING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME 2021**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion and the Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Members with an overview of those schools that have been inspected in the period, including those schools that have presented as a cause for concern, their progress and the work delivered or currently underway to continue to support them to improve.

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

The Chair enquired regarding the turnaround at the River Centre for students to get back into mainstream schooling. The Corporate Director of Education said the River Centre was a 64 place school with 40 turnaround places and 24 permanent places and one of the considerations that needed to be developed and strengthened was the work undertaken around the 40 turnaround places. There were concerns that learners were not being placed back into mainstream settings with the support they needed and this was a consideration linked to the pre-warning notice letter. He added that a Service Agreement was being developed. It would be a tripartite partnership arrangement between the Local Authority, the River Centre and the receiving school and he felt that the school needed to demonstrate more of a collaboration approach with partners in terms of working towards the return of learners back into mainstream settings and this was a priority piece of work to take forward.

A Member commented that it was quite concerning that the River Centre had gone from Amber to Yellow and was now in the position of a warning notice. He referred to para 4.1.2.3 school pupil capacity and admission arrangements for learners and said there had been an on-going issue with administrative paperwork i.e. on some occasions the correct paperwork had not been forwarded to the River Centre for them to be aware of potential problems and also when pupils returned to mainstream settings the paperwork had not followed and enquired if these issues had been addressed.

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The Corporate Director of Education felt that the categorisation of the River Centre previously as a Yellow school was a historic reflection on the status of the performance at the school and this categorisation was questionable. The Governing Body had been strengthened with three LA appointed Governors supporting the work of the Governing Body. Admission arrangements featured as part of the pre-warning notice letter and he felt more engagement from the school was needed, they were not currently engaging in the Additional Learning Needs Panel arrangements. The administrative paperwork was being produced but he felt that the school needed to participate at ALN Panel when learners were being discussed for potential placement within the River Centre and again this was part of the pre-warning notice letter and that needed to be resolved with the school.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion had been in discussions with the Headteacher to identify and resolve any ongoing issues and felt it was important that a member of the senior leadership team was involved in all the discussions so they were aware of pupils that were potentially going to be placed at the River Centre. From September, the service was looking to resume dual placements where pupils were placed in the River Centre for four days a week and then back in their original school for one day a week and this would be part of supporting those young people to be able to go back into mainstream schooling.

The Principal Challenge Advisors pointed out that from the perspective of categorisation, the school's admission arrangements were not part of that discussion and so the EAS were unable to make any judgements in relation to admission arrangements as part of the categorisation discussion. There were aspects of leadership of the school during the pandemic, where there was less clarity around the school's provision for learners. She also pointed out that the school was not under an official warning notice but had received a pre-warning notice letter from the Corporate Director of Education. There were now strong plans in place to support the school and move it forward.

The Member again referred to the administrative paperwork as it was important that the correct paperwork was

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|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <p>administered with the pupil's records so that the school was aware of potential issues before the pupil attended the school. He felt that this issue needed to be improved in order to help pupils go back into mainstream education.</p> <p>The Chair said this had been a problem for a number of years and had hoped that it was improving and that meetings were held to discuss children attending the school. He felt it was especially important for out of county placements going to the River Centre so that the school had all the correct information regarding that pupil.</p> <p>The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion confirmed that meetings were held to discuss the information regarding a child attending the River Centre but unfortunately members of the River Centre staff were not always present and that was an issue they were trying to resolve as that was the opportunity to share the paperwork and discuss any issues. On some occasions the statutory paperwork was provided but the River Centre had requested additional paperwork and this could lead to GDPR issues which they were trying to resolve so that from September there would be no further issues.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that a further report on the River Centre regarding the numbers of learners that go back into mainstream education be prepared. The Corporate Director of Education said that he would ensure that the Improving School reports that were presented to Committee would contain narrative that outlined the progress that was being made around the 'revolving door' turnaround arrangements at the River Centre.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report as provided be accepted.</p> |  |
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**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**Action Sheet**

**Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee – 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021**

| Item | Action to be Taken   | By Whom   | Action Taken   |
|------|--|---|--|
|      | A letter of best wishes to be sent to Alan Williams.   | Democratic Team   | Letter sent 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2021   |
|      | Vacant position for Co-opted Member. Education Directorate to contact the Diocese to seek a nominee.   | Lynn Phillips   | Meeting with Diocese convened in early September and nomination under consideration.   |
| 7    | <b><u>Action Sheet – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Small Grants Summary 2020/21</b>, an explanation to be provided on the variances between the top 3 schools.</li><li>• <b>Pupil Development Grants</b>, further information to be provided on the interventions in different schools and how the grant supports FSM pupil's progress.</li><li>• Link on the Council website to apply for Free School Meals to be checked to ensure that it is easily accessible for parents.</li></ul> | <div>Lynn Phillips</div> <div>Lynn Phillips</div> <div>Claire Gardner</div> | <div>See attached</div> <div>See attached</div> <div>The link for FSM direct payments for newly eligible parents - when live (two weeks prior to each holiday period), is added to the front page of the Council's website, and circulated directly to parents via schools. It is also shared via our social media channels, along with the contact details for the Education Transformation team. Applications for general free school meal eligibility is dealt with</div> |

| Item | Action to be Taken  | By Whom                                       | Action Taken  |
|------|---|---|---|
|      |   |   | via Benefits, information for which can be found via the following section of the website:<br><a href="https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/schools-learning/free-school-meals/">https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/schools-learning/free-school-meals/</a> |
| 9    | <b><u>Education Directorate – Recovery and Renewal Plan</u></b><br><br>School Improvement Guidance framework consultation document to be circulated to Members. | Hayley Edwards-Davies (EAS) / Democratic Team | Document circulated on 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2021   |

SCHOOL GRANTS RECEIVED FROM THE EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE

The various grants received by Blaenau Gwent schools from the Education Achievement Service are distributed by different methods. A list of the main distribution methods are shown below:-

- Wales Government formula;
- Bid or application from schools ie candidates agreed to undertake particular training etc;
- Same lump sum provided to all schools in the Local Authority;
- Same lump sum provided to all schools in a particular sector;
- Same lump sum provided to all schools with Chair of task and finish groups;
- Allocation for schools involved in a particular project;
- Allocation to good schools supporting other schools in the region;
- Allocation to schools receiving support from good schools;
- Regionally agreed formula ie for free school meals growth etc;
- Allocation to school with new Headteacher;
- Allocation to schools where the Headteacher acts as a Leadership Coach;
- Allocation to schools that host assessment centres;

These different distribution methods are the reasons why there are variations in the grant allocations received by schools.

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ACTION SHEET - EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22/06/21

PUPIL DEVELOPMENT GRANT EXPENDITURE 2020/21

| Expenditure Type     | School 1<br>Secondary | School 2<br>Primary<br>Over 200<br>Pupils | School 3<br>Primary<br>Under 200<br>Pupils |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| Teachers             | £23,500               | £0  | £0   |
| Teaching Assistants  | £81,559               | £58,537                                   | £50,458                                    |
| Administrative Staff | £38,953               | £0  | £0   |
| Software Licences    | £3,188                | £0  | £0   |
| Capitation           | £0                    | £8,164                                    | £880                                       |
| Course Fees          | £0                    | £0  | £420                                       |
|                      | £147,200              | £66,700                                   | £51,758                                    |

In the above schools the Pupil Deprivation Grant is being used to fund/part fund teachers, teaching assistants and administrative staff to provide support to pupils who receive free school meals. In addition these schools have purchased resources and training which will improve the support provided to these pupils.

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# Agenda Item 7

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**  
Date of meeting: **14th September 2021**  
Report Subject: **Education Services - Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**  
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) |
| ✓                           | 26.08.21                  | 01.09.21                 |                 |                               | 14.09.21           | 22.09.21            |         |                      |

## 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 processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners, particularly for the Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

## 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 report provides a high-level narrative and the Education Directorate's Self-Evaluation Policy (appendix 1), which sets out the arrangements for effective self-evaluation. The findings from the Self-Evaluation Report (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 areas of work.
- 2.3 A comprehensive data set of 2018-19 school performance, coupled with evaluations of impact and effectiveness of Council based and partnership support feeds into the overall evaluation. It should be noted, however, that there has been a relaxation of reporting performance arrangements by Welsh Government. Therefore, the Education Directorate is unable to report on school performance data and categorisation has been suspended so any information presented in this report is to only be used for internal self-evaluation purposes. The report focusses on the Main SER updates, particularly the way that corporately the Council, Education Directorate and partners are supporting our schools/learners across the school estate. Self-

evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will need to be further updated to reflect the 2020-21 KS4 and Post 16 results during the Autumn term 2021.

- 2.4 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 are captured every Autumn and Spring time as well as via quarterly performance and finance reporting mechanisms. This report details the findings and these are shown in the main SER attached as appendix 2. The Main SER is structured in a way to be aligned to the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework as detailed below.
- 2.5 The three inspection areas of the LGES inspection framework are:  
**Inspection Area 1 – Outcomes**  
Standards and progress overall  
Standards and progress of specific groups  
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning  
**Inspection Area 2 – Education Services and Provision**  
Support for school improvement  
Support for vulnerable learners  
Other education support services  
**Inspection Area 3 – Leadership and Management**  
Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers  
Self-evaluation and improvement planning  
Professional learning  
Safeguarding arrangements  
Use of resources
- 2.6 WG has set a strategic approach to the accountability framework across the education sector in Wales. A comprehensive set of school performance data is used under normal circumstances, coupled with an evaluation of impact and effectiveness of Council/partnership support and this feeds into the overall SER. It should be noted, however, that self-evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will consider progress that is being made, where possible. However, since 2019-20 there needs to be acknowledgement of the national relaxation of performance reporting measures across the education system.
- 2.7 Moreover, it is the high-level points only, which are presented in the narrative in this report shown under Section 6, which is provided to contribute to Member's potential areas for scrutiny. It is also intended to update the Summary Self-Evaluation document for the next report to Members later in the academic year. Estyn's Thematic Review highlighted BG's effective support for schools during the pandemic and an improving relationship with the schools built on a culture of collaboration. Schools continue to respond well to the new ways of working e.g. curriculum reform and blended learning. The Education Recovery and Renewal Action Plan is now produced to provide support for all learners, including wellbeing considerations. There is a thorough impact assessment that covers all key stakeholder work and this will be used to inform the Recovery and Renewal programme of activity and business planning. The Council has also recently received Estyn's Summer letter, this correspondence

is positive overall and provides an update on the progress made against the inspectorate's national recommendations. The Blaenau Gwent Estyn Summer letter is attached as appendix 3 to inform self-evaluation and Member discussions.

### **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.

3.2 **Option 1:** to accept the report as presented, whilst also acknowledging that effective self-evaluation is an on-going process.

3.3 **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.

3.4 This report provides the Committee with important and statutory performance monitoring information, as well as opportunity to identify where progress has been made and where further improvement is required.

### **4. Evidence of how 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 £46.5 million (2021/22) 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 2021/22 was £6,980 which is the 2nd highest in Wales and £593 above the Welsh average of £6,387.

5.1.2 For 2021/22 the funding delegated to schools was 85.4% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of Councils, (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2021/22).

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 £352,000 and a 2% decrease on the previous financial year. 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 can be 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 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 (currently suspended); and,
- the progress schools make towards targets is also monitored on a termly basis (currently suspended apart from for Schools Causing Concern. School safeguarding processes are also closely monitored.

5.2.3 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.

## **5.3 Legal**

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

## **5.4 Human Resources**

There are no direct HR/OD implications associated with this report, however, it is intended to establish a corporate/partnership project group for project management purposes to create collective ownership as well as distributed leadership for self-evaluation across the board. The group will also play a key role in being Estyn inspection ready.

## **6. Performance Information**

### **6.1 Performance**

**(NB.** Some school performance information relates to 2018-2019 and/or 2019-20. Recent inspectorate activity has been used to inform the areas of progress outlined below).

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

- Progress has been made on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on pupil performance and school operations.

- Engagement with schools and school-to-school working has improved significantly.
- Recovery and Renewal processes e.g. impact assessments are well developed with key stakeholders, particularly the schools.
- Strong focus on wellbeing, as recognised in recent inspectorate activity.
- Sound progress has been made on ALN reform and curriculum reform readiness.
- 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;
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

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

- Re-establish baseline data processes to collect data/evidence on school performance via the Recovery and Renewal action planning process.
- Re-evaluate previous areas for improvement to establish whether there has been progress in these areas, whether there needs to be further improvement or whether other areas for further improvement are identified:
  - Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years;
  - Improved attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more-able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
  - Improving school attendance;
  - Progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
- Further improve provision for pupils with additional learning needs;
- Continuing the work with two schools in an Estyn category (ALC and BFS);
- Continuing the work with the four Schools Causing Concern; and,
- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE).

6.1.3 It is acknowledged that the Main SER document is a very lengthy working document, that covers all of the LGES framework. The document provides the context and data to evidence progress and inform self-evaluative commentary. However, it is intended to update the Summary SER document for future self-evaluation reports to enable Members to focus specifically on key priorities and this document is much more succinct. Therefore, it is proposed that Members consider the following areas as lines of enquiry for the scrutiny process, in line with the corporate impact assessment detailed in Appendix 4.

- Recovery and renewal linked to academic progress;
- Support for vulnerable learners;
- ALN reform/Curriculum reform;
- Learner wellbeing; and,
- Collaborative working to support learners, particularly with schools.

6.1.4 The Education Directorate will establish a corporate group to work with services 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 develop a modernised relationship with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

**6.2 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 has been suspended in academic year 2020-21.

**6.3 *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. The Welsh Government will determine when schools will be required to resume reporting on performance data.

**6.4 *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.

**6.5 *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.

**6.6 *Integration (across service areas)***

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

**6.7 *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.

**6.8 *Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

The self-evaluation update and report is drafted largely for monitoring purposes and whilst raising educational standards remains a corporate priority, this report does not include any 'strategic decisions' as defined by the Socio-Economic Duty. Therefore, a Socio-Economic Duty Assessment was not required.



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 business plans are considerate of emerging findings for improvement.

**Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Self-Evaluation Policy
- Appendix 2 – Main SER
- Appendix 3 – Estyn Summer Letter 2021
- Appendix 4 – Education - Corporate Impact Assessment

REF: BGESDSEF.216

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**Blaenau Gwent County Council**

**EDUCATION DIRECTORATE**

**SELF EVALUATION POLICY**

**September 2020**

## **1. Introduction**

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 standard 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).

Self-evaluation activities are undertaken throughout the year and the self-evaluation report (SER) for LGES is updated in October and March of every academic year. Updates are aligned to data release dates from Welsh Government and other time points when data and information becomes available.

At the heart of self-evaluation process are four key questions:

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What do we need to do to improve further?
- How are we going to do it?

The established self-evaluation processes allows both the Council and the Education Directorate to take a critical reflective look at practice, performance and effectiveness. In this way, the Council is corporately able to ensure that its work remains focused on those areas that require improvement and is aligned to the provisions set out in the LGES framework and is aligned to our statutory obligations. The Education Directorate endeavours to ensure that all our children and young people and our educational establishments are well supported to achieve and make good progress in all learning settings across the school estate and partners e.g. Coleg Gwent and the Post 16 Learning Zone.

## **2. Who should be involved?**

All relevant stakeholders should be involved in evaluating the Council's Education Services to ensure its continued effectiveness. To achieve this, a range of approaches are used to ensure that any barriers to participation and engagement

are minimised and where possible removed. Moving forward, this will be verified on an annual basis with additional quality assurance processes undertaken to further secure the engagement of stakeholders in this key process. To support this process, a summary SER has been developed at the end of the self-evaluation cycle. The document will highlight the key areas of progress and areas for further improvement and can be used for elected members, schools and wider stakeholders.

The summary SER document is to be distributed to the key stakeholders to ensure that they understand the organisational context and are able to recognise their important contribution to facilitate further improvement. Going forward, this will be managed through core business activities that are aligned to business as usual activities, where officers will provide greater context e.g. breakfast meetings, member briefing sessions, open evenings, parents and other corporate road show events.

For consistency, the following grading question is used in order to assess the response to the question and is used to inform the judgement as to how well the Education Directorate takes account the view of stakeholders in its improvement planning and the services it offers.

|                |       |          |                   |            |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|

### **3. What should be involved?**

Self-evaluation will involve:

- Asking deep and searching questions about outcomes and progress, quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management;
- Using a range of performance data to inform and guide reflections, including that of matched data to inform judgements about progress for specific groups of learners;
- Using other information such as the Corporate Improvement Plan and family benchmarking data relevant to the particular context;
- Using ongoing reflections and enquiry into practice;
- Considering the needs of children and young people (and the various groups) in context; and,
- Using evidence from a range of sources to inform and support self-evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative.

Officers and commissioned services use a FADE approach to support the collection of this information with individual FADE requirements being set out in a FADE Register. The FADE Register also acts as a deployment list for officers and stakeholders. Deployment of FADEs is kept under review by the Education Directorate's Management Team. The Corporate Director oversees the process and

the compilation of the final SER. To complement this policy a SE Toolkit has been devised comprising aides to support the SE processes.

The toolkit is updated on an annual basis in the summer term based upon the learning from the previous self-evaluation cycle.

#### **4. Why have self-evaluation processes?**

- To provide an evidence base upon which to arrive at judgements about pupil outcomes and progress, quality of provision and the effectiveness of leadership and management of Education Services and its future improvement journey;
- To reflect on what has been done to consistently deepen understanding;
- To recognise and celebrate good practice, and where appropriate, use this to support others in line with the Vision for Education and our agreed approach to a school-led, school to school methodology;
- To ensure that stakeholders understand the context of the organisation and the contribution that they can make to further facilitate improvement; and
- To improve the performance, impact and effectiveness of Education Services and its constituent parts, including commissioned services to further enable officers and schools to make informed decisions for our children and young people.

The SE process is a cyclical one and the high level activities are summarised below, however, it should be noted that the COVID-19 response will have an impact on some aspects of self-evaluation work in 2020-21 academic year, such as suspending school categorisation:

| <b>Date</b>        | <b>What</b>   |
|--------------------|---|
| April to August    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provisional Teacher Assessment analysis</li> <li>• Performance analysis (school LA vulnerable learners and ALN)</li> <li>• Categorisation review</li> <li>• Self-evaluation toolkit updated</li> <li>• FADES completed in line with the register for last academic year</li> <li>• Improvement tracker for year ahead developed</li> <li>• Emerging findings are reflected as actions in Directorate's business plans</li> </ul> |
| September to March | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All business plans completed on a quarterly basis.</li> <li>• Heads of Service challenge sessions via Wider Corporate Leadership Team (WCLT).</li> <li>• Categorisation confirmed.</li> </ul>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning from current self-evaluation process to inform next process.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

MER: Monitoring (gathering the evidence), Evaluation (arriving at judgments) and Review (making changes as a result) are fundamental components to the improvement process and hence self-evaluation (SE). Findings from SE underpin all business, service and team plans.

There are a range of approaches in place to support this which include:

- Regular reporting to Scrutiny and Executive Committee meetings and Full Council.
- Regular reporting to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).
- Termly Estyn monitoring meetings with the Local Authority Link Inspector (LALI) meetings.
- Regular reporting to Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings.
- Individual – evaluation of the effectiveness and the performance of Heads of Service through peer challenge sessions and the quality assurance FADEs and the resultant business improvement plans.
- Departmental – through team meetings, processes to hold the EAS to account such as regular EAS/ other commissioned service quality assurance meetings, DMT, FADE approach, Directorate business plan
- Monitoring by specific officer groups e.g. ALN QA, School Admission Forum, Budget Forum, JCC, HT meetings etc.
- Headteachers – engagement with Headteachers occurs throughout the year and evaluated as part of the agreed approach to self-evaluation. This work is further supplemented by a two yearly questionnaire of the assessment of the quality of the services offered by education, which coupled with the level of buy back of SLA services offered to schools which are arranged on a 3 yearly basis provide an overview of the level of satisfaction. Engagement on the draft summary SER takes place at cluster level and is facilitated by Education DMT representatives in the latter part of the autumn term. This work is concluded with the final SER presented to Headteachers for final comment in the spring term.

## 5. Summary

The purpose of self-evaluation is to secure ongoing improvement across services, particularly to enhance wellbeing and progress in pupil outcomes. Self-evaluation is not done in isolation and will be influenced by stakeholders with a key interest and ability to support the implementation of any identified agreed action.

The provision of high quality and tailored education services, which both support and challenge learners is a complex process frequently requiring highly effective

partnership and collaborative working and the involvement of stakeholders being a fundamental aspect to the Council's now mature approach to SE. The Self-Evaluation Policy is considerate of these complex arrangements and seeks to simplify and share the understanding, process and purpose of effective self-evaluation so that ongoing improvement is secured.

This policy is under review in September 2020 and features in the Council's Scrutiny/Executive forward work programmes. The implementation of this policy will be monitored via regular DMT meetings, through performance coaching sessions with relevant officers and by elected members via the forward work programme.

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Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**Blaenau Gwent**  
County Borough Council

# **EDUCATION DIRECTORATE SELF EVALUATION REPORT**

## **September 2021 (Education Directorate)**

**CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION: LYNN PHILLIPS**

**(Report for the Education Directorate)**



**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
Education Directorate**

**Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for Local Government Education Services**

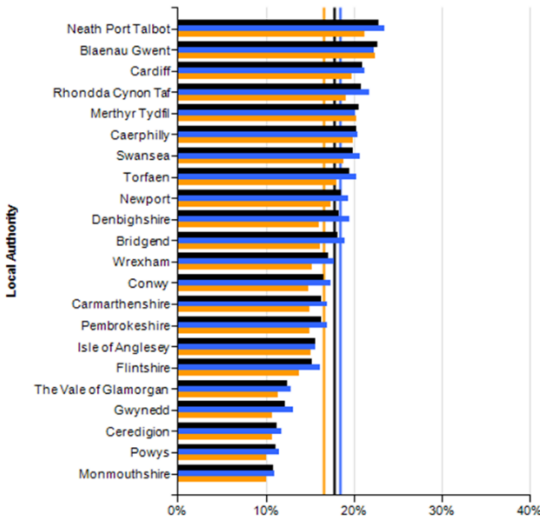
**August 2021 update**

**Contextual information**

**Context**

The levels of pupils eligible for free school meals in Blaenau Gwent were 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. Although eFSM data hasn't been recently produced nationally, eFSM rates have increased across the County Borough in line with the impact of COVID-19 and 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.

1.1 % pupils of statutory school age eligible for FSM 3-year average  
LA comparison - 2018/19



The 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) was published on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019. It ranks small areas according to their relative deprivation levels, across 8 types of deprivation to produce an overall index. It orders areas from the most to least deprived. Scores are calculated for each type of deprivation and combined together in a weighted sum (education has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest weighting at 14%). This gives each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in Wales an overall score that allows them to be ranked. The 2019 (WIMD) recorded the following for Blaenau Gwent;

- **Almost 13% of LSOAs are in the most deprived 10% in Wales.**
- **Over 85% are in the top 50%- the highest proportion in the nation.**

The proportions of pupils on school action (SA) and with SEN statements were below the all-Wales means in 2018-19. This contrasts to the previous year when an above average of pupils at secondary level were categorised on school action plus (SAP) and the combined proportions of pupils on SAP and with SEN statements at secondary level was the highest in Wales. As in the previous year, the rate of pupils indicated as receiving education other than at school (EOTAS) was the lowest (<1%) in Wales during 2018-19 but the rate for those pupils electing for home education was much higher (>9 per 1000 pupils) – an increase of 3 from the previous year.

2.4% (86) primary school pupils and 1.1% (15) secondary school pupils were recorded as having English as an additional language (below being fluent) during 2018-19. Both figures were similar to the previous year and much lower than for Wales as a whole.

Secondary school attendance during 2018-19 was the same as in the previous year (92.9%). This was 0.9% below the all-Wales average.

Unauthorised absences in secondary schools during 2018-19 was 2.2%. This is a 0.4% increase compared to the previous year and 0.5% above the all-Wales average. **WG modelling for attendance vs eFSM during 2018-19 indicated that 3 of the 4 BG secondary schools had positive residuals i.e. had better than predicted attendance figures.**

**Overall, the 2019 WIMD figures and high eFSM eligibility reflect very high levels of deprivation within the authority.** They also indicate the significant challenge required to improve educational outcomes to levels within other similar (but less deprived) LAs and to consistently match the all-Wales averages. **However, 2018-19 performance figures show that Blaenau Gwent has achieved parity with the latter in a number of areas confirming the progress being made within its schools.**

**This socio-economic context is provided as a backdrop to the SER and is not in any way a means to justify low-performance levels, indeed the Education Directorate/Council and key partners are ambitious for Blaenau Gwent's learners and the SER is increasingly demonstrating performance that is above expected levels across a number of areas of the LGES framework.**

## Inspection Area 1 – Outcomes LM-M Lead

### 1.1 Standards and progress overall

#### N.B.

- **There has been a relaxation of reporting performance arrangements by Welsh Government. Therefore, the Education Directorate are unable to report on school performance data for 2020-21.** Categorisation has also been suspended, so any information presented in this report is to only be used for internal self-evaluation purposes. A comprehensive data set of 2018-19 school performance is included, as the last available published data.
- The Statistics Department of the Welsh Government issued the following statement in the statistical bulletin for National Test results published on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2018:  
*'Following consultation on publication of teacher assessment data and National Reading and Numeracy Test data, the **Statistical Release will no longer publish data at a local authority level.** Analysis of the progress measure by local authority was presented in the Statistical Release in previous years. This is no longer published as a result of this change.'* Consequently, the SER does not refer to comparative outcomes for LAs as in previous years. However, there is reference to outcomes and progress for Blaenau Gwent and for its constituent schools.
- The WG statistical bulletin SFR64/2018 included the following statement:  
*'The revised AoL were introduced on a statutory basis from September 2015. This means that the cohort of children that started Reception in September 2015 were the first children to be formally assessed against the revised outcomes at the end of the Foundation Phase in the summer of 2018. **Comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should, therefore, be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis.**'* The bulletin also confirmed that *'the decrease in the FPI between 2017 and 2018 is due to a change in policy and recalibration of the Foundation Phase outcomes.'*
- **All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**

#### Foundation Phase

##### At LA level:

**LO5+ outcomes** fell for all performance indicators except LLCW in 2019 (the latter result only related to the single Welsh medium school in BG). The lowest fall was in PSD. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. Except for LLCW, the results were also below the 2019 national averages with the greatest difference for LLCE. While the Y2 cohorts were different in years 2017-19 and acknowledging the WG advice above, there is indication of a falling trend in LO5+ outcomes during the last 2 years.

**LO6+ outcomes** also fell for all performance indicators except LLCW in 2019. The pattern was similar to that at LO5+ but with smaller changes for each indicator. The pattern again reflects that observed within Wales as a whole. Except for LLCW, the results were also below the 2019 national averages with the greatest difference for PSD.

**3-year performance trend:****At LO5+**

Except for Welsh, both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years. However, the falls were greater for BG in 2019 and so increased the performance gap between the two.

**At LO6+**

With the exception of Welsh, both BG and national averages fell by a similar amount during the last 2 years and generally maintained the performance gap between the two.

**At school level:**

Just over one-half of schools had lower LO5+ results in 2019 than in the previous year. Except for PSD, a majority of schools also had lower LO5+ results than their 2019 targets (as in the previous year). The pattern for LO6+ outcomes is generally similar to those for LO5+. However, almost two-thirds of schools improved LLCE results in 2019 while a similar proportion of schools exceeded their targets in MD. This suggests target setting by teachers is more reliable at this level.

**In summary, the WG ‘health warnings’ regarding 2018 FP results strongly indicate that comparative BG outcomes (at both school and LA level) should be viewed with caution.** Given the changes predicted by the revised curriculum, revised assessment criteria and the decline in national results in 2019, the fall in school results (with the exception of Welsh) and at LA level might be expected. **However, the differences between BG and national figures are small and indicate that LA performance is generally good and particularly so when contextualised for deprivation factors.** School target setting procedures continue to be a concern with a majority of schools attaining lower than target results in 2019. If school results reflect the true ability levels of pupils, then (in these schools) targets have been set too high.

**Key Stage 2****At LA level:**

**L4+ outcomes** fell for all the main performance indicators in 2019. The greatest fall was for Welsh (but based on the single Welsh medium primary school in the LA). Writing outcomes also fell noticeably in 2019. The differences were generally commensurate with the gains made in the previous year making 2019 outcomes similar to those of 2017. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. The results were also below the 2019 national averages with the greatest difference for Welsh and English.

**L5+ outcomes** also fell for all performance indicators except Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language in 2019. As for L4+, the greatest fall was in Welsh. The falls again reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. Except for Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language, outcomes were also below the 2019 national averages with again the greatest differences for Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language and maths.

**3-year performance trend:****At L4+**

Both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators in 2019. However, the falls were greater for BG in 2019 in the core subjects and so increased the performance gap between the two. 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.

**At L5+**

There was a similar pattern to that shown at L4+ for the main core subjects i.e. a decline in BG performance which was a little higher than that observed nationally.

**At school level:**

Just over one-half of schools had lower L4+ results in 2019 than in the previous year. However, a majority of schools had similar or higher L4+ results compared to their 2019 targets. Most schools had lower L5+ outcomes than in 2018 while about one-half of schools had L5+ results below their 2019 targets.

**In summary, BG performance declined in all L4+ and L5+ indicators in 2019. As previously indicated, these falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole indicating that LA performance is generally good and particularly so when contextualised for deprivation factors.** However, the decline in BG outcomes was greater than for Wales as a whole resulting in widening performance gaps in 2019. A majority of schools had similar or higher results compared to their 2019 targets indicating a better correlation between the two than for the FP. Graphs showing the relationship between English & maths performance vs eFSM generally identified the same underperforming schools as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to the quality of learning and pupil standards.

**FP-KS2 value-added performance (2015-19)****At LA level**

Using national data:

- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC language fell to become a little negative and moved below the national figure.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC maths fell a little but remained above the national figure.

Using aggregated pupil level data:

- FP-KS2 value-added progress in language & maths was a little higher than expected but declined a little in both areas with a falling trend for the last 2 years.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in reading was better than expected and improved from the previous year. Progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and similar to that for reading.

**At school level**

- All but 3 schools averaged 2+ NC levels progress in 2019 in both language & maths.
- Progress in reading was better than expected in about two-thirds of mainstream schools
- About one-half of schools improved progress in reading in 2019.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in a majority of schools.
- A minority of schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores.

**In summary, with the exception of NC language, value-added performance was good using either NC levels or national test scores as performance indicators.**

However, progress in NC language was a little lower than expected and below the national figures for 2015-19.

### Key Stage 3

#### At LA level:

#### Core subjects & Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language.

**L5+ outcomes fell for all the main performance indicators in 2019 and particularly for maths and science.** These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. The results were well below the 2019 national averages with the greatest differences for English and maths. However, writing outcomes noticeably improved.

**L6+ outcomes** improved for English and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language in 2019 but fell for maths and science. The greatest improvement was in Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language and the highest fall in science. These falls again reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. However, all results were well below the 2019 national averages with the greatest differences for Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language and science. Literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019 – particularly for writing.

#### Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language

- KS3 learners attended YGG Gwynllyw in neighbouring LA. Figures relate to performance of just BG pupils at Gwynllyw and not to the whole-school.
- L5+, 6+ and 7+ outcomes all improved in 2019 with the former two outcomes higher than the all-Wales means. 90.5% of the 2019 BG cohort also attained the CSI compared to 86.2% doing so nationally.

#### 3-year performance trend:

##### At L5+

Both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators in 2019. However, except for Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language, the falls were greater for BG and so increased the performance gap between the two.

##### At L6+

There was a similar pattern to that shown at L4+ for maths & science i.e. a decline in BG performance which was a little higher than that observed nationally. However, L6+ English results improved in BG with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap. Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language results also improved in 2019 but also did at the national level.

#### Non-core subjects.

**L5+ outcomes** fell in all non-core subjects in 2019 and particularly for art, history and geography. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. As in previous years, MFL results were by far the lowest (as was the case nationally). All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history.

**L6+ outcomes** also fell in a majority of non-core subjects in 2019 and particularly in art, D&T and music. As in previous years, ICT results were the highest and MFL by far the lowest. However, there were modest improvements for MFL & PE. Changes in performance were generally greater than at L5+. All results were lower than the 2018 national means and particularly so for MFL and history.

#### At school level:

#### Core subjects & Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language.

There were only 5 areas of improvement for the main L5+ performance indicators in 2019. Two out of the four secondary schools had improved L5+ English outcomes. One of these also improved Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language outcomes while another attained higher science results. Three schools also improved their L5+ oracy & writing results. However, one school had lower results in each performance indicator. Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English but with falls in maths and science.

The remaining school's results were the opposite with higher results in maths and science but lower outcomes for English. Three schools also improved their L6+ reading & writing results. A majority of schools had results below their 2019 targets at both levels and so questions the accuracy and reliability of internal assessment and target-setting procedures.

#### **Non-core subjects.**

L5+ outcomes fell in all non-core subjects at three of the four schools and in a majority of these at the remaining secondary school.

**In summary, for core subjects & Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language, BG performance was adequate. Outcomes declined in all L5+ indicators in 2019 and in maths and science at L6+. However, L6+ outcomes improved for English and particularly for Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language.** As previously indicated, these falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole but, as for KS2, the decline in BG outcomes were sometimes greater than for Wales as a whole resulting in widening performance gaps in 2019. All results except L5+ Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language were well below the national averages but this might be expected given the high level of deprivation factors within BG and their likely impact upon pupils' learning. At school level, there were some improved outcomes for core subjects but a majority of performance indicators declined with L5+ maths results falling in all 4 secondary schools. However, all but one school had improved L5+ oracy and writing results and all schools improved L6+ writing outcomes. There is a concern regarding assessment reliability at two of the four schools. Results also indicate target setting as generally unreliable in schools at KS3 (as in previous years).

**For non-core subjects**, performance fell in all at L5+ & in all but MFL and PE at L6+. As previously indicated, these falls generally reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. The differences between BG outcomes and national averages were generally large and particularly for MFL and at L6+.

#### **KS2-3 value-added performance (2016-19)**

##### **At LA level**

Using national data:

- KS2-3 value-added progress in NC English and in maths fell considerably and was well below the national figure in both subjects.

Using aggregated pupil level data:

- KS2-3 value-added progress in NC maths was barely adequate and was unsatisfactory in NC English.
- KS2-3 value-added progress in reading was better than expected and improved from the previous year.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.

##### **At school level**

- **3 of the 4 mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English** with 2 of the 4 schools having expected progress for this subject.
- 2 of the 4 schools maintained progress for NC maths and had expected progress for this subject.
- One specific school had the lowest progress in both NC English & maths.
- Progress in reading was better than expected in in all centres.
- 3 of the 4 mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for reading.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools.



- A significant proportion of pupils regressed more than 10 SAS points in both reading and numeracy reasoning. An inordinate number of these pupils were from one centre.
- Some schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores.

**In summary, 2016-19 value-added progress (as measured by NC levels) was barely adequate in maths and unsatisfactory in English. However, progress (as measured using national test results) was good in both reading and numeracy reasoning.** A majority of secondary schools had better than expected progress for these test results. However, a disproportionate number of pupils at one centre were indicated as regressing in both these skill areas. As for KS2, some schools had inconsistencies between NC assessments and national test progress scores and so questions the accuracy & reliability of teacher assessments within these centres.

**Key Stage 4 (narrative based on provisional SSSP data; however, for final KS4 information see page 13.**

**The following points should be noted with regard to the provisional KS4 results:**

- The Welsh Government have stated that attainment across Wales in 2018 was negatively impacted by a change in early entry patterns, a change in type of cohort and the type of exams taken. Consequently, direct comparison between 2017 & 18 results may be unreliable. The same may apply in 2019.
- The 2018 GCSE cohort was smaller than previous years by 4.2% with GCSE exam entries 8.9% lower than in 2017.
- A record number of learners in Year 10 sat GCSEs early in 2017 which resulted in a reduction in the number of exam entries by Year 11 learners in some subjects in 2018. A significant number of Year 11 learners achieved their GCSEs in Summer or November 2017 and have not re-sat examinations in 2018. The reported results indicated the best results for 16 year-olds in 2018, who attained GCSE outcomes in either Y10 or Y11.
- There were 15 new or reformed GCSEs in Wales in 2018 including 6 new GCSE Science qualifications.
- Entries significantly increased for all these new GCSEs in 2018, influenced by changes to school performance measures. Consequently, was difficult to make meaningful comparisons with previous years' results due to these changes. The same may apply in 2019.
- The only changes to the 2018 performance measures related to the inclusion of GCSE science only as part of the Capped Points 9 score, and GCSE science results only reported in the A\*-C science figures. In previous years, BTEC science results were included in these figures.
- The new National Measures were reported on for the first time in 2019 and so, with the exception of the *capped 9 points score*, there are no previous outcomes to compare with.

**At LA level:**

**N.B Y11 cohort numbers in both schools and in the LA as a whole have fallen during the last 2 years. The smaller numbers make statistical comparisons increasingly unreliable.**

- Of the indicators with previous available data, one-half improved in 2019.
- 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 proportions of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A\*/A grades were below the LA targets.

- BG results for the new national measures were all lower than the national means. Most results were also lower than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- However, the Welsh Bacc. result was higher than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- Differences between actual and modelled outcomes for the five 2019 interim measures indicated BG had negative residuals for all indicators except for the Skills Challenge Certificate results. However, BG had higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy & 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 pupils achieving no qualifications doubled to 2.4% in 2019 and was over twice as high as the all-Wales average.

### **3-year performance trend:**

- For the main performance indicators where previous years' data is available, all improved during 2017-19 in spite of a modest fall in the proportion of pupils attaining L2+ and 5 A\*/A grades in 2019. In contrast, some of these indicators declined at national level during the same period.

### **Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language**

- KS4 learners attended YGG Gwynllyw in neighbouring LA. Figures relate to performance of just BG pupils at Gwynllyw and not to the whole-school.
- The proportion attaining A\*-C grades increased in 2019 with an improving trend during the last 2 years. 17% of the 2019 BG cohort attained A\*/A grades in Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language and 48% attained L2+ compared with 43.3% of those learners in BG-based English medium schools.

(Awaiting KS3-4 progress data).

### **Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language**

#### **Full-course results**

- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*/A grades fell in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and was about half the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades also fell in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and was about 10% below the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-G grades fell a little in 2019 but was similar to the all-Wales average.

#### **Short-course results**

- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*/A grades increased in 2019 but was well below the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades also increased in 2019 but remained below the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-G grades fell a little in 2019 but was similar to the all-Wales average.

**Overall**, the short-course results are no longer comparable with national figures due to the relatively low numbers entered across Wales as a whole. 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.

### **At school level:**

There was considerable variation in outcomes between BG schools in 2019:

- Of the indicators with previous available data, over one-half improved in 2019.
- 2 of the 4 mainstream schools improved in at least one-half of these performance indicators in 2019.
- 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 A\*/A grades, English & capped 9 points scores.
- Ebbw Fawr and Tredegar performed best for the new National Measures in 2019.
- L2 maths & 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 (pre-existing) performance indicators in 2019

Provisional data using modelled estimates for 2019 (prepared by EAS) indicated that:

- Most of the residuals indicate 'expected' outcomes for BG schools with residual values close to zero.
- Better than expected outcomes are indicated at Tredegar for Capped 9 points and at Ebbw Fawr for WB skills challenge.

**In summary, BG outcomes improved in a number of important performance indicators in 2019-21. The improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining higher GCSE grades in English and maths is particularly encouraging and may allow pupils to pursue appropriately challenging post-16 courses and improve their life chances.** In addition, outcomes for pre-existing performance indicators (with available data) all improved during 2017-19 in spite of a modest fall in the proportion of pupils attaining L2+ and 5 A\*/A grades in 2019. In contrast, some of these indicators declined at national level during the same period. At school level, there were improvements for most schools and particularly so for Abertillery in 2019. The increase in the proportions of pupils attaining A\*/A grades in English & maths is particularly encouraging. However, the fall L2 maths / numeracy outcomes in most schools is a concern as is the decline in Tredegar's outcomes in 2019.

#### **KS3-4 value-added performance**

At **LA level**, there was a significant difference in progress between English language and maths in 2019 (as in previous years). Progress in English was much higher than for maths (and also higher in each individual school). Overall progress in 2019 was lower than in the previous year for both subjects with falling trends during the last 2 years. The maths results indicated that, on average, little progress was achieved during KS4. The average grade for both English and maths was a D. Progress was improved in each area when 'best of' results were included but the rate for English / literature remained more than twice that for maths / numeracy.

#### **At school level:**

**2017-19 KS3-4 value-added performance for English was barely adequate** with only one of the 4 schools (Tredegar) averaging better than 1 'NC level' progress during the key stage. Outcomes improved when literature outcomes were included with 3 of the 4 mainstream schools achieving more than 1 NC level progress. Average grades also improved when literature results were included with 3 of the 4 mainstream schools achieving an average C grade for this combination. Tredegar achieved the best progress in 2019 while Brynmawr and Ebbw Fawr benefited most by including literature outcomes.

Of the 507 pupils who remained in the school throughout KS4:

- Almost two-thirds progressed 1 or more 'NC levels' in English.
- About 28% progressed 2 or more 'NC levels' (compared to about one-half in 2017 and one-third in 2018).
- About 4% progressed 3 or more 'NC levels' (compared with about 10% in 2017 & 5% in 2018).
- Almost one-third failed to progress at least 1 'NC level' (about one-quarter in 2018).
- About 12% actually regressed one or more levels during KS4.

**2017-19 KS3-4 value-added performance for maths was unsatisfactory** with all schools averaging less than one-half 'NC level' progress during the key stage and with Brynmawr and the River centre having average regression during this period. Progress rates improved when numeracy outcomes were included but, even so, no school achieved expected progress for this period. None of the centres achieved an average C grade for maths but one (Ebbw Fawr) did so when numeracy results were included.

Of the 507 pupils who remained in the school throughout KS4:

- About 43% progressed 1 or more 'NC levels' in maths.
- About 13% progressed 2 or more 'NC levels' (compared to about one-quarter in 2017 and one-fifth in 2018).
- Less than 2% progressed 3 or more 'NC levels' (compared with about 5% in 2018).
- About one-half failed to progress at least 1 'NC level' (about one-third in 2018).
- Nearly one-third actually regressed one or more level during KS4.

**In summary,**

- KS3-4 value-added progress declined for both English and maths during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English.
- Progress improved notably when literature and numeracy outcomes were included in value-added calculations but, even so, progress for maths / numeracy remained unsatisfactory.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19.
- KS3-4 value-added progress declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- Progress improved notably when literature and numeracy outcomes were included in value-added calculations but, even so, progress for maths / numeracy remained unsatisfactory.
- On average, pupils at the River Centre regressed in both English and maths during 2017-19.
- On average, pupils at Abertillery and Brynmawr made no progress or regressed in maths during 2017-19.

**Performance against WG modelled estimates**

WG residuals have been calculated from a regression line produced by plotting (National Measure) performance outcomes against % eFSM for all Welsh secondary schools and then aggregated at LA level. A positive value indicates better than expected performance in relation to eFSM while a negative value indicates lower than expected performance. For BG in 2018-19:

- All of the residuals are negative except for the Welsh Skills Challenge result.
- The maths / numeracy and science residuals are weaker than for language / literacy.
- The capped 9 points score for BG is very close to the modelled figure. This is mainly attributable to BG pupils having better outcomes in their 6 'optional' subjects. For BG pupils, 35% of the capped 9 points were attributable to non-compulsory qualifications compared with just 27% in Wales as a whole.

### **'Thirds' outcomes**

For 2018-19, in each of the interim KS4 measures, the cohort for each school was divided into thirds based on attainment, showing the **average points score** for the upper third, middle third and lower third of the cohort. The proportions of learners in each national third was also been determined (and compared with family schools when data available). The figures for BG secondary schools indicated:

- 3 of the 4 schools have the highest proportion of pupils in the lower attainment third.
- Abertillery and Brynmawr have the highest proportion of pupils in the lower attainment third.
- All 4 schools have the lowest proportion of pupils in the higher attainment third.
- Abertillery and Brynmawr have the lowest proportions of pupils in the higher attainment third.

School outcomes were then compared against modelled outcomes for FSM eligibility levels and compared to averages for other schools in Wales. A positive value indicates better than expected performance in relation to eFSM while a negative value indicate lower than expected performance. The results for BG schools in 2018-19 were:

- About one-half of the residuals were positive.
- 3 of the 4 schools had relatively high positive residuals in the lower attainment third.
- 3 of the 4 schools had negative residuals in the higher attainment third (but all were relatively small).

The results reflect previous findings which indicated that the proportion of BG pupils attaining higher grades (and consequently point scores) was notable lower than the all-Wales average.

### **Summary of KS4 Performance in Blaenau Gwent – 2020-21 (For information only, not to be used for comparative purposes)**

#### **N.B. The information does not contain results relating to the River Centre or Pen-y-Cwm Special School**

- The performance detailed results from the Centre Determined Grade (CDGs) model developed by Welsh Government, has been provided directly from schools. (**N.B.** APS is Average Points Score)
- **One school** - Performance declined in all indicators when compared to the 19-20 Academic Year, except for Best Science, which saw improved performance of +0.2 points.
- **One School** - Performance improved in all indicators, except for Numeracy, which saw a decline of -3.0 points.
- **One school** - Performance improved in all indicators except for Capped 9 and the Skills Challenge which saw declines of -7 points and -0.5 points accordingly.

- **One school** - Performance improved in all indicators except for 5A\*-As and Best of Science which saw a slight decline of -0.2% and -0.2 points accordingly.
- While there is no longer a requirement to report on the L2 Including English/Welsh & Maths indicator, many schools calculate this as a legacy performance measure. Comparison with the 2019 results in this indicator (no results were collected in 2020), demonstrate that there has been significant improvement in performance - +8.9%, +15.9%, +5.1% and +4.7% at the four secondary settings.
- **Of the performance indicators detailed above, 20 of 31 (65%) demonstrated improved performance at KS4.**

#### **Post-16 outcomes (provisional data)**

##### **A & AS level Outcomes**

With the exception of Welsh-medium pupils attending YGG Gwynllyw in a neighbouring LA, most post-16 BG learners attend Coleg Gwent and, in particular, the Learning Zone for post-16 education.

For learners attending the **Learning Zone** during 2019-20:

- Completion rates for vocational courses were lower than for academic ones.
- Attainment rates (where learners completed courses) were similar for vocational and academic courses.
- Success rates (where learner did not complete courses) were higher for academic courses.

For learners following A & AS level courses across **all Coleg Gwent campuses** during 2019-20:

- At **AS level**, the proportions of learners attaining A\*-C and A\*-E grades were a little higher than the all-Wales means. However, the proportion attaining A\*/A grades was noticeably lower than the national figure.
- Outcomes at **A level** were similar to those for AS level. The proportions of learners attaining A\*-C and A\*-E grades were a little higher than the all-Wales means. However, the proportion attaining A\*/A grades was noticeably lower than the national figure.

**N.B. The BG Learning Zone's provisional performance for 2020-21 will be updated during the Autumn term 2021, however, an initial view is that academic 'A' Level KS5 performance remains relatively strong overall as detailed below;**

- A Level Pass Rate 99.1% in 2020-21, which is on the Wales mean average.
- A\*-A grades 31% (29% previous year).
- A\*-C grades 82% (88% year previous).

##### **Learner Destinations (2019-20)**

The **2019-20** Careers Wales surveys for Blaenau Gwent indicated the following destinations for **Y11 learners**:

- Many BG learners (86%) remained in full time education during 2019-20 an increase of 1% from the previous year. The 2019 figure was about 3% lower than the national average.

- Most BG learners opting for full time education returned to college but a few (4%) stayed on at school. These either continued in Pen-y-Cwm SEN school or moved to other LA sixth form schools.
- No BG learners were recorded as continuing in part-time education during the last few years.
- A small proportion of pupils (approx. 4%) undertook WBT during the last 3 years – slightly higher than the Welsh average of 3%.
- A small proportion (approx. 3%) entered employment - again slightly higher than the national average of 2%.
- Number of Year 11 leavers (17 year olds) - 9 individuals (%) were NEET at the time of the 2019-20 survey – 2 less than in the previous year and a lower proportion than for Wales as a whole (1.7%). All individuals are known and where needed supported individually via the Youth Service as part of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework in BG.
- A number of learners (13) failed to respond to the 2019-20 survey – a notable decrease from the previous year. However, this was in part due limited engagement at times due to the pandemic. Careers Wales shares all non-respondent data with the Youth Service, and all individuals are contacted through a visit, and where needed offer support or referral to another appropriate agency.
- Number of 18/19 year olds known to be NEET – No whole authority destination data for 2018 is currently available for years 12 & 13. Careers Wales only report on 18-year-old NEET figures for young people who are in sixth form. DWP and Statistical data provides information for 18 – 24 year olds. Therefore, as Blaenau Gwent has a tertiary model, the only data published by Careers Wales for 18 year olds in Blaenau Gwent specifically is for learners leaving Pen-y-Cwm, an SEN school. Therefore, a partnership approach is used to ensure that referrals are made between organisations when young people either 'wobble', leave provision or need support. Young people are identified through the NEET Practitioner Forum, a sub group of the Raising Aspirations Group, and support is provided. Data is shared between the college, training providers and the Local Authority.
- Work based Learning providers share their data annually and will be available later in the autumn 2020. Coleg Gwent provides more detailed information regarding learner outcomes during 2019-20 to offset the gap in the Careers Wales data.

#### School Categorisation: 2016 to 2019:

**NB: All schools are categorised on an annual basis in accordance with the National Model for Categorisation. The process has taken place at a regional level and historic national moderation has confirmed that the regional process is robust. However, there has been no school categorisation process undertaken since 2019.**

Due to national reporting arrangement Special Schools are not included in these figures. Special schools in Blaenau Gwent include Pen y Cwm (3-19), which is categorised as green and The River Centre (3-16) which is categorised as yellow.

**Blaenau Gwent has a strong position overall on school categorisation and a relatively small number of Schools (4) Causing Concern, with progress being identified in 3 of the SCC schools.**

The proportion of **primary schools** categorised as green (i.e. highly effective) has tripled during the last 3 years with 86% now categorised as either green or yellow (i.e. effective or highly effective schools). The number of amber schools (i.e. in need of improvement) and red schools (i.e. in need of urgent improvement) has fallen with just 2 amber and 1 red school in the last 3 years.

Of the 4 **secondary schools** within the authority, one was categorised as green during the last 3 years but 2 identified as red during the same period and 1 as yellow.

**Overall, the 2018 /19 data confirms that over the last 3 years schools have improved their categorisation profile; many (83%) of schools are now either green or yellow with only two schools in amber and two schools red. This is a significant improvement when compared to the profile in 2014 when only two schools were green. This demonstrates that schools and clusters continue to build their capacity to self-improve and are becoming more resilient.**

### Historical School Categorisation

- **3 primary schools** were categorised as green for 2016, 2017 and 2018 (Beaufort Hill, Deighton & Georgetown) **with 3 primary schools** categorised as green for 2017 and 2018 (All Saints, Glanhowy and St Mary's CIW)
- **2 primary schools** were promoted to green in 2018 (Blaen-y-Cwm and Cwm) and 1 primary school promoted from amber to yellow (St Illtyd's Primary School) and 1 demoted to amber (Brynbach) but none demoted to red. It is anticipated that both amber schools will improve their categorisation status later this year.
- At **secondary level**, Tredegar was categorised as green during the last 3 years and Abertillery red during the same period. Ebbw Fawr was promoted to amber in 2017 and to yellow in 2018, but Brynmawr remains categorised as red. Overall, half of the schools are in need of improvement with 1 of these schools demonstrating significant progress and it is anticipated that this school will move to amber in the next categorisation round.

### School Categorisation January 2019

Overall, National School Categorisation in January 2019 indicated further continued improvement when compared with the previous year in terms of the number of green and yellow schools:

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School).
- 2 schools were categorised as Amber (one school Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary remained as Amber with Brynbach Primary School being categorised from yellow to amber due to the need to provide additional support. Overall this represented a reduction of 2 schools compared to the previous year.)
- **10** schools were categorised as yellow (Coed-y-Garn Primary, Glyncoed Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Sofrydd Primary Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, Ystruth Primary with a further 3 schools moving from Amber to Yellow, including River Centre, EFLC and St Illtyd's Primary)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Deighton Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CIW Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School with a further 3 schools moving from Yellow to Green Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Cwm



Primary and Willowtown Primary). This is again an improvement on the previous year and over a three-year period represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

### **School Categorisation January 2020**

Overall, National School Categorisation in January 2020 indicated further sustained improvement over the period.

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School), as both schools are in an Estyn category.
- **2** schools were categorised as Amber (Glyncoed Primary School and Sofyrdd Primary School.)
- **10** schools were categorised as Yellow (Coed-y-Garn Primary, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, St Illtyd's Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, River Centre with a further 2 schools moving from Amber to Yellow (Brynbach Primary and Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary) and one Deighton Primary School moving from Green to yellow)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Cwm Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary, Willowtown Primary, Ystruth Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School. This is again an improvement and represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and further demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

### **Schools Causing Concern**

**Sofrydd Primary School** was categorised as Amber in January 2020 as the school development plan was identified as unsatisfactory and became part of the regional schools causing concern arrangements. A review identified 12 key recommendations for securing improvement and now informs the work programme that is being progressed. Key to this improvement agenda has been the need to improve governance arrangements, which have continued to be strengthened through the successful recruitment of a new Chair of Governors and Vice Chair of Governors who has continued to work alongside the Acting Executive Headteacher, this relationship has continued to deliver satisfactory progress against the recommendations, however, there is a need for the school improvement service to verify judgements. At the start of the Summer term 2021 a new Acting Headteacher commenced in post.

### **Schools in Receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice**

#### **Abertillery Learning Community (Red)**

The school is currently subject to a LA warning notice to improve and a programme of intervention. However, it is important to note that for 2020 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon. A school leadership review was undertaken in the Autumn term of 2017, which resulted in LA intervention and when the school was inspected in February 2018 it was then placed in the statutory category of requiring significant improvement. A follow-up visit was held in July 2019 and Inspectors noted the progress that had been made in respect of many of the recommendations for action from the

inspection, although noted that many of the improvements are at an early stage of development and as such confirmed that the school will remain within an Estyn category. Following a successful period of leadership continuity by two established Headteachers, the Governing Body successfully recruited a suitably experienced Headteacher to the permanent position of Headteacher and also appointed a new Chair of Governors. Both have been in place now for in excess of 2 years. The ALC revenue budget provisional out-turn is a significantly improved position with a deficit circa £324,000 against the projected deficit of over £1m+.

The Headteacher presented reports in each of the SCC meetings. In the October 2020, December 2020, February 2021 and March 2021 SCC meetings, the Headteacher reported on actions taken against each of the recommendations in the current term, with limitations on making school judgements due to the circumstances of the pandemic. It was acknowledged, however, by the SCC Panel that satisfactory progress is being made, based on the evidence seen and presented and that the Learning Community is in a more stable position, especially from a governance perspective. A broad range of actions were taken in all priority areas and each were reported on in detail in the meetings, including outlining the provision developed in distance and blended learning across the community, with a focus on both learning and wellbeing of pupils, staff and the wider school community. It is expected that Estyn will return to the school in the near future to undertake a monitoring visit.

#### **Brynmawr Foundation (Amber to Yellow and to Red)**

In December 2013 Brynmawr Foundation School was inspected by Estyn and placed in Estyn monitoring; with an adequate judgement for its current performance and prospects for improvement. The school was categorised as Amber in 2014 and 2015. The school was issued with a statutory Warning Notice in 2015 to improve standards, particularly in Maths. Support was put in place and Key Stage 4 outcomes improved significantly in 2016. The Warning Notice was subsequently lifted.

Due to the improvement secured, in 2016 the school was classified as Yellow, having made strong progress against Estyn's recommendations and with improved performance at the end of KS4. However, following an unexpected decline in KS4 performance in 2017, particularly in Maths and the outcome of an EAS review of the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school, the school was categorised as Red in the 2017-18 in the national school's categorisation process and invoked the LA powers of intervention. The school continues to be subject to a LA statutory warning notice to improve and after a period of support, intervention is now in place.

In the autumn term 2019, the school was inspected by Estyn and was placed in a category of Significant Measures. Since that time, governance has significantly improved. However, it is important to note that for 2020 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon. The school's engagement in regional Professional Learning Opportunities and professional networks has been strong. The school has had several changes in senior leadership since the core inspection.

#### **River Centre (Amber to Yellow)**

In the Spring term of 2021, the Council acted promptly and issued a pre-warning letter to the Chair of Governors of the River Centre. The pre-warning notice clearly set out the Council's areas of concern, which were predicated around the school's pupil capacity and admission arrangements for learners. There are also other concerns that have emerged, such as the quality of the School Development Plan that will be covered through the SCC protocols. Following the issuing of the pre-warning notice a number of governors resigned from the governing body, which included both the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors. These vacancies have now been filled and a new Chair of Governors appointed as well as three strong LA Governors being appointed. The Council are considering the next steps in supporting the River Centre who are part of the Learning Network Schools partnership arrangements, in line with regional protocols.

## 2016 – 2019 School Inspections:

NB: Estyn Inspections have been suspended since the start of the pandemic.

### Standards

For KQ1, a majority (67%) of centres were judged as good and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19. No judgements were awarded in the inspection of the non-maintained settings as the cohort was too small to be representative

### Wellbeing

For KQ2, many (83%) centres were judged as good and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19.

### Teaching and Learning experience

For KQ 3, many (75%) educational establishments were judged as good and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19.

### Care support and Guidance

For KQ 4 many (75%) of educational establishments were judged as good with 1 school judged as Excellent and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19.

### Leadership and Management

For KQ 5 many (75%) educational establishments were judged as good with 1 establishment judged as Unsatisfactory.

During the period excellent practice was identified at Blaen-y-Cwm against KQ 4 (care support and guidance) and at Tredegar Comprehensive for the quality indicators of Wellbeing, Learning Environments and Partnership working and at Sofrydd for partnership working.

7 Estyn re inspection monitoring visits/activities took place during the period 2016-19 with a few remaining in a category (1 middle school (14%). This is an improvement on the same time last year where 2 establishments were subject to follow up activity.

**The proportion of educational establishments attaining good judgements has continued to increase during 2016-19 and the proportion receiving adequate or worse judgements has continued to decrease over the same period.** This generally reflects improved standards, teaching and leadership in Blaenau Gwent educational settings. The case study requested from Blaen-y-Cwm identified excellent practice further evidences the improving standard of outcome / provision.

**The school now subject to SI (ALC) continues to receive tailored bespoke support from the LA and EAS.** The most recent Estyn monitoring visit noted that progress has been made against some of the recommendations and a further revisit was anticipated in 2021, but this did not happen as a consequence of Estyn inspection formal visits being suspended. Progress through recommendations forms the core of the Improvement Plan that is in place and the LA appropriately discharges its statutory function for a school causing a concern through the use of powers of intervention through the statutory Schools Causing Concern framework. A forensic approach to progress through the Intervention Panel is taken which encompasses a Council wide support programme at all levels of the organisation to ensure

progress continues to be made at an appropriate pace. **The school in Special Measures (BFS) is now part of the WG initiative of Multi-Agency Support for Schools in Special Measures and a 'one plan' approach has been adopted.** This will replace the SCC arrangements for BFS.

#### **2019-20 Youth Service Outcomes:**

**The Youth Service data demonstrates the 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.**

In 2019/20, 18% (2054 individual young people) of 11-25 year olds voluntarily registered with the Youth Service, a 1% increase since the previous year (increase of 44 young people), placing 10th across Wales and above the Welsh national average (15%), with an additional 15,089 anonymous contacts made with young people (not registered, 8000 more than previous year) through the 11-18 Counselling Service, increased Detached youth work and street based support. 17% places Blaenau Gwent 2nd best across the region (Caerphilly 17%, Monmouthshire 22%, Newport 4% and Torfaen 13%) and 4th across the family mean (Caerphilly 17%, Merthyr 29%, Neath Port Talbot 28% and RCT 26%), same ranking as the previous year.

Out of the 2054 individuals, 41% (847 young people) gained 851 nationally recognised accreditations. The number of young people gaining a qualification significantly increased this year (16% increase), which was not expected as this is not the focus of the work, but is welcome. The outcomes for each programme are now measured on improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either attendance and behaviour, rather than accreditations. It is worth noting that achievements are made voluntarily and during the young people's spare time. However, 41% is the best performing across Wales and significantly higher than the Welsh national average of 10%.

#### **Numbers of individual young people gaining nationally recognised accreditations**

|               | Level achieved at 31 August |            |            |            |                               |  |                      | Total<br>2017-18 |
|---------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------------------------|--|----------------------|------------------|
|               | Entry<br>Level              | Level<br>1 | Level<br>2 | Level<br>3 | Duke of<br>Edinburgh<br>Award | Any other<br>National<br>Accreditation | Total<br>2018-<br>19 |                  |
|               | 1                           | 2          | 3          | 4          | 5                             | 6                                      | 7                    |                  |
| <b>Gender</b> |                             |            |            |            |                               |  |                      |                  |
| Male          | 4                           | 144        | 18         | 0          | 21                            | 22                                     | 209                  | 144              |
| Female        | 95                          | 255        | 210        | 1          | 15                            | 62                                     | 638                  | 157              |
| Total         | 99                          | 399        | 228        | 1          | 36                            | 84                                     | 847                  | 301              |

### Numbers of nationally recognised accreditations gained by young people

|               | Level achieved at 31 August |         |         |         |                         |                                  |               |               |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|               | Entry Level                 | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Duke of Edinburgh Award | Any other National Accreditation | Total 2018-19 | Total 2017-18 |
|               | 1                           | 2       | 3       | 4       | 5                       | 6                                | 7             |               |
| <b>Gender</b> |                             |         |         |         |                         |                                  |               |               |
| Male          | 4                           | 144     | 18      | 0       | 21                      | 22                               | 209           | 234           |
| Female        | 99                          | 255     | 210     | 1       | 15                      | 62                               | 642           | 222           |
| Total         | 103                         | 399     | 228     | 1       | 36                      | 84                               | 851           | 456           |

Out of the 847 young people gaining accreditations, 209 males gained 209 accreditations and 638 females gained 642 accreditations. This is a significant increase on last year's figures and reflects some of the work with the wellbeing groups established in the school year groups at the beginning of the school year.

Of those supported by the Youth Service, 79% (1704 young people) were aged 11-16 and 13% (350 young people) were aged 17-25 years old. This reflects the funding focus on school age young people and transition support for year 11 young people. These figures are recorded through the work with young people in the following projects: Inspire 2 Achieve, Inspire 2 Work, Health and Wellbeing, Duke of Edinburgh, Positive Futures, Young Ambassadors, the BYG Editorial Group, Youth Clubs and Young Reps Volunteering programme. The numbers of 17-25 year olds increased this year due to the support accessed and provided during the pandemic.

In addition, in 2018/19 the Youth Service recorded supporting young people *anonymously* (not registered) through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events. The Youth Service had 15089 anonymous contacts with young people (one contact is between 1-3 hours).

The Youth Service also facilitates the strategic Raising Aspirations Group (RAG) and two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships, sub groups of the RAG, which co-ordinates the Early Identification process, allocation of lead worker role, and robust tracking and monitoring of transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.

As a result of this co-ordinated approach with partners, there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET, reaching 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019-20. This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the lowest record to date. 1.5% is lower than the Welsh average of 1.7%, ranking BG as joint 10<sup>th</sup> with Swansea, 3<sup>rd</sup> across our family mean and 2<sup>nd</sup> across the region.

### Welsh Language in the Early Years in Blaenau Gwent

Cylch Meithrin Gwdihw (Brynithel) have recently extended their services to become an early year's education provider. The transition rate to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg via Gwdihw has been low over the last few years, due in part to parental concern in relation to children accessing home to school transport at age 3. However, the aforementioned development has the potential to positively impact upon transition, as the children will be able to access their early year's education at Cylch Meithrin Gwdihw (Brynithel) in the short-term, prior to transitioning into Welsh-medium primary school.

As part of their national programme 'Set Up and Succeed' (SAS) programme, Mudiad Meithrin have established a Ti a Fi in Tredegar which is seeing growing numbers of families accessing this provision. They are also planning to open in new Cylch Meithrin in the Tredegar area in the autumn 2021. In addition, Buds to Blossoms in Beaufort are piloting Cylch Meithrin sessions (through the medium of Welsh) on a daily basis, with the support via Welsh Language programme Croesi'r Bont, which seeks to introduce Welsh language immersion and secure linguistic continuity via effective transition into Welsh-medium primary provision.

Mudiad Meithrin and Cymraeg y Blant have also established effective parent engagement programmes within Blaenau Gwent, details of which can be found in the table below:

|                  | Number of Group Sessions | Number of Parents Attending | Session Details   |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>2018-2019</b> | 65                       | 332                         | In person - Welsh rhyme time & sign, baby massage and baby yoga (Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Aberbeeg, Blaina) |
| <b>2019-2020</b> | 124                      | 750                         | In person - Welsh rhyme time & sign, baby massage and baby yoga (Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Aberbeeg, Blaina) |
| <b>June 2020</b> | 214                      | 296                         | Via online engagement Me and my baby, Cuppa & Chat Cymraeg, Baby Massage, Welsh rhyme time & Sign       |

In line with the Welsh Government Childcare Grant, Welsh Medium Grant and Band B 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Projects, the Council plan to open 2 new Welsh-medium childcare settings in the autumn-term 2023, as follows:

- A full day care provision in the Ebbw Fawr Valley, which is programmed for development on the new build Glyncoed Primary School site.
- A full day care provision in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley, which will be co-located with the new Welsh Medium Seedling School on the Chartist Way site.

Numbers of pupils on roll, along with those applying for a place at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg continues to increase, with a positive trend noted over the last 4 years in relation to both nursery and reception uptake. Transition rates in Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg via Helyg Buchan continue to be high, with between 60 and 70% of children progressing into Welsh-medium primary education. Work is ongoing to support a further increase via the Welsh Education Forum and associated promotion strategy.

**2019 Welsh Language Youth Service Outcomes.** The Youth Service works in partnership with the Urdd to provide welsh language opportunities to young people. Over the last year, 80 young people accessed support and activities through the medium of welsh. A Welsh language youth worker (funded by the Youth Service, employed by the Urdd) delivered issue based workshops, accredited programmes and opportunities through the Urdd, through the medium of Welsh. Activity included:

1 x weekly after school transition club from year 6 welsh medium provision into year 7 welsh medium provision (20 young people)

2 x lunch time clubs within welsh medium secondary provision (Gwynllyw)

3 x weekly after school welsh clubs across secondary schools (30 young people)

Additionally, stronger links were developed with Coleg Gwent campus, Blaenau Gwent young people from the Welsh Language Youth Forum within Gwynllyw was supported to feed into Blaenau Gwent wider youth forum, 10 young people were provided with volunteering opportunities for young leaders at Urdd residential and Youth Service staff were given training in Welsh language and culture.

### 1.1 Standards and progress overall - Areas where good progress has been made:

**N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**

#### Foundation Phase

Given the WG guidance that *comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should ..... be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis*, it would be unwise to interpret and compare 2018 & 19 results in relation to earlier years. However, good features identified from the 2019 results include:

- 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.
- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in language & maths was a little higher than expected in 2019.
- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in reading & numeracy reasoning was better than expected and improved from the previous year.
- All but 3 schools averaged 2+ NC levels progress in 2019 in both language & maths.
- Progress in reading was better than expected in about two-thirds of mainstream schools & about one-half of schools improved progress in reading in 2019.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in a majority of schools.
- A 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

- L5+ writing outcomes improved noticeably in 2019.
- L6+ outcomes improved for English and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language during 2017-19 and particularly for 2019.
- LA-level literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019.
- At LA-level there were modest improvements for MFL & PE in 2019
- Two out of the four schools had improved L5+ English outcomes & three schools improved their L5+oracy & writing results.
- Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English & three schools improved their L6+ reading & writing results.
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in reading was better than expected and improved from the previous year.
- LA-level progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.
- 3 of the 4 mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English
- Progress in reading was better than expected in in all centres while 3 of the 4 maintained or improved progress for reading.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools.

### Key Stage 4

- Of the indicators with previous available data, one-half improved in 2019.
- 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.
- BG had higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy & 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.
- 2 of the 4 mainstream schools improved in at least one-half of the pre-existing performance indicators in 2019.
- 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 A\*/A grades in English & capped 9 points scores.
- Most residuals indicate 'expected' outcomes for BG schools.
- There were better than expected outcomes at Tredegar for Capped 9 points and at Ebbw Fawr for WB skills challenge.
- For WG modelled estimates, the capped 9 points score for BG is very close to the modelled figure.
- For WG modelled estimates for 'thirds' outcomes, about one-half of the residuals were positive and 3 of the 4 schools had relatively high positive residuals in the lower attainment third.

### Post-16

- At AS level, the proportions of learners attaining A\*-C and A\*-E grades were a little higher than the all-Wales means in 2019.



- At A level, the proportions of learners attaining A\*-C and A\*-E grades were 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.
- Coleg Gwent provided more detailed information regarding learner outcomes during 2018-19.
- Coleg Gwent now provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals (initiated October 2019).

**Current Youth Service outcomes / achievements include:**

- In 2018/19, 2010 (17%) of 11-25 year olds were registered as Reach and supported by the Youth Service. This is higher than the all-Wales mean (16%).
- Out of the 2010 individuals, 301 (15%) gained 456 nationally recognised accreditations. The outcomes for each programme are now measured on improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either attendance and behaviour, rather than just accreditation.
- In addition, the Youth Service recorded 7298 anonymous contacts with young people during 2018-19 through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events. (1000 more than previous year)
- The Youth Service also facilitates the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) through a strategic multi-agency partnership called the Raising Aspirations Group (RAG) and two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships. The RAG oversees the YEP Framework, co-ordinates the Early Identification Tool and through the practitioner forums brokers support and the lead worker role, providing robust tracking and monitoring of young people from year 2 to year 11 and transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.
- Current data indicates 1.5% of BG learners being NEET. The all Wales figure has not yet been published.
- Coleg Gwent provides monthly data which indicate withdrawals from college courses
- Careers Wales provides monthly data against the 5 tiered system including all those in WBL for 16 – 18 year olds.

**1.1 Standards and Progress overall: Areas requiring improvement:**

- **N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**
- **Foundation Phase**
- Given the WG guidance that *comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should ..... be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis*, it would be unwise to interpret and compare 2018 & 19 results in relation to earlier years. However, areas requiring improvement identified from the 2019 results include:
  - Except for LLCW, both BG and the national averages at LO5+ fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years. However, the falls were greater for BG in 2019 and so increased the performance gap between the two.
  - 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**

- L4+ & L5+ outcomes fell for all the main performance indicators in 2019. The differences were generally commensurate with the gains made in the previous year making 2019 outcomes similar to those of 2017. However, the falls in outcomes were generally greater for BG than for Wales in 2019 and so increased the performance gap between the two.
- 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) in 2019 were identified as 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 fell to become a little negative and 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 for all the main performance indicators in 2019 and particularly for maths and science. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. However, the falls were greater for BG and so increased the performance gap between the two.
- L5+ outcomes fell in all non-core subjects in 2019 and particularly for art, history and geography. All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history.
- 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 in 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**

- **N.B. the new National Measures were reported on for the first time in 2019 and so, with the exception of the *capped 9 points score*, there are no previous outcomes for these measures to compare with.**
- BG results for the new National measures were all lower than the national means. Most results were also lower than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- The proportion of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A\*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA targets.
- L2 maths & 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 during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19.
- KS3-4 value-added progress declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- 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 remain relatively strong.
- Embed process initiated in October 2019 where Coleg Gwent provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals.

## 1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups

### Gender Differences 2019

#### Foundation Phase

- Girls' LO5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator.
- LO5+ gender differences increased for LLCE and PSD in 2019 but fell for LLCW. Gender gaps for MD and the FPI were similar to the previous year.
- Except for LLCW, 2019 LO5+ gender differences were higher than the all-Wales means but only noticeably so for LLCE.
- Girls' LO6+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator except MD.
- LO6+ gender differences were all lower than in the previous year. This was attributable to some improvement in boys' outcomes but mainly to lower girls' results.
- All LO6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means and particularly so for LLCE.

#### Key Stage 2

- Girls' L4+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator and particularly in Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language.
- Except for Welsh 1<sup>st</sup> language, L4+ gender differences were generally similar to the previous year.
- L4+ gender differences varied between indicators but all were lower than the all-Wales means.

- Girls' L5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator.
- Except for Welsh 1st language, L5+ gender differences were lower than in the previous year. This was mainly attributable to lower girls' outcomes in 2019.
- However, all L5+ gender differences were higher than the 2019 all-Wales means.

### FP-KS2 Progress

744 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS2 during 2015-19 (726 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 52% were boys (about 5% higher than in the previous year).

- Girls had a higher mean NC level in both language & maths and particularly in language.
- **Progress scores for both boys & girls (as NC levels) were higher than expected i.e. greater than 2 NC levels progress during KS2.**
- **There was little difference in the mean NC progress scores between boys & girls indicating that, on average, boys had lower FP outcomes in 2015 but made similar NC progress to girls during KS2.**
- **Girls had a higher mean SAS in reading but lower in numeracy reasoning.**
- Mean progress scores in reading & numeracy reasoning varied but were as expected for boys & girls in both skill areas.
- **Boys made greater progress in both reading and numeracy reasoning within KS2.**

### Key Stage 3

#### Core subjects & CSI

- Girls' L5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in each core subject and for the CSI.
- **L5+ gender differences were lower than for the previous year in each of the main performance indicators. This was mainly attributable to lower girls' outcomes in 2019.**
- L5+ gender differences varied. The difference was similar to all-Wales mean for science but higher than this for the other indicators and particularly in maths.
- **Girls' L6+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator and particularly for English.**
- L6+ gender differences were lower than for the previous year in all core subjects. This was mainly attributable to lower girls' outcomes for maths & science in 2019.
- **L6+ gender differences varied but were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject.**

#### Non-core subjects

- Girls' L5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in each non-core subject and particularly for art, MFL and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language.
- L5+ gender differences varied but were higher than in the previous year for about one-half of subjects.
- L5+ gender differences were higher than the all-Wales means in a majority of subjects and particularly in art, ICT and MFL.
- Girls' L6+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every subject except PE in 2019 and particularly for art and D&T (as in the previous year).
- L6+ gender differences varied but were lower than in the previous year for a majority of subjects
- L6+ gender differences were higher than the all-Wales means in a majority of subjects but lower for ICT, MFL and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language.

### KS2-3 Progress

524 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS3 during 2016-19 (505 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 50.4% were boys (similar to the previous year).

- Girls had a higher mean NC level in both English & maths.
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) were lower than expected except for girls' maths i.e. below 1.5 NC levels progress during KS3.**
- Boys' mean NC progress scores were lower than for the girls in both English & maths.
- **On average, boys made less NC progress than girls in both subjects during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.**
- Girls had a higher mean SAS in reading but lower in numeracy reasoning.
- **Mean progress scores in reading & numeracy reasoning were better than expected for both boys & girls.**
- **Girls made greater progress in reading but less progress in numeracy reasoning.**
- **On average, boys had considerably lower reading scores in 2016, made less progress than girls during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.**
- **On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and reversed the gender gap.**

### Key Stage 4

- **Girls had higher outcomes in each of the reported main performance indicators in 2019 (and in previous years for pre-existing indicators).**
- Gender differences in BG were higher than the national means for most performance indicators in 2019.
- **Overall, there was little change in boys' outcomes in any of the pre-existing main performance indicators. 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.**

### KS3-4 Progress

For **English language**:

- Average progress rates for boys and girls were similar during 2017-19 years but a little below expected.
- The average progress made by boys was consistent during the last 3 years.
- **The average progress made by girls fell during the last 2 years and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- **Progress rates and average GCSE grades for both boys and girls improved when literature outcomes were included.**

For **maths**,

- Average progress rates for boys and girls were similar during 2017-19 years but well below expected.
- **Both boys' and girls' average progress rates fell during the last 2 years and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- Progress rates for both boys and girls improved when literature outcomes were included but not enough to improve average GCSE grades.

**Overall, the indicated progress rates for boys and girls in English language / literacy 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.**

## Performance and Progress of eFSM pupils 2019

### Foundation Phase

- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in nearly all performance indicators in 2019 but the differences were lower than the national means. However, the differences generally increased during 2017-19.
- Given the WG advice that *'comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should ... be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis'*, it would be unwise to attempt to determine any definite trend or pattern from the data or make conclusions based on these. However, eFSM outcomes still (proportionately) trail those of non-eFSM pupils in all FP main performance indicators and improving eFSM outcomes remains a priority for both schools and the LA.

### Key Stage 2

- 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 the differences increased during 2017-19.**

### FP-KS2 Progress

744 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS2 during 2015-19 (726 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 21% were eFSM pupils.

- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean NC level than eFSM pupils in language & maths.
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) for eFSM & non eFSM pupils were similar to or higher than expected i.e. 2 NC levels progress during KS2.**
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) were only a little higher for non-eFSM pupils.**
- **On average, eFSM pupils had lower FP outcomes in 2015 and made a little less NC progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2.**
- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean SAS in numeracy reasoning and particularly in reading.
- Mean progress scores varied but were lower and a little below expected for eFSM pupils in both reading & numeracy reasoning.
- **Non-eFSM pupils made greater progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning.**
- **On average, eFSM pupils had considerably lower reading & numeracy reasoning scores in 2015, made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2 and so widened the performance gap.**

### Key Stage 3

- 2019 non-eFSM L5+ and L6+ outcomes were higher than for eFSM in each performance indicator.
- 2019 L5+ gender differences varied compared with those in the previous years. The gaps narrowed for English and the CSI, was similar for maths but widened for science. However, all differences were below the 2018 national means.
- 2019 L6+ differences were similar to or higher than in the previous year in each core subject. However, all differences were below the 2018 national means.

### KS2-3 Progress

524 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS3 during 2016-19 (505 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 23% were eFSM pupils.

- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean NC level in both skill areas.
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) were lower than expected for eFSM & non-eFSM pupils i.e. 1.5 NC levels progress during KS3.**
- eFSM pupils' mean progress scores were a little lower than for non-eFSM pupils in both English & maths.

- **On average, non-eFSM pupils had lower KS2 outcomes in 2016 and made a little less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3.**
- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean SAS in both reading and numeracy reasoning.
- Mean progress scores **were better than expected for both eFSM and non-eFSM pupils.**
- Non-eFSM pupils made greater progress in reading but less progress in numeracy reasoning.
- **On average, eFSM pupils had considerably lower reading scores in 2016 and made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so widened the performance gap.**
- **On average, eFSM pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores in 2016 but made greater progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so narrowed the performance gap.**

#### Key Stage 4

- Differences between eFSM and non-eFSM outcomes for BG pupils in 2019 were lower than the national means in each reported main performance indicators i.e. the performance gaps were consistently smaller. This was the case in previous years for pre-existing indicators.
- **Given the high levels of deprivation and disadvantage within the authority, eFSM pupils achieved good outcomes for most KS4 performance indicators in 2019.**

#### KS3-4 Progress

##### For English language:

- Average progress rates for eFSM and non-eFSM pupils were similar during 2017-19 years but a little below expected.
- **The average progress made by eFSM pupils improved during the last 2 years.**
- **The average progress made by non-eFSM pupils fell during the last 2 years and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- **Progress rates and average GCSE grades for both boys and girls improved when literature outcomes were included.**

##### For maths,

- The average progress rate for eFSM pupils was higher than that for non-eFSM pupils during 2017-19 years but well below expected.
- **The average progress made by eFSM pupils improved during the last 2 years while that for non-eFSM pupils declined and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- Progress rates for both eFSM and non-eFSM pupils improved when numeracy outcomes were included but not enough to improve average GCSE grades.

**Overall, the indicated progress rates for eFSM and non-eFSM pupils in English language / literacy are just about adequate while those for maths / numeracy are unsatisfactory. Progress for eFSM pupils during 2017-19 was similar to or better than that for non-eFSM pupils. The weak progress in maths is a main contributing factor to low school and LA performance at GCSE.**

#### Performance and Progress of More-Able Pupils 2019

**N.B. BG results should be viewed with due consideration of a fall in all main performance indicators at FP & KS2 at national level in 2019.**

**In addition, the DoE have stated that ‘the decrease in the FPI between 2017 and 2018 is due to a change in policy and recalibration of the Foundation Phase outcomes.’ This statement is applicable to school, LA and national results and so lower FP performance for BG during 2018 & 19 was to be expected.**

**At FP**

- 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
- Except for LLCW, the falls in BG and national averages were similar and so generally maintaining the performance gap between the two during the last 3 years.
- About 4% fewer BG pupils attained LO6+ in LLCE and about 3% fewer in MD compared to Wales in 2019.
- About 5% fewer Y2 pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 7% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

**At KS2**

- Both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators in 2019. However, except for Welsh (attributable to just one Welsh medium school in BG) & Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language, the falls were greater for BG and so increased the performance gap between the two.
- 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.

**FP-KS2 Progress**

- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher than expected for MAT pupils i.e. >2 NC levels during KS2.**
- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher for MAT (L5+) pupils than for those attaining L4 or lower.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was better than expected for MAT (SAS >115) pupils.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores.**

**At KS3**

- L6+ outcomes in maths & particularly science fell during the last 3 years and decreased a little more than that observed nationally. However, L6+ English results improved in BG for 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap.
- Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language results also improved in 2019 but they also did at national level.
- 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.
- About 3% fewer BG pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 5% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

**KS2-3 Progress**

- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils i.e. >1.5 NC levels.**
- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils than for those attaining L5 or lower.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was better than expected for MAT (SAS >115) pupils.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores.**



**Overall, MAT pupils not only attain higher NC levels and national test scores, they also progress at a faster rate than those with lower outcomes at the previous key stage. This indicates that differences in outcomes between low and high attaining pupils increase as they progress through the key stages and that attainment at both FP and KS2 are significant determinants of future progress.**

#### **At KS4**

The proportion of pupils attaining 5 A\*/A grades fell by about 2% in 2019 and was well below the national mean (which fell by a similar amount in 2019 – see previous comments).

**Overall, except for a few indicators at KS3, higher level outcomes fell for in most indicators at each key stage in 2019 and the proportions of pupils attaining higher level outcomes / grades were consistently lower than the all-Wales averages. However, progress in both NC assessments and National test results was, on average, better or much better than expected at both KS2 & 3. The differences in these finding may be explained in that improvements at each key stage are essentially determined by pupil outcomes at the previous NC level. The generally low ability levels BG pupils on entry to schools and the relatively small proportions of pupils with higher ability levels has effectively determined higher level outcomes at subsequent key stages. Consequently, the LA needs to be a focus on raising standards within early years.**

#### **KS3-4 Progress**

For **English language:**

- The average progress rate MAT pupils was much higher than for the Y11 cohort as a whole and well above expected progress.
- Adding literature outcomes improved the overall progress rate to a greater extent than for just MAT pupils

For **Maths,**

- The average progress rate MAT pupils was much higher than for the Y11 cohort as a whole and well above expected progress.
- Adding numeracy outcomes improved the overall progress rates of both MAT pupils and the whole cohort to similar extents.

**Overall, 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. Overall maths progress at KS4 has been consistently weak in Blaenau Gwent but this particular group of pupils has progressed at a much higher level and so contradicts this trend. This may suggest that the quality of teaching and learning in maths is better for MAT pupils and that other pupils might benefit from a revised deployment of more effective teachers.**

**The number of pupils achieving A\*/A grades was fairly evenly distributed across mainstream schools. Tredegar had most (13) and Brynmawr least (5).**

#### **In summary:**

The Mean NC progress in English and in maths from F Phase to end of KS 2 was higher for MAT (L5+) pupils than for those attaining L4 or lower i.e. 2.4 as opposed to 1.9

The Mean progress in NT reading and in numeracy reasoning from F Phase to end of KS 2 was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

In KS3 L6+ English results improved in pupils BG for 2019 (against a national backdrop of decline) with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap.

The Mean progress in English and in maths between KS 2 and KS 3 was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils than for those attaining L5 or lower i.e. 1.7 and 1.8 as opposed to 0.9 for lower levels

The Mean progress between KS 2 and KS 3 in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

**Overall**, MAT pupils not only attain higher NC levels and national test scores, **they also progress at a faster rate than those with lower outcomes at the previous key stage**. This indicates that differences in outcomes between low and high attaining **pupils increase as they progress through the key stages** and that **attainment at both FP and KS2 are significant determinants of future progress**. The quality of support to ensure good progress is of reasonable quality and effectiveness, **however, the quality of support to improve early outcomes in the Foundation Phase needs to improve**.

Consequently, a key priority is to ensure that support is effective at maximising attainment in the Early Years and on **improving pupils' attainment at the earliest stage possible** i.e. within the FP or prior to this. Work with schools and the EAS is underway to start to address this but this remains a key area for improvement.

### Performance and Progress of Pupils with SEN 2019

#### Foundation Phase

There were 148 pupils with SEN recorded in the 2019 Y2 cohort (87 SA, 52 SA+ & 7 with SEN statements. This comprised about **one-fifth of the whole 2019 cohort**.

- About one-half of **pupils on SA** attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD with a higher proportion reaching this level in PSD. All results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- About one-third of **pupils on SA+** attained LO5+ in LLCE with just under one-half doing so in MD & PSD. All results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- Almost one-third of **statemented pupils** attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD but with a lower proportion reaching this level in PSD. The former results were higher than the 2018 national means but that for PSD a little below this figure.

**Overall, BG pupils on SA and SA+ had lower outcomes than their national peers (in 2018) whereas statemented pupils had better than average results in both LLCE and MD.**

#### Key Stage 2

744 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS2 (726 with NT data) and are included in the following data. About 10% were on SA, 10% on SA+ and 3% statemented.

- 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.
- The proportions of pupils attaining L4 or better in maths also fell for all SEN groups in 2018 and were below the 2018 national means except for statemented pupil outcomes.
- All SEN groups had a lower mean NC level than non-SEN pupils in language and in maths. The means for SA and SA+ pupils were similar but it was lower for statemented pupils.  
All SEN groups had a lower mean SAS than non-SEN pupils in reading & numeracy reasoning. The means for SA & SA+ pupils were similar but higher for those with statements.

**FP-KS2 Progress****NC progress**

- NC results for language and for maths indicate that, on average, SEN pupils had lower FP outcomes in 2015 and, except for SA pupils, made less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS2.

**National Test progress**

- NT results indicate that, on average, SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and made much less progress during KS2.
- The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading scores in 2015 but made, on average, very good progress during KS2.
- NT results indicate that, on average, SA pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and regressed in this skill area during KS2.
- The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading scores in 2015 but made slight progress during KS2.

**Key Stage 3**

523 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS3 (505 with NT data) and are included in the following data. About 9% were on SA, 8% on SA+ and 5% statemented.

- The proportions of pupils attaining L5 or better in language in 2019 was similar to the previous year for SA and SAP pupils but increased for those with statements. Except for statemented pupils, the results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- The proportions of pupils attaining L5 or better in maths in 2019 varied. It was similar to the previous year for SA pupils, fell for SAP pupils but increased for statemented pupils. Except for statemented pupils, the results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- All SEN groups had a lower mean NC level than non-SEN pupils in English and in maths. SA pupils had the highest score and statemented pupils the lowest.
- All SEN groups had a lower mean SAS than non-SEN pupils in reading and in numeracy reasoning.
- The reading means for SA & SA+ pupils were similar but higher for those with statements. The numeracy reasoning means for SA & statemented pupils were similar but lower for SA+ pupils.

**KS2-3 Progress****NC progress**

- NC results for **English & for maths** indicate that, on average, SEN pupils had lower KS2 outcomes in 2016 and made less progress than non-SEN pupils during **KS3 and particularly so for SA+ pupils in maths.**

**National Test Progress**

- The results indicate that, on average, SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores in 2016 and made much less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS3.

- The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading scores in 2015 but made, on average, very good progress during KS3. The pattern is similar to that seen for reading during KS2.
- The results indicate that, on average, SA and SA+ pupils had lower scores in 2016 and made less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS2 and particularly so for SA+ pupils.
- The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading and numeracy reasoning scores in 2016 but made, on average, very good progress during KS3.

#### **Key Stage 4**

The proportions of pupils attaining A\*-G grades improved for all SEN categories in maths and in all except SA+ in English language in 2019.

**The proportions of pupils attaining A\*-C grades improved substantially for all SEN categories in both English language and maths in 2019. Overall SEN results were only a little below those for mainstream pupils.**

#### **KS3-4 progress**

There were 507 pupils in the 2017-19 cohort (28 / 5.5% on SA; 70; 13.8% on SA+; 34; 6.7% with SEN statements). Only those pupils with recorded outcomes at both KS3 and 4 were included in calculations.

#### **For English language:**

- The average progress rate for statemented pupils was similar to non-SEN pupils during 2017-19 years but lower for SA pupils. All were below expected values.
- The average progress rate for SA+ pupils was higher than for non-SEN pupils during 2017-19 and a little higher than expected.
- The average progress made by SA+ and statemented pupils improved compared to the previous year but was similar to this for SA pupils.
- Progress rates and average GCSE grades improved when literature outcomes were included.

#### **For Maths,**

- The average progress rate for SA pupils was similar to that for non-SEN pupils during 2017-19 years but well below expected.
- On average, both SA+ and statemented pupils made no progress in Maths during the KS3.
- However, all SEN groups improved their average progression rates compared to 2016-18
- Progress rates for all SEN groups improved noticeably when numeracy outcomes were included but not enough to improve average GCSE grades except for SA+ pupils.

Overall, the proportions of SEN pupils attaining A\*-C and A\*-G grades were relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils. Progress rates for SEN pupils were also generally similar to non-SEN pupils. These were adequate in English / literature but unsatisfactory for maths / numeracy. The improved progress in both subject areas during 2017-19 is encouraging and particularly for the large group (70) of SA+ pupils in English and suggests that support for these pupils has been effective.

## Performance and Progress of Pupils at the River Centre School 2019

**N.B.** It is important to be aware that standardised tests only provide a snapshot of pupils' skills and that individual results can vary from day to day. In addition, the very small numbers of pupil results for the River Centre makes performance comparisons e.g. with BG mainstream pupils statistically invalid. Consequently, pupil results should be viewed at an individual pupil level and with due regard to any contextual factors likely to have impacted on outcomes.

### Key Stage 2

There was only 1 pupil in the Y6 cohort recorded as attending the River Centre (RC) during 2018-19. This pupil had no matched data for FP & KS2 outcomes.

### Key Stage 3

There were 11 River Centre pupils recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2018-19 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 6 of the 11 pupils. 4 pupils had SEN statements and 7 were on SA+. 3 were LAC and a majority were recorded with the Youth Offending Team.

- Only 2 pupils in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and in maths.
- The mean NC levels for RC pupils were much lower than those for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also much lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

### NC progress

- About one-half of RC pupils progressed at least 1 NC level for English during KS3 but only 3 did so for maths.
- One pupil progressed 2 NC levels in English.
- The mean NC progress rates for RC pupils were much lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas

### National Test progress

The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected and higher than the BG means - particularly for reading. However, the small numbers of RC pupils undertaking the national tests and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons statistically unreliable.

**Overall**, NC and national test scores were much lower than mainstream averages. NC progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils but progress in national test outcomes was better than expected.

### KS3-4 outcomes & progress

Of the 10 pupils who attended the River Centre throughout 2017-19:

- Just 1 pupil attained a B grade in English language but none gained a C grade or better in maths.
- The average grade in English language (E) was lower than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths (F) was also lower than that for the whole cohort (D).
- 5 pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English but only 3 did so in maths.

- 4 pupil regressed in English and in maths (one had very poor attendance).
- The mean progress rate for River Centre pupils in English and in maths was much lower than that of the whole BG cohort and indicated overall regression.
- Including literature had little impact on average progression but did improve the average GCSE grade.
- Including numeracy improved average progression considerably and also improved the average GCSE grade.

N.B. The very small numbers of pupils attending the River Centre and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

**Overall**, River Centre pupils as expected had lower outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. There was a noticeable improvement to overall maths / numeracy outcomes when numeracy results were included but little change to language / literature outcomes when literature results were included. This suggests that support for numeracy was more effective than that for language.

### **Analysis of Outcomes & Value-added Performance for Resource Base Pupils 2019**

NC outcomes, national test and value-added performance of pupils attending resource bases at BG schools are considered in this report.

#### **Key Stage 2**

There were 9 pupils RB pupils recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y6 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 2 of the 9 pupils. 5 pupils had SEN statements, 3 were on SA+ and the remaining pupil on SA.

Only 1 pupil in the Y6 cohort attained L4 or better in English and just 2 did so in maths. The mean NC levels for RB pupils were about one-half that for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019. The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were a little below the mainstream cohort (but comparing just 2 pupils' results).

All but 1 RB pupil progressed at least 1 NC level for language and all did so for maths during KS2. About one-half of pupils progressed 2 NC levels in both language in maths. However, the mean NC progress rates for RB pupils were lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas. The progress rates for the 2 pupils with national test results were much higher than the BG mean for reading but similar to this for numeracy reasoning.

N.B. The very small numbers of RB pupils and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons statistically unreliable.

#### **Key Stage 3**

There were 14 pupils RB pupils recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 10 of the 14 pupils.

6 pupils had SEN statements, 6 were on SA+ and 1 on SA.

Only 1 pupil in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and in maths. The mean NC levels for RB pupils were less than one-half that for the whole BG Y9 cohort in 2019. The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were much lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

**About one-half of RB pupils progressed at least 1 NC level for language and for maths during KS3.** One pupil progressed 3 NC levels in both languages in maths while 2 others progressed 2 NC levels in maths only. The mean NC progress rates for RB pupils were much lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas with some pupils indicated as regressing during KS3. **The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were generally as expected but lower than the BG means - particularly for reading.**

**N.B.** The small numbers of RB pupils and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons statistically unreliable.

**Overall**, except for national test scores in Y6, NC and national test scores were much lower than mainstream averages. Progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils but the differences were greater at KS3 than at KS2 with some pupils indicated as regressing in NC assessments.

#### Key Stage 4

7 pupils attended the SNRB during 2017-19.

Of the 7 pupils in the cohort:

- 1 was eFSM.
- 1 was on SA+ and 6 statemented.
- None were low attenders.
  
- 5 pupils attained a C grade or better in English language but only 3 did so in maths.
- The average grade in English (C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths was the same (D) as that for the whole cohort.
- 5 RB pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language but only 2 did so in maths.
- 2 pupils failed to progress at all in English and maths while 3 pupils regressed in the latter.
- The mean progress rate for RB pupils in English language was higher than that of the whole BG cohort and better than expected. However, the mean progress rate for maths indicated no progression overall.
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression but not average GCSE grades.

**N.B.** The very small numbers of RB pupils and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

**Overall**, SNRB pupils had similar or better outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. This suggests that support for language and maths / numeracy development within the SNRB is generally effective for language at KS4 but, and for the main cohort, is less effective for maths/ numeracy.

### **Performance and Progress of Pupils in Ethnic Minority Groups & with EAL in 2019**

#### **Key Stage 2**

There were 25 pupils from different EM groups in the 2019 Y6 cohort.

- All but 4 of the 25 EM pupils in the Y6 cohort attained L4 or better in English and all but 3 did so in maths.
- Over one-half of EM pupils attained L5 in both English and maths.
- All but one of the pupils not attaining L4 had SEN and some had additional contextual factors which may have impacted on their progress.
- **The mean NC levels for EM pupils were higher than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.**
- **The mean national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher for EM pupils.**

#### **NC Progress**

- All but 4 EM pupils progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths. All of these identified pupils had SEN and some had additional contextual factors which may have impacted on their progress.
- Over one-fifth of EM pupils progressed 3 NC levels in language and almost a third did so in maths.
- **The mean NC progress rates for EM pupils were higher than for the whole BG cohort in both areas**

#### **National Test progress**

- The mean progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were much higher for EM pupils.

#### **Key Stage 3**

There were 21 pupils from different EM groups in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Only 16 had matched KS2 & 3 NC results.

- **All but 2 of the 16 EM pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Both of these pupils had SEN and one had very poor attendance.**
- **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 NC levels for EM pupils were a little higher than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.**
- **The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning for EM pupils was similar to that for the whole BG cohort.**

#### **NC progress**

- About one-third of EM pupils progressed 2 or more NC levels in English and maths during KS3
- Two pupils failed to progress at all and one regressed in English. However, 2 of these pupils had SEN categorised and one had very poor attendance.



### National Test progress

- The mean progress rate for EM pupils in reading **was a little higher than the whole BG cohort** but the mean progress rate for numeracy reasoning indicated on average progression

**Overall**, except for KS2-3 progress in maths, EM pupils had similar to or better outcomes and higher average progress rates than pupils in the 2019 mainstream cohort.

### KS3-4 outcomes & progress

Of the 17 EM pupils in the 2017-19 cohort:

- 10 pupils attained a C grade or better in English language but only 7 did so in maths.
- The average grade in English (C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths was the same (D) but lower in terms of mean NC level.
- About two-thirds of EM pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language but only about one-half did so in maths.
- 6 pupils failed to progress at all in English. However, all of these had EAL or SEN or both.
- 4 pupils failed to progress at all in maths while 5 actually regressed. However, all but one of these had EAL or SEN or both.
- The mean progress rate for EM pupils in English language was similar to that of the whole BG cohort but the mean progress rate for maths was lower and indicated on average regression.
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression and particularly so in the latter,

N.B. The very small numbers of specific EM groups and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

**Overall**, in KS4 EM pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language / literature but lower in maths / numeracy. 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.

## Performance and Progress of Children Who Offend 2019

### Key Stage 2

There were 3 YOs recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y6 cohort. 1 pupil was on SA+ and one on SA.

- 1 pupil in the Y6 cohort attained L5 in English and Maths and another attained L4 in maths.
- The mean NC levels for YOs were lower than that for the whole BG Y6 cohort in language and in maths.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were well below the mainstream cohort (but comparing just 3 pupils' results).

### NC progress

- One YO progressed 3 NC levels in both language and maths during KS2.

- One progressed 2 NC levels in maths only and the remaining YO progressed just 1 NC level in both.
- The NC progress rates for individual YOs indicated expected or below expected progress.

### **National Test progress**

- The progress rates for national test results also varied between YOs.

### **Key Stage 3**

There were 12 pupils YOs recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 8 of the 12 pupils. 4 pupils had SEN statements, 4 were on SA+ and 1 on SA.

- 3 YOs in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and 6 did so in maths.
- The mean NC levels for YOs were lower than that for the whole BG Y9 cohort in 2019 and particularly so in English.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

### **NC progress**

- About one-half of YOs progressed at least 1 NC level for language and for maths during KS3.
- One pupil progressed 2 NC levels in English while 2 did so in maths.
- About one-half failed to progress at all in English and in maths.
- The mean NC progress rates for YOs were much lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas.

### **National Test progress**

- The mean progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were generally as expected but lower than the BG means - particularly for numeracy reasoning.

**Overall**, NC and national test scores of YOs 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.

### **KS3-4 outcomes & progress**

Of the 26 YOs in the 2017-19 cohort:

- 13 YOs attained a C grade or better in both English language and in maths.
- The average grade in English language (C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths (D) was the same as that for the whole cohort.
- About two-thirds of YOs progressed 1 or more NC levels in English but only one-half did so in maths.
- About one-third failed to progress all in English while about one-half failed to do so or even regressed in maths. However, most of these pupils had SEN
- The mean progress rate for YOs in English was higher than that of the whole BG cohort and indicated expected regression.
- The mean progress rate for YOs in maths was a little higher than that of the whole BG cohort but indicated much lower than expected progression.
- Including literature improved average progression but not the average GCSE grade.
- Including numeracy improved average progression, a little but not the average GCSE grade.

N.B. The relatively small numbers of YOs attending KS4 and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

**Overall, YOS had higher outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort.** Outcomes improved a little when literature & numeracy results were included. The findings suggest that support for young offenders within BG has effectively allowed them to generally achieve the same outcomes as mainstream peers.

### **Performance and Progress of Children Looked After (CLA) 2019**

#### **Key Stage 2**

There were 8 CLA pupils in the 2019 Y6 cohort. 3 were on SA, one on SA+ and one statemented.

- All but 2 of the 8 CLA in the Y6 cohort attained L4 or better in English and in maths.
- LAC pupils attained L5 in English and one did so in maths. Of the 2 pupils not attaining L4, one had an SEN statement and the other was on SA+.
- The mean NC levels for CLA was similar to that of the whole BG Y6 cohort in language **but lower in maths.**
- **The mean national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were noticeably lower for CLA.**

#### **NC progress**

- All but one CLA progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths. All of the latter pupils had SEN.
- One CLA progressed 3 NC levels in language and almost a half did so in maths.
- The mean NC progress rates for CLA were similar to those for the whole BG cohort in both subject areas.

#### **National test progress**

- The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were lower than expected and indicated some degree of regression, particularly in the former.

#### **Key Stage 3**

There were 14 CLA pupils in the 2019 Y9 cohort (only 12 had matched reading & numeracy reasoning results). 2 were on SA, four on SA+ and two statemented.

- 9 of the 14 CLA with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Of the CLA who failed to attain this level, all had SEN and three had very poor attendance.
- One CLA attained L6 in English & maths and two attained L7 in maths.
- The mean NC levels for CLA were much lower than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also lower for CLA than for the whole BG cohort – particularly for the former.

#### **NC progress**

- Most CLA progressed 1 or more NC levels in English and maths during KS3 with progress rates similar to that of the whole BG cohort.
- Two CLA failed to progress at all in English and 3 failed to do so in maths. All of these pupils had SEN and two had very poor attendance.

### National Test progress

The mean progress rates for CLA in reading and numeracy reasoning were notably higher than for the whole BG cohort.

**Overall, in KS2 and KS3 both NC and national test outcomes were, on average, lower for CLA than for other mainstream pupils.** This was more evident at KS3 than at KS2 for NC outcomes. NC progress for CLA was generally similar to the mainstream cohort in both English & maths. Progress rates in reading and numeracy reasoning were noticeably different for KS2 & 3. At KS2, both reading and numeracy reasoning progress rates indicated some regression but both were noticeably higher than for mainstream pupils at KS3.

### KS3-4 Outcomes & Progress

Of the 10 CLA in the 2017-19 cohort:

- 4 CLA attained a C grade or better in English language and the same number did so in maths.
- The average grade in English (C) was the same as that for the whole Y11 cohort. The average grade in maths (D) was also the same as that for the whole Y11 cohort.
- Over one-half progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language and in maths.
- 2 CLA failed to progress at all in English while a further 2 actually regressed. However, the former 2 were statemented.
- 3 CLA regressed in maths. However, all of these had EAL or SEN.
- The mean progress rate for CLA in English and in maths was similar to that of the whole BG cohort but below expected values - particularly for maths
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression but not average GCSE grades.

N.B. The very small numbers of CLA in the cohort and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

**Overall, in KS4 CLA had similar outcomes and average progress rates to mainstream the main cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggest that CLA support for language and maths development is generally effective at KS4.**

### Performance and Progress of Low Attenders 2019

Low attenders are defined in the WG core data sets as those pupils '*absent for at least 20% of half-day sessions*'.

#### Key Stage 3

There were 13 low attenders recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 7 of the 13 pupils. 1 pupil had 1 SEN statement, 3 were on SA+ and 3 on SA. 3 pupils were LAC, 1 on EAL category B (Early Acquisition) and 2 were registered as young offenders.

- 4 pupils in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and 8 did so in maths.
- The mean NC levels for RB pupils were lower than those for the whole BG Y9 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also much lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

### NC Progress

- About one-third of low attenders progressed at least 1 NC level for language during KS3 while about two-thirds did so in maths.
- One pupil progressed 3 NC levels in language 5 in maths.
- The mean NC progress rates for low attenders were lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas.

### National Test progress

- The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were generally as expected but lower than the BG means.

### KS3-4 outcomes & progress

#### ***Of the 38 low attenders in the 2017-19 cohort:***

- About one-half of low attenders attained a C grade or better in both English language and in maths.
- The average grade in English language(C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths (D) was the same as that for the whole Y11 cohort.
- Over two-thirds progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language – similar to the overall LA figure.
- About one-half progressed 1 or more NC levels in maths – higher than the overall LA figure.
- 3 low attenders failed to progress at all in English while a further 8 actually regressed.
- The mean progress rate for low attenders in English language and in maths was a little higher than that of the whole BG cohort but below expected values - particularly for maths
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression and the average GCSE grade in maths.

**N.B.** The relatively small numbers of low attenders in the cohort and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

**Overall, and in KS4, low attenders had similar or higher outcomes and average progress rates to the mainstream cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggests that support in language and maths development for low attenders is generally effective at KS4 and / or a significant proportion of low attendance (of able pupils) was attributable to illness / injury rather than truancy.**

### Performance and progress of Gypsy travellers

In 2018/19 there were only 2 pupils in the Year 11 cohort and both completed statutory schooling and are going on to further education. Average attendance in 2018/19 was 81.24%, an increase of 1.75% compared to 2017/18 (79.5%).

In Foundation Phase, in 2018/2019 1 out of the 5 in the cohort (20%) achieved the FPI. This is compared to last year when 1 out of the 3 (33%) in the cohort achieved FPI.

In 2018/2019 one out of five pupils **(20%) achieved the outcome 5+ or above LLCE. 4/5 (80%) achieved outcome 5+ for their PSD.** All pupils achieved or exceeded their target in MDT, **1/5 (20%) got an outcome 5+ or above.** This is compared to last year's where in 2017/2018 (3/3) pupils (100%) achieved outcome 5+ for LCE, and 1/3 achieved their FPI, 3/3 achieved their PSD and 2/3 achieved their MDT (66%)

**In KS2, in 2018/2019 five out of five pupils (100%) achieved their CSI.** This compared to last year where four out of five pupils achieved the CSI. In 2018/2019, five out of five pupils achieved their L4 in all core subjects. Compared to 2017/2018 when four out of five pupils achieved L4 in all subjects.

**In KS3, in 2018/2019, two out of five pupils (20%) achieved their CSI.** This is compared to last year where one out of one pupils achieved their CSI. Two out of five achieved their level 5 or above in Maths, English and Science, where one 1/1 pupil achieved this last year.

There have been two exclusions in 18/19, compared to 9 exclusions in 2017/18.

In 2018/19 overall, 100% completed their required 200 sessions before going travelling. Attendance at FP was 80.8%, at KS2 81.2%, at KS3 78.5% and at KS4 82.9%.

**Overall, the quality of support provided for pupils in the Foundation Phase and KS3 is weaker than that provided in KS2 where all of the pupils achieved the CSI at L4+.**

## 1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups: Areas where good progress has been made:

**N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**

### Foundation Phase

Given the WG guidance that *comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should ..... be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis*, it would be unwise to interpret and compare 2018 results in relation to previous years. However, good features identified from the 2019 results include:

- 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.
- There was little difference in the mean NC progress scores between boys & girls.
- 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 for ethnic minority pupils were higher than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher for ethnic minority pupils.
- The mean progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning in 2019 were much higher for EM pupils.
- 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 BG cohort in both subject areas.

### **Key Stage 3**

- L6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject.
- L6+ gender differences were lower than in the previous year for a majority of non-core subjects
- L6+ gender differences were lower than the national means for about one-half of non-core subjects.
- Mean progress scores in reading & numeracy reasoning were better than expected for both boys & girls.
- On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and so reversed the gender gap.
- 2019 eFSM & non-eFSM differences were lower than the national averages at both L5+ and L6+.
- Mean progress scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected for eFSM pupils.
- eFSM pupils made greater progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so narrowed the performance gap.
- L6+ English results improved in BG for 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap compared when with national outcomes.
- Statemented pupils made, on average, very good progress in reading & numeracy reasoning at KS3 during 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 BG cohort.

### **Key Stage 4**

- Differences between eFSM and non-eFSM outcomes for BG pupils in 2019 were lower than the national means in each reported main performance indicator.
- The proportion of learners gaining A\*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019.
- 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 in maths was relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.
- Progress rates for SEN pupils were also generally similar to non-SEN pupils and suggests that support for these pupils has been effective.
- Ethnic minority pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language. This suggest that support for language development is generally effective at KS4.

- Young offenders generally had higher outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. This suggests that support for young offenders within BG has effectively allowed them to generally achieve the same outcomes as mainstream peers.
- LAC had similar outcomes and average progress rates to mainstream the main cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggests that LAC support for language and maths development is generally effective at KS4.
- Low attenders had similar or higher outcomes and average progress rates to the mainstream cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggests that support in language and maths development for low attenders is generally effective at KS4 and / or a significant proportion of low attendance (of able pupils) was attributable to illness / injury rather than truancy.

## 1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups: Areas Requiring Improvement:

**N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**

### 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 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 & 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.
- EM 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.

### 1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

#### **Pupil and Parent responses to Estyn Questionnaires regarding aspects of pupil wellbeing: for schools inspected during 2017-2019**

Pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are predominantly good in mainstream settings. This is evidenced by recent inspection reports. 16 primary schools, 3 secondary schools, one 5-16 school, 1 special school and 1 PRU have been inspected during the last 3 years. 14 primary schools were judged as good and 2 as adequate for this area. Of the 3 secondary schools, 1 was judged as excellent, 1 as adequate and 1 as unsatisfactory. The 3-16 school was also judged as adequate

although this was specific to behaviour in the secondary phase The special school was judged as good. With the exception of the 3-16 school (Abertillery LC), none of the above are currently subject to Estyn monitoring. This indicates that BG schools have responded swiftly and positively in improving this important area.

A review of pupil and parent responses to Estyn questionnaires was conducted during December 2017. This related to the most recent inspections at that time (14 primaries, 3 secondary, 1 special school and 1 PRU). The high proportion of positive responses given **by primary school pupils** was encouraging. This generally reflected a high level of wellbeing contributed to by effective provision and leadership. However, some issues were apparent and, in some cases, consistent across schools. Staff responses to bullying, effectiveness of homework and opportunities for exercise were indicated as requiring address in specific schools while pupil behaviour was an issue common to most schools. The need to improve pupil wellbeing was identified as a significant issue within the secondary phase of Ebbw Fawr LC. This has been addressed by the school and its actions recognised by ESTYN by noting it had made strong progress in this area and subsequently removed from follow up.

**Primary parents** also had very positive views of most aspects and, importantly, nearly all felt that their children were safe at school. However, some issues were evident in a minority of schools. These concerned weak transition arrangements, ineffective school reporting, insufficient support for SEN and a lack of extracurricular activities. Concerns about pupil behaviour were more common across the schools and reflected pupils' own views.

Responses given by **secondary pupils and parents** were of greater concern because of higher levels of disagreement recorded against the Estyn questions. At the time responses at Tredegar were much more positive than for Brynmawr and Ebbw Fawr and most concerns related to the latter two schools. Pupil wellbeing at EFLC was also identified by ESTYN as an area requiring significant improvement. However, a subsequent Estyn visit / report noted that strong progress had been made and the school is no longer subject to Estyn monitoring. Parents' responses generally reflected those of pupils for most questions and were much less positive than those at primary level particularly for Brynmawr and Ebbw Fawr schools. However, parental views have now greatly improved in both schools; two new HTs and new Chairs of Governors are in place as well as a significant number in each school of new staff. The Council has intervened in both these schools over the last two years and improvements have been secured. Concerns about 'transition', school reporting and extracurricular activities paralleled those of parents in primary schools notably in same two clusters as aforementioned which have now been addressed.

Three additional BG schools were inspected during 2018 and 2019. Detailed responses from pupils and parents are no longer included in inspection reports. However, the reports make reference to the contribution and impact of pupil and parent input e.g. at Blaen-Y-Cwm, staff provided an additional outside stage for role play and drama opportunities in key stage 2 as a response to pupil feedback and at St. Joseph's, *listening to learners* formed an important part of the school's self-evaluation process. However, at Abertillery LC, the use of pupils' views was underdeveloped in the secondary phase, there was too little regard for parents' feedback and the governing body had insufficient pupil representation. The school is currently addressing these concerns as part of their PIAP and monitoring progress.

### Healthy Schools Outcomes

The Healthy Schools and pre-schools programmes operating in BG are effective. All schools and pre-schools participate in these. School co-ordinator and pre-school officers ensure the effectiveness of implementation. The regional SEWC network providing support and a coordinated approach to the Healthy Schools agenda while good school to school support is taking place. An SRE group maps SRE provision against the 'What Matter' statements and the new curriculum in Wales in order to provide a toolkit for schools which operates from reception to KS4. This is a collaboration in Caerphilly LA. The partnership working between Pioneer school and regional Healthy Schools Group has been given exemplar recognition. Evidence shows that training has been effective and well received by schools and pre-schools.

The WNHSS and HSPSS are robust schemes, recognised by Welsh Government and provide a platform to ensure good health and wellbeing are at the core of school life. Significant progress has taken place during the last few years, currently:

- 6 schools are working towards NQA status.
- All 20 pre-school settings have achieved accreditation to the next phase.
- 5 additional schools have achieved Phase 5
- 3 additional schools have achieved phase 4
- Training has been carried out for a range of appropriate areas e.g. Relationships and sex Education, ACE awareness for pre-schools with all setting staff, cooking projects, emotional health & wellbeing and physical literacy.
- The development of a RSE toolkit has also encompassed a large element of work in preparation for the new Curriculum.
- The use of pupil voice as an integral part of progression when implementing actions within school, particularly around healthy eating and making necessary changes to attitudes.

All 4 secondary Schools completed the 2019 School Health Research Network survey, this will mean as well as schools having an individual report the LA will obtain a report also. This is expected to be publish at the beginning of April 2020.

Key findings will be disseminated to key partners across the Authority in order to discuss and address findings (where appropriate) collaboratively.

A working party with partners such as Aneurin Health, Aneurin Leisure and Police has been set up to support the schools with training and action planning.

Healthy Schools Co-ordinator continues to work closely with the Pioneering School Co-ordinator, who also attends the Gwent Healthy Schools Group. Such practice has been considered exemplar and is being adopted across Wales.

### **Sport and Physical Activity**

The Aneurin Leisure Sports Development team create and develop bespoke interventions to ensure everyone in our communities can benefit from Sport and Physical Activity to help improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing. The team supports the Vision for Sport in Wales that states 'Everyone can have a lifetime enjoyment of sport. We want Wales to be an active nation with as many people as possible inspired to be active through sport.'

Aneurin Leisure's Sports Development team deliver a wide range of sport, physical activity, community engagement and swimming opportunities across Blaenau Gwent which contributes to the new 'Vision for sport' and their mission statement, 'An active nation where everyone can have a lifelong enjoyment of sport.' Sports Wales and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 underpin and embrace the new Vision for Sport in Wales via their new Sports Wales Strategy.

Blaenau Gwent has a real passion for sport and physical activity and the Sports Development team provides participation opportunities for young people of all ages and abilities. Sports Development endeavour to support individuals, groups, families and local and national partners to promote a healthier Blaenau Gwent. To ensure the wider community have the opportunity to become more physically activity there are a number of programmes to cater for every one of all ages. Those programmes include an array of Leadership and volunteer opportunities, Physical Literacy, Secondary School extra-curricular, Primary School interventions, Club Development and funding support, Disability and Community Sport engagement. The Community Sport model has created a gateway to local 'hard to engage' communities in Blaenau Gwent, and has provided a platform for young people living in the area. Community Sport aims to encourage local young people to become more physically active in a safe and fun environment. Sessions are volunteer-led and participant centred, with an emphasis on engaging the 'right' target group into a more physically active and sporting lifestyle.

Community Sport offers an abundance of opportunities to local young people. Specific opportunities include; Fit and Fed, Street Games, SERVES and Us Girls. The team are able to use these activities as a tool to impact on some of the wider social issues such as reducing barriers to participation such as increasing community safety, reducing anti-social behaviour and social isolation. Via Healthy and Active funding, the Sports Development team have created a bespoke programme to support families who are inactive. The programme is designed to explore the reasons behind that and to create a plan unique to that family to help them become more active. Support includes free access to sport centres, free sport club membership, employability training, financial support, housing support and nutritional advice. The families are referred into the programme via schools and social services.

All the current interventions are tools not only increase physical activity but to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, their families and the wider communities.

Sport Wales currently uses the School Sport Survey to evaluate the performance of school sport within individual local authorities. Headline measures from the latest 2018 School Sport Survey include:

- 96% of pupils would like to do more sport and this equals the national average.
- 38% of pupils are “Hooked on Sport” and this has declined in line with LAs across the Greater Gwent area.
- 55% of pupils feel PE and Sport contribute towards a healthy lifestyle.
- 51% of pupils are members of a sport club.
- BG provides 92 minutes of curricular PE per week.

There are currently 2329 children that take part in school swimming years 3 – 6, with a pass rate of 75% which is 4% higher than the national average: -

- Total No. of Primary School Pupils Swimming: 2,329
- Number of Girls Swimming: 1,174
- Number of Boys Swimming: 1,155
- Total No. of Year 6 Pupils Achieving KS 2: 405, 75%
- Total No. of Year 6 Swimming: 538
- Number of Year 6 Girls Swimming: 272
- Number of Year 6 Boys Swimming: 266
- Number of Year 6 Girls Achieving KS 2: 202, 74%
- Number of Year 6 Boys Achieving KS 2: 203, 76%
- Number of Year 6 Achieving KS 2, Abertillery: 91, 60%
- Number of Year 6 Achieving KS 2, Ebbw Vale: 196, 79%
- Number of Year 6 Achieving KS 2, Tredegar: 118, 84%

Swim school provisions are currently 1477 out of a possible 1903 (maximum occupancy) children taking part in these lessons.

- Ebbw Vale – 634/713 – Occupancy 89%
- Abertillery – 510/630 – Occupancy 81%
- Tredegar – 419/560 – Occupancy 75%

Non swimmers from KS2 are now catered for through the sports development AYP swimming, those who don't pass the criteria at

KS2 are invited to year 7 swimming classes. The current rate is 57 non swimmers invited with 35 undertaking the lessons, which equates to a 65% uptake. The new measurement for Every Child a swimmer by the end of KS 2 (year 6) will now be measured against the Nofio Ysgol framework which mirrors the Swim Wales learn to swim model.

The partnership between the Council, swimming clubs and Aneurin Leisure make the transition from swimming lessons more focused to swimming length following FINA rules and regulations. Invitations to swimmers from wave 5 – 8 are invited to trial sessions at the swimming clubs in Blaenau Gwent with the aim of retaining them in aquatic activities.

The swim data collection will now include:

- Swimming Clubs – Average number of people per lane (6) x number of lanes x number of hours
- Other aquatic clubs (water polo, canoeing, synchro, octopush, parties) – Average of 20 people per hour x number of hours
- School numbers to be recorded by numbers of children attending x number of sessions.

A summary of the main strengths for Sport and Swimming include:

1. Data from the 2018 School Sport Survey shows 96% of pupils would like to do more sport and 55% of pupils feel PE and Sport contribute towards a healthy lifestyle. There is clear latent demand for physical activity opportunities that is targeted.
2. There is a very high number of children in both our school swimming programme and learn to swim programme. A great deal of work has been put into the development of the swimming programme through the help of Swim Wales; therefore, a robust pathway exists from fundamentals to competitive swimming.
3. There are 2329 children in our 'school swimming' programme and 1477 in our 'learn to swim' programme, which gives an occupancy of 63%. This is the Council's highest participation achieved to date.
4. School swimming is rolling programme all year around during terms times, this gives more opportunities to all levels and ages of swimmers.

A summary of the main areas for development include:

1. The decline in "Hooked on Sport" figure from 43% in 2015 to 38% in 2018. The Sport Development team has streamlined its programmes, created new partnerships while developing existing ones to ensure that figure increase. Emphasis has been placed on Primary School support to create greater preventative measures. Community hubs are being established to allow sport to be at the heart of our most venerable communities.
2. The swimming programme is under review i.e. the amount of time we offer in our swimming pools, as there needs to be a balanced between public, schools and structured activities.
3. Advertising 'learn to swim' sessions frequently during the year. Targeting the marketing campaign to coincide with new term times for greater uptake while raising the occupancy of 'School Swimming' to our 'Learn to Swim' programme.

All schools have access to an annual whole-school survey - PASS (Pupil Attitude to School and Self) the cost of which is covered by the LA. This provides high quality, comprehensive and comparative data on aspects of pupil wellbeing. Approximately half of the schools currently employ the PASS. There are excellent examples of where PASS has been used very effectively to identify, support and show sustained improvements for pupil well-being. The LA is currently promoting increased use of PASS in non-participating schools.

The Wellbeing Data Set provides Challenge Advisors with useful data for further investigation into aspects of inclusion and wellbeing. However, effective use of the data sets is at an early stage and requires further development through better joint working between Challenge Advisers and LA Officers to ensure consistency when challenging schools and promoting evidence based practice.

#### **2019 Outcomes from the Youth Counselling Service:**

Involving young people is a core principle of youth work. A bi-annual consultation takes place with young people across the borough to understand what they need. In addition, the Youth Service's Advisory Group (YAMS) help decide on how priorities are set and what gaps need meeting. Each project works with young people, both in groups or as individuals to ensure they influence the delivery and design of their particular project. Additionally, young people have been directly involved in the recruitment of all key staff for the past 7 years.

The Youth Service also works collaboratively with a range of partners, both external and internal to the Council. This partnership approach is essential to ensure that young people are well supported and to meet the needs of both external funders and Council priorities.

The Counselling Service is facilitated by the Youth Service. Having access to an independent Counselling Service for 11-18 years became a statutory duty in April 2013. In addition, the Youth Service provides counselling for young people in the community for young people aged 18-25. There were 5 independent counsellors working across Blaenau Gwent schools and young people's settings on a part time basis. There was access to a male and female counsellor in all secondary schools and were generally available term time only. During the pandemic we extended counselling to also be available, should young people need/want it to cover school breaks. Counsellors had to quickly adapt their work from March 2020 to enable them to provide therapeutic support using various digital platforms and in line with which young people preferred, or had access to. For some young people, they felt that would prefer to put their sessions 'on hold' whilst not being able to be seen in their settings. It was also found that for young aged young people (Years 6 and 7 particularly) they did not want to engage digitally at all with support often provided by the counsellors via parents.

A total of 268 (318 previous year) young people aged 11-18 accessed a counsellor across 12 settings during 2019-20. Of these 153 were female and 114 were male.

Referrals to counselling can be made by any person or organisation working with a young person, who feel it may be beneficial to them. The young person should be made aware of the referral and wish to engage in the therapeutic process for it to be a successful relationship. Young people can also self-refer and Welsh Government have been keen to see that self-referrals make up a high percentage of total, 15% of self-referrals were made in BG, with the highest referrer coming through the schools at 64%. Referrals were derived a range of pupils, some with specific characteristics e.g. LAC, pupils with SEN and differing ethnicities. This is the ninth academic session where family has been in the top 3 highest predominant issue for both boys and girls. This academic year anxiety was the highest for girls with family second followed by self-worth. For boy's family was the highest predominant issue with anxiety second and self-worth also being third. This is the 6th academic session that anxiety and self-worth were also in the top 3 predominant issues.

The Youth Service has now also extended the counselling service to 18 to 25 year olds. (one day per week for Inspire 2 Work young people and one day per week for other post 18 young people). For the last year, 23 young people aged 16-25 years accessed support from the Counsellor providing a service for post 16 young people. 19 (82.6%) were female and 4 (17.4%) were male. The predominant issues in counselling for post 16 young people were anxiety, depression and domestic abuse.

Responses to counselling have been very positive. Anonymous questionnaires completed at the end of the sessions indicated the following impact:

(During times when Counsellors were working online we suspended the use of evaluations due to counselling not taking place in its usual format.)

- 100% of young people completing a questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that counselling helped them understand their situation or feelings
- 74% agreed or strongly agreed that their relationships with others had improved since attending counselling. 26% didn't know.
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that their problems had got easier since attending counselling. 10% didn't know
- 93.5% agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to get to their sessions. 6.5% didn't know.
- 93.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good relationship with their counsellor. 6.5% didn't know

YP Core uses a series of 10 questions which are scored and calculated on a scale. The higher the number, the higher the level of emotional distress. In the last academic year, for those attending counselling and completing a YP Core questionnaire at the beginning and end of counselling Blaenau Gwent were 1<sup>st</sup> out of 22 LAs in the highest improvement of emotional wellbeing.

When asked what were the 'best things about counselling', the majority of young people expressed that being able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, problems were the best things about counselling. Another thread was being listened to and helped.

Some young people that attend counselling in Blaenau Gwent are experiencing high levels of emotional/mental health issues such as significant depression and/or anxiety disorders, self-harm and suicide ideation. There were/are a few young people that are being 'held' by Counsellors as they were not meeting the high thresholds for assessment with PCMHS or CAMHS or not attending appointments when offered for a number of reasons. This is particularly true for post 18 young people. This is not a unique situation for young people within Blaenau Gwent however the implementation of the Space Wellbeing Panel in April 2019 has improved this. Referrals into panel can be made by anyone with the consent of parents and with young people's consent to engage in services. The main objective of the Panel is to ensure that children and young people (aged 0-18 years) are able to access the appropriate level of service to meet their emotional and mental health needs.

Future developments for the Youth Counselling Service include:

- Ensuring all school staff understand that the counselling process impacts on pupils' wellbeing and ability to learn.
- Ensuring referrals are appropriate in order to target those genuinely in need and avoid inappropriate referrals misappropriating limited counselling time.
- Providing appropriate and confidential accommodation for counselling sessions in schools
- Further develop the play therapy service established this year
- Ensuring effective transition of support from children to adult services in relation to emotional & mental health and overall wellbeing.

### **Exclusions:**

#### **Exclusions**

The last data published by Welsh Government in October 2020, reported on 2018/19 exclusions. At that time, Blaenau Gwent was 21/22 for rates of 5 day exclusions or less, 5/5 in our family of LAs and 5/5 in SEWC. The rate of exclusions per 1,000 pupils was 66 which is well above the Welsh national average of 39.1 (NB 1/22 would be least excluding).

For rate of 6 days or more BG were 13/22, 2/5 in our family of LAs and 4/5 in SEWC. The rate of exclusions per 1,000 pupils was 1.7 which is equivalent to the Welsh national average (NB 1/22 would be least excluding). At the last point that comparative Council data was available (17/18), Blaenau Gwent was 13/22 for rates of 5-day exclusions or less, 4/5 in our family of LAs and 2/5 in South East Wales Consortia (SEWC). For rate of 6 days or more we were joint 6/22, 2/5 in our family of LAs and 2/5 in SEWC.

The table overleaf sets out Blaenau Gwent exclusion data for the last five years.

Number of Exclusions:

|                      | 2016/17    | 2017/18    | 2018/19    | 2019/20    | 2020/21    |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>KS3 &amp; KS4</b> | <b>443</b> | <b>564</b> | <b>474</b> | <b>306</b> | <b>160</b> |
| 5 days or less       | 439        | 546        | 460        | 295        | 155        |
| 6 days or more       | 4          | 18         | 14         | 11         | 5          |
| <b>FP &amp; KS2</b>  | <b>80</b>  | <b>61</b>  | <b>133</b> | <b>67</b>  | <b>33</b>  |
| 5 days or less       | 74         | 61         | 132        | 63         | 33         |
| 6 days or more       | 6          | 0          | 1          | 4          | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>523</b> | <b>625</b> | <b>607</b> | <b>373</b> | <b>193</b> |

Number of Days:

|                      | 2016/17      | 2017/18      | 2018/19    | 2019/20    | 2020/21      |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>KS3 &amp; KS4</b> | <b>742.5</b> | <b>872</b>   | <b>762</b> | <b>544</b> | <b>259.5</b> |
| 5 days or less       | 705.5        | 766.5        | 628        | 430.5      | 225.5        |
| 6 days or more       | 37           | 105.5        | 134        | 113.5      | 34           |
| <b>FP &amp; KS2</b>  | <b>188.5</b> | <b>84.5</b>  | <b>225</b> | <b>137</b> | <b>47.5</b>  |
| 5 days or less       | 139.5        | 84.5         | 211.5      | 111.5      | 47.5         |
| 6 days or more       | 49           | 0            | 14         | 25.5       | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>931</b>   | <b>956.5</b> | <b>987</b> | <b>681</b> | <b>307</b>   |

There has been a decrease in both number of/ and days lost to exclusions in 2020/21 compared to the previous year, particularly in KS3/4. However, the data over the last two years is not really comparable to previous years due to school closures, periods of isolation and an increase in blended learning.



KS3/4 data shows a 48% reduction in the number of exclusions in 2020/21 compared to the previous year and a 52.5% reduction in the number of days lost. Foundation Phase (FP)/KS2 data shows a 50% reduction in the number of exclusions in 2020/21 compared to the previous year and an almost 66% reduction in the number of days lost. Data at FP/KS2 shows that one school in particular accounted for nearly 50% of the exclusions.

The main reasons for exclusion follow national trends and remain largely unchanged and in line with national trends:

- persistent disruptive behaviour
- verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult
- physical assault on a pupil

Exclusions are higher in the Summer term, followed by the Autumn term and then the Spring. This would be reflective of the situation with Covid as there were more pupils in school in the summer term, the autumn term had seen a number of families not sending the pupils back initially and schools were closed for the majority of the Spring Term.

In 2021 more pupils were excluded in year 9 than any other year group.

There were a total of six permanent exclusions in 20/21 (however one was later overturned at independent appeal) compared to nine in 2019/20. The 6 permanent exclusions were generated by 2 schools.

### Primary and Secondary School Attendance

**Primary school attendance** has declined between 2016/17 and 2018/19 from 94.5% to 94.3%. At the end of 2018/19, there was a slight decrease in the number of schools placed in Q1 and Q2. This places BG 3rd in the family of LAs and 5<sup>th</sup> in SEWC.

All Wales mean for Primary attendance stands at 94.6% in 18/19. BG Primary attendance is therefore 0.3pp below the all-Wales means.

Unauthorised absence at the end of 2018/19 remained the same as in 2017/18 at 1.4% but still placed BG primary schools 2<sup>nd</sup> in its family of LAs and in line with the Welsh mean (1.4%).

Persistent absenteeism in the primary sector has remained at 1.6% since 2015/16. The all-Wales means stands at 1.7% BG remains 0.1% below this and ranks joint 1<sup>st</sup> in our family of LAs and joint 2<sup>nd</sup> in SEWC.

**Secondary attendance**, declined from 93.7% (16/17) to 92.9% (18/19). Based on the trend data over the 3-year period Blaenau Gwent is placed joint 3<sup>rd</sup> in our family of local authorities and 5<sup>th</sup> across the SEWC region. All-Wales means for secondary attendance is 93.8% which places BG 0.9pp lower than the all-Wales figures.

Unauthorised absence has increased from 1.5% (16/17) to 2.2% (18/19) and BG remains above national averages (1.7%).

Persistent absenteeism in the secondary sector has increased from 3.4% to 4.1% since 2015/16, which place places BG 1<sup>st</sup> in our family of local authorities and 2<sup>nd</sup> across the SEWC region. Despite the slight increase in persistent absenteeism, it is in line with the Welsh average of 4.1%.

There has been a marginal reduction in pupils with below 80% attendance at the end of July 2019 compared to the end of July 2018. (747 in 2018/19 compared to 772 in 2017/18).

Primary attendance: 3rd in family  
 Unauthorised: 2<sup>nd</sup> in family  
 PA joint: 1<sup>st</sup> in family

3 of the 4 Secondary schools exceeded WG modelled estimates for attendance.  
 PA ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in family

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the only comparative data available is for the whole school estate and that fluctuates on a weekly basis. However, Blaenau Gwent has performed well in the last few weeks of the Summer 2021 term, regularly featuring in the top 5 of LAs across Wales.

### 1.3 Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning: Areas where good progress has been made:

- 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 / their children's wellbeing in schools.
- All pre-schools and schools participate in effective Healthy School programmes with exemplar work being recognised nationally and there are effective 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. There has been an excellent number and range of events to engage and seek the views of children and young people.
- An effective 11-18 counselling service in place for with very positive feedback from attendees, with an extended service for 18-25 year olds.
- BG is one of only a very few Councils to have a fully compliant 3<sup>rd</sup> School Sport Survey to provide an evidence base to inform more targeted work.
- 3 out of 4 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.
- An improving trend of increased opportunities for *pupil voice* in BG schools and greater learner participation in decision-making.
- Outcomes for registered young people are excellent.

### 1.3 Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning: Areas requiring improvement:

#### 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 reduce primary unauthorised absence in BG from 1.4% to below 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%

**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 PA in the secondary sector in BG from 5.0% to below that of the all-Wales means (also currently 4.6%)

To continue to reduce the numbers of pupils excluded in primary and secondary sectors.

To continue to improve pupil behaviour in schools and staff response to pupil concerns

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

## Inspection Area 2 – Education Services Leads CG/JS/MJ/ Inclusion/HD-E (EAS)

### 2.1 Support for school improvement

**The local authority knows its schools very well and acts swiftly and uses its full statutory powers to support and improve standards within them. The level of challenge provided is graduated with the identified needs within each school setting. This has resulted in significant improvements during recent years e.g. improved outcomes in targeted areas, fewer schools with amber & red categorisation and improved inspection outcomes.** In addition, examples of excellent practice have been identified in BG schools more frequently than in past years. A range of established and improved procedures and protocols have contributed to these better outcomes e.g. improved training / mentoring for governing bodies, regionally agreed protocols, more effective intervention panels, forensic at-risk registers and expert HR advice. Throughout the pandemic the Council has continued with its support to schools identified as a cause for concern through holding regular check-in and catch up meetings.

The LA understands the importance of close consultation with relevant stakeholders in addressing school improvement e.g. all Headteachers and School Governors were engaged in the consultation process when developing the revised Partnership Agreement, which was implemented during Summer 2018. As a consequence, the PA is now better understood and aligned to our Vision for Education in Blaenau Gwent.

LA and EAS officers are effective in coordinating support and interventions within schools and so avoid unnecessary duplication of provision. The LA robustly monitors EAS support and the impact of Challenge Adviser work and curriculum support. In particular, the LA ensures that support work focuses on its priorities and in targeting those schools in greatest need. Evaluations of Challenge Adviser notes and EAS reports have generally been good. The introduction of FADE reports as part of the LA's self-evaluation procedures has contributed to this and ensured consistency of approach. The impact of these actions are becoming evident e.g. the school's single plan/SDP more clearly reflect LA priorities and school self-evaluation processes have improved particularly for primary schools.

A major contributing factor to school improvement is the wide range of data and information made available to schools, LA, EAS and Council officers. Performance data is shared with all head teachers through Hwb the EAS School Profile and in HT meetings. This has helped schools to improve their own analyses and evaluations and helped them better identify priorities for improvement. While this has undoubtedly helped schools to better inform their own improvement planning, target setting

procedures have not always benefitted e.g. about one-half of schools had substantial discrepancies between outcomes and targets at each key stage in 2019 and in previous years. The accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within a minority of schools was also questioned by differences between 2019 NC and National Test results. These shortcomings are linked and so the LA and support services need to further develop teachers' assessment skills particularly as schools move to develop formative assessment procedures aligned with forthcoming curriculum changes.

Data and information is also made available to and used effectively by a wide range of support services e.g. LA inclusion officers and educational psychologists. This allows individual support to be identified and provided for individual learners particularly those in vulnerable groups and most at risk of underachievement. Some vulnerable groups have clearly benefitted from support e.g. BG pupils from differing ethnic groups and statemented pupils have achieved good or very good outcomes in recent years. However, other groups have not achieved as well e.g. eFSM pupils & SEN pupils within KS3 & 4. Consequently, the LA needs to direct greater support to these groups and in particular to the teaching and learning approaches currently provided for them and also the more recent approach to quality assuring PDG spend plans will further support improved targeting of support for specific groups.

**The proportion of educational settings attaining good judgements has continued to increase during 2016-19** and the proportion receiving adequate or lower judgements has continued to decrease over the same period. This generally reflects improved standards, teaching and leadership in Blaenau Gwent educational settings. The case studies requested from Blaen-y-Cwm, St Marys RC and Cwm Primary as well as Pen y Cwm and Tredegar evidence excellent practice across a larger range of settings.

The school subject to Estyn Significant Improvement (ALC) continues to receive tailored bespoke support from the LA and EAS. The recent Estyn monitoring visit noted that progress has been made against some of the recommendations and a further revisit is anticipated in the spring term 2020. Progress through recommendations forms the core of the PIAP that is in place and the LA appropriately discharges its statutory function for a school causing a concern through the use of powers of intervention through the statutory Schools Causing Concern framework. BFS was placed in Special Measures in December 2019, the PIAP and LA Statement are being implemented. A full package of support is in place in line with the WG's Multi-Agency Support for Schools in Special Measures initiative, including a 'one plan' approach.

A forensic approach to progress through the Intervention Panel is taken which encompasses a Council wide support programme at all levels of the organisation to ensure progress continues to be made at an appropriate pace. **Overall, school categorisation at primary level remains good.** Just 2 primary schools are indicated as in need of improvement (Sofrydd and Glyncoed) and one all-through and one secondary setting in need of urgent improvement (Abertillery and Brynmawr Foundation School); there is strong evidence of cultural change occurring in both settings due to new HTs and senior teams in place in both schools.

**The LA has made good progress in improving its work to support, challenge and intervene in underperforming schools.** Specific schools are identified according to the National Model and resources are targeted appropriately on those with the greatest need. There is a good track record of schools improving following post-inspection intervention. However, 2019 results indicated the same few underperforming schools as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to the quality of learning and pupil standards.

Earlier target setting, provisional categorisation and greater challenge is currently being employed to hasten support for these centres. In addition, good practice is effectively shared across schools for example, the ACE agenda in Ebbw Fawr Learning Community which is also learning network school, Tredegar is offering support

across a range of subject specialisms as well as a professional learning pioneer school. Glanhowy Primary is a learning network schools and Welsh Hwb school, Beaufort Primary is a lead partner school working with Cardiff Metropolitan University on ITT, Willowtown Primary is a learning network school for Maths and STEM and also a regional professional learning pioneer school, St Illtyd's Primary is a quality improvement school and Deighton is a learning network schools for DCF.

The Corporate Director of Education, Executive Member for Education, EAS Principal Advisor and Strategic Education Improvement Manager devise an agreed approach for schools causing concern, holding them to account for progress and keeping support plans under review.

Improving literacy, numeracy and reducing the performance gap due to disadvantage are key priorities for the LA and these are reflected within key LA Business Plans as well as the EAS Business Plan. The LA's schools have achieved considerable success in these areas during the last few years e.g. 2019 results indicated improved literacy standards in the Foundation Phase, good value-added progress in reading & maths / numeracy at KS2 and improved writing outcomes at KS3. However, L4+ writing outcomes fell at KS2 in 2019, value-added progress in English was weak in KS3, and the differences between eFSM and non-eFSM outcomes have generally increased.

Another key priority is to increase the number / proportion of learners achieving higher NC levels and GCSE grades. There have been some improvements in relation to this e.g. L6+ outcomes improved for English and Welsh 2<sup>nd</sup> language during 2017-19 and particularly for 2019 and the proportion of learners gaining GCSE A\*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019. However, the proportion of learners gaining GCSE 5 A\*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA target and, at post-16, the proportion of learners attaining higher level grades (A\*/A) was lower than the all-Wales means at both A and AS level.

The below-average outcomes at higher levels is mainly attributable to the low literacy & numeracy skills possessed by pupils on entry to school. Value-added progress is generally good for both language & maths within KS2 and at least adequate for reading and numeracy (reasoning) within KS3. However, the low starting points limit what learners may achieve at each key stage – particularly at higher levels. **Consequently, the LA intends to have greater focus on pre-school and early years' development in order to achieve higher starting points for learners and so higher outcomes at each subsequent NC stage.** In tandem with this, the LA intends to develop individual, school and whole-authority value-added measures for the Foundation Phase in order to monitor the effectiveness of its actions.

**The LA has made very strong progress in line with its strategy for improving standards in ICT during the last 2 academic sessions.** This has involved continued effective implementation of the Infrastructure and Connectivity Project, along with of Waves 1-4 of the WG Hwb EdTech Programme. In addition, Education have made good progress towards the development of a strategy and associated sustainability plan for both infrastructure and devices in BG. As a result, the LA and SRS now have in-depth appreciation of the BG position in relation ICT infrastructure, connectivity, device status, management, ratios etc. It is understood that BG schools are well placed to effectively facilitate implementation of the Digital Competency Framework. Blaenau Gwent's Infrastructure and Connectivity Project (ICP) has reached completion, addressing the following:

- the quality, quantity and location of wireless access points in classrooms and schools;
- migration to the Schools SRS Edu system; and,
- the speed and capacity of wireless access, along with improves support to schools.

As a direct result of the aforementioned projects, the LA and its schools are compliant with the Hwb Education Digital Standards. **The status of the ICP project placed Blaenau Gwent in a very strong position to further enhance the infrastructure in line with the first 3 waves of Hwb EdTech funding.**

Hwb EdTech funding (waves 1-3) has permitted additional infrastructure priorities to be addressed that the ICP did not cover, further enhancing provision throughout the school estate. The LA has made very good progress despite the emergency situation, successfully signing off the first 3 waves in the autumn-term 2020, and having made very strong progress towards the completion of Wave 4. Up to January 2021 2,051 end of life devices had been replaced in schools, since then an additional 1,071 Chromebooks have been allocated to the schools, along with the replacement of an additional 1,072 end of life devices throughout the school estate. We currently have 3,347 devices across the school estate that are in need of replacement. Our long-term plan is to replace 20-25 % of end of life devices per on year as a rolling programme to ensure technology refresh is able to effectively facilitate the delivery of teaching and learning. The LA are working with the schools re: affordability, desired ratios and aspirations for ICT within the schools, and are in the process of establishing a 5-year sustainability plan to ensure that the schools have a high level of suitable, usable devices at all times. This method seeks to avoid significant cost pressures for schools, whereby all devices require replacement at once. We are working with WG to look to replace an additional 1,500 end of life devices over the course of next academic year, which would enable us to effectively progress onto Wave 5 (audio visual). In support of blended learning, to date the LA has used a mixture of its own and Welsh Govt. funding to support digitally disadvantaged learners, by repurposing 1,359 end of life devices, which have distributed to learners over the course of the last academic session. In addition, 161 Mi-Fi devices have been allocated to digitally disadvantaged learners requiring connectivity support. Ongoing support in planned for the forthcoming academic session.

**The EAS provides schools with good quality curriculum support for literacy, numeracy, Welsh language, the Foundation Phase and IT. The provision of frameworks to support curriculum development, monitoring and quality assurance is particularly valued by schools.** School understand the differentiated support and challenge policy and the need for targeting support in identified schools. As previously indicated, greater emphasis needs to be given to supporting schools to improve English / literacy and particularly within early years.

**The LA has increased its focus on improving the outcomes of vulnerable groups.** This is supported by the Wellbeing Data Pack and by establishing closer working arrangements between LA inclusion services and the EAS. In particular, the LA aims to improve performance of eFSM pupils in KS3 & 4 and those learners with a record of underachievement in previous years. There has been some success in this with eFSM pupils achieving better than expected progress in reading and numeracy reasoning within KS3 during 2016-19, a narrowing of the performance gap in numeracy reasoning for the 2019 Y9 cohort and by eFSM pupils achieving good outcomes for most KS4 performance indicators in 2019.

**However, eFSM outcomes trail those of non-eFSM learners at all key stages and progress rates for the 2019 cohorts were lower than those of non- eFSM pupils for most performance indicators.** The LA has used individual pupil tracking for value-added progress to good effect. Individual pupil, class and whole school profiles have helped to determine precisely the effectiveness of teaching & learning within centres. The introduction of the LA Virtual School (VS) approach to collating and using 'matched data' to better understand and evaluate measures of progress, along with greater use of contextual value added measures has helped in this. However, the move to restrict National Test outcomes to schools will limit the LA's ability to conduct such analyses and prevent value-added progress to be determined.

**Partnership working between schools, Coleg Gwent and WBTPs is developing; 2020 vocational outcomes at Coleg Gwent were good. A level and A/S level 2020/21 Centre Determined Grades results were also good and comparable to the national averages except for a lower proportion of learners attaining A\* / A grades.**

- A Level Pass Rate 99.1% in 2020-21, which is in line with the national mean average.
- A\*-A grades 31% (29% previous year).
- A\*-C grades 82% (88% year previous).

**A Level Results**

|      | A* - E | A* - C | A* - A |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| 2021 | 99.1   | 81.9   | 31.1   |
| 2020 | 100.0  | 88.0   | 29.1   |
| 2019 | 100.0  | 75.9   | 15.3   |
| 2018 | 98.7   | 74.4   | 15.6   |

**A/S Level Results**

| A* - E | A* - C | A* - A |
|--------|--------|--------|
| 94.1   | 70.2   | 19.4   |
| 92.7   | 68.9   | 17.4   |
| 90.9   | 63.5   | 14.8   |
| 89.9   | 58.2   | 10.3   |

Improved partnership working between the LA and Coleg Gwent who now provide the following:

- Annual summary reports for Blaenau Gwent learners attending all college campuses which could be amended / extended to correspond with current WG performance indicators and so allow comparisons to be made with other LAs within Wales.
- Destination data for Blaenau Gwent learners to both the LA and Careers Wales.
- Regular updates of learner withdrawals and learner circumstances in order that the LA Youth Service might provide further support to identified individuals.

As a consequence, Coleg Gwent has provided more detailed information regarding learner outcomes during 2019-20 and now provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals (initiated October 2019); this has further enabled the Youth Service to provide improved, targeted support at an earlier stage, along with information provided by Careers Wales.

**Transition arrangements between childcare practitioners and foundation phase settings is good.** All childcare practitioners are trained to deliver good quality practice and engage in effective visit programmes between settings. Flying Start provision and practice (where it is available) is very good and provide a useful model for the development of effective transition practice. However, transition information needs to be simplified for receiving classroom staff.

The LA ensures that there is a range of support strategies and professional development opportunities available for school staff at all level e.g. the Excellence in Teaching and Learning Framework (ETF), ILM and PGCE in Education Leadership and Management. In addition, the EAS provides leadership programmes and schools organise their own development programmes such as Olevi. Schools also work together in a number of ways e.g. school-to-school support strategies and wider CPD and networking activities. These have proved effective in disseminating good practice.

**The LA has implemented a supportive induction programme for Headteachers** and aspiring school senior leadership involving collaboration between LA officers, EAS colleagues and head teachers. The LA and National HT Mentors are aligned.

**School leaders are playing an increasingly active and effective role in the co-production and implementation of LA and SEWC regional strategy as evidenced through the EAS Education HT Steering Group, the ICT strategy group as well as the Strategic HT group for OD issues, also the school's Budget Forum and JCC Trade Union meetings.**

For schools causing concern, there is effective use of high quality mentor Headteachers to support leadership, together with support from schools, which demonstrate high quality provision and outcomes for example Cardiff High School for BFS. The identification of high quality leaders and schools by the EAS has been key to the success of this approach, which builds on the regional school-to-school support strategy. Support and intervention plans ensure coordinated approaches to supporting leaders and governors in schools causing concern. Specialist HR support offered through the EAS to support Headteachers and governors in developing approaches to tackling underperformance of leaders and teachers is effective, with quality training provided on Regional Pay Policy and Performance Management. This compliments the support available from the LA when dealing with individual cases.

The LA ensures that there is a good range of support strategies for improving the quality of school governance e.g. governor training programmes, supported self-evaluation arrangements, governor networking meetings and an Annual Regional Conference ensures effective communication with governors and updates on national strategies, priorities, and school / LA performance. However, attendance at these events can be weak and improving governor engagement is a priority for the LA for example a cluster based approach is being rolled out in the summer term 2020.

There are established processes for the selection and appointment of LA governors to schools but the robustness of monitoring arrangements to ensure sufficiency of governors needs to be improved. A number of high quality governors have been identified who serve temporarily on governing bodies in schools causing concern as a part of the LA's formal powers of intervention. They provide effective models of good governance and contribute to improving procedures and general governance in schools.

The LA has increasing awareness of the management needs of governors and senior middle leaders. Current support for school leaders and governors is both universal and bespoke but demonstrating a positive impact on outcomes e.g. by improving school categorisation, school inspection findings and good or better progress through the school's single plan.

Schools causing concern processes are proving to be effective mechanisms to provide targeted support and challenge to Head teachers and Chairs of Governors to improve the capacity of the setting to improve. Formal powers of intervention have been used to secure the necessary changes in governance, leadership and consequently the capacity of the school to improve. There is a good track record of schools increasing their capacity to improve and sustaining improvement following Council intervention, for example Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Bro Helyg, Willoughton and Glyncoed with new senior leaders, teams and Governors in ALC and BFS. The Hwb system is used by schools to facilitate school planning, monitoring and evaluation of impact of all grant spend for example, EIG, PDG, PL, LAC and PDG LAC against funding plans. This provides a transparent approach to grant funding and enables schools to more effectively evaluate outcomes/impact against spend.

## **2.1 Support for school improvement:**

### **2.1 Areas where good progress has been made and where support for school improvement has been effective:**

- **The LA has appointed 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.
- Post 16 arrangements are strengthened and the pathways for learning are improving.
- Strong progress on ICT infrastructure and connectivity developments.
- 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 Areas requiring improvement:

- 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 e.g. Joint Headteachers' meetings.
- 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 The quality of support for vulnerable learners

It should be noted that COVID-19 has increased the level of eFSM across the school estate. Evaluations of the quality and effectiveness of provision is illustrated by pupil progress and achievement, which in turn informs the content of the evaluative narrative below:

##### For Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals:

**The quality of support for eFSM pupils in all phases and at all key stages needs to be improved so that performance matches that of non-FSM pupils.** This is particularly the case for more-able pupils where differences in outcomes are greater. Where performance gaps are lower than national figures, this is usually due to the performance of non-FSM being lower than their national peers and indicates that the quality of support to improve performance of non-FSM pupils also needs to be improved. Progress of both eFSM and non-eFSM pupils during **KS3** was higher than expected in both reading and numeracy reasoning with eFSM pupils making the greater progress in the latter. This indicates that the quality of support for these skills was generally good. However, eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils in reading and confirms that enhanced support is required for this area. Both groups made less than expected progress in NC levels highlighting the need to improve the quality of curriculum support for all learners (including non-FSM) within KS3.

At **KS4**, differences between eFSM and non-eFSM GCSE outcomes were lower than the national means but mainly attributable to weaker outcomes for the latter group. The average progress made by eFSM pupils in English and in maths improved during the last 2 years but fell for non-eFSM pupils. However, for both groups, progress was only just about adequate in English and unsatisfactory in maths / numeracy. This emphasises the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these areas and for all pupils at KS4.

LA and EAS process in this regard has been developed more recently: for example, all schools' PDG plans are double checked for appropriateness by the EAS and signed off by the LA to help ensure that support is appropriately targeted. During these meetings the Headteacher is requested to set out how they intend to secure effective use of the PDG and expected outcomes and impact. This practice is fairly new but will continue to develop and become more refined going forward.

#### **For Pupils Presenting with Special Educational Needs:**

In preparation and in readiness for the ALN ACT and also for 2019 PLASC all schools reviewed their SEN registers. This activity was based on the findings of a pilot group of 5 schools which resulted in all schools undertaking moderation activity on their SEN Registers to establish improved consistency across all learners in Blaenau Gwent. This evaluation is based on matched data for pupils present throughout each key stage. In general, pupils with **statements within the FP, KS2 & 3 have achieved well in recent years indicating that the quality and effectiveness of support is good. In particular, statemented pupils generally made good progress within KS2 & 3 and particularly for reading and numeracy skills. This confirms that the quality of provision for these pupils has been effective.**

Conversely, pupils recorded as on **SA & SA+ made relatively lower progress in these areas during KS2 & 3.** This clearly indicates the need for greater improvement in the quality of provision and an increased focus on attainment and progress of these groups within these key stages.

**At KS4, the proportions of SEN pupils attaining A\*-C and A\*-G grades were relatively high,** much improved compared to previous years and **generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.** The proportions of pupils attaining A\*-C grades improved substantially **for all SEN categories** in both English language and maths in 2019. Progress rates for SEN pupils were also generally similar to non-SEN pupils. However, as for mainstream pupils, these were just adequate in English / literature but weaker for maths / numeracy)

**The improved progress for SEN groups in both subject areas during 2017-19 is encouraging** and particularly for the large group (70) of SA+ pupils in English and indicates that the quality of support for these pupils has generally been effective. However, the relatively weak progress made by pupils (particularly in maths) **clearly indicates that more tailored and targeted support is needed for pupils with SEN throughout KS4.**

#### **For Pupils Attending Resource Bases (RB):**

##### **KS2**

Of the 9 pupils in the 2019 cohort (5 with SEN statements), all but 1 progressed at least 1 NC level for language and all did so for maths during KS2. About one-half of pupils progressed 2 NC levels in both languages in maths. This indicates that in KS 2 the quality and effectiveness of support for pupils registered for NC assessments was at least adequate. However, there is a need to continue to improve the quality of support in order to ensure all pupils attending the RB achieve expected progress.

**KS3**

There were 14 pupils in the 2019 cohort (6 with SEN statements). 10 of these had matched test data available. Of these, about one-half progressed at least 1 NC level for language and for maths during KS3. One pupil progressed 3 NC levels in both languages in maths while 2 others progressed 2 NC levels in maths only. This indicates that the quality and effectiveness of support was at least adequate.

However, the mean progress rates for **RB pupils were generally lower than for the whole BG cohort and particularly for reading**. Consequently, there is a need to continue to improve the quality of support in order to **ensure all pupils attending the RB achieve expected progress particularly in the latter area**.

**KS4**

There were 7 pupils in the 2019 cohort (6 with SEN statements). Of these, 5 pupils attained a C grade or better in English language but only 3 did so in maths. 5 pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language but only 2 did so in maths. 2 pupils failed to progress at all in English and maths while 3 pupils regressed in the latter.

**The mean progress rate for RB pupils in English language was higher than that of the whole BG cohort and better than expected. However, the mean progress rate for maths indicated no progression overall. The outcomes indicate that the quality of support in KS 4 was generally good for English particularly when taking into account the educational needs of the cohort. However, the weaker outcomes in maths / numeracy indicate that the quality of support in this subject and in KS4 needs to be improved.**

### For Pupils Attending the River Centre 3-16 Special SEBD School.

**KS3**

There were 11 pupils in 2019 cohort. 4 had SEN statements, 3 were LAC, 7 were at SA+ and the majority were known to YOT. Of these, about one-half of the cohort progressed at least 1 NC level in English while fewer did so in maths. The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected and higher than the BG means - particularly for reading. **These outcomes indicate that, given the potential challenges to learning encountered by these pupils, the quality and effectiveness of support within KS3 was effective.**

**KS4**

There were 10 pupils in the 2019 cohort. A minority had contributing contextual factors. 6 pupils achieved a GCSE in English while 7 did so in maths. **Only one pupil gained a C grade or better in either subject.** 5 progressed at least 1 NC level in English but only 3 did so in maths. 4 pupils regressed in both subjects.

These results **indicate comparatively weak outcomes and progress for SEBD pupils at KS4 and that the quality and effectiveness of support needs to be improved in both English and maths / numeracy but particularly in Maths.**

### Support for Excluded pupils:

**Over the last 4 years Headteacher turnover at both secondary and primary has been significant i.e. all new Headteachers and senior staff at secondary level and approximately 60% turnover at Primary level; this turnover at senior leadership level has been welcomed and supported by the local authority. This has brought a fresh approach to expectations regarding pupil behaviour, pupil/teacher interactions and relationships.** New senior leaders have gone on to develop new and more inclusive provision in line with the development of a continuum of provision provided by the local Authority. Overall, exclusion figures reflect this developmental journey which is also reflected in the much improved provision evidenced in school categorisation, for example the number of green schools increasing from 2 in 2014 to 13 in 2020.

Monitoring of pupil level exclusion data has improved by all Inclusion teams and is now regarded as being effective, informing the quality of Officer work and dialogue with individual schools. The establishment of the Safer Schools Partnership approach is beginning to support improved partnership work which will further support work to reduce exclusions. Work to progress the Respect and Resilience action plan is well underway. Reducing exclusions is a key area requiring improvement.

All schools have access to the educational psychology service which provides advice and support to schools regarding pupils at risk of exclusion. The service also provides training to schools to build capacity in terms of their behaviour management as well as supporting the work of ELSAs within schools.

All pupils who are permanently excluded receive tuition from the 16<sup>th</sup> day. Alternative placements are sought either via school admissions into a mainstream school or via the ALN Panel to more specialist provision. The ALN Service has been established which includes a teacher with responsibility for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The River Centre provides provision for those pupils for whom mainstream no longer is appropriate.

### **Youth Service Support for Excluded Pupils**

**The Youth Service utilises the highly effective Early Identification Tool (as part of the YEP Framework) to work with schools to identify young people most at risk of becoming NEET in the future, including being excluded, and support is provided through the Inspire 2 Achieve project. Additionally, young people at risk of exclusion or those excluded are also supported through the Youth Service's Positive Futures project.**

The Positive Futures School group, supports young people on the cusp of permanent exclusion, to remain in or return to school. Youth Workers support the young people to develop positive relationships with other young people and adults, developing an understanding of the barriers they face in mainstream school, and supporting the young person and work with the school to help them stay in or return to school. The project works intensively with identified young people outside of school and one evening a week, supported by a small team of 3. The project delivers the Princes Trust Award and a variety of opportunities such as martial arts, boxing, gang and violence workshops, substance misuse workshops, anger management and self-esteem. An SLA is in place with the Community Psychology Team, where the Community Psychologist supports the team one hour a week to offer support, advice and a reflective practise session each week. The outcomes from this project are good, with the risk of permanent exclusion significantly reduced.

### **Inspire 2 Achieve supports young people well within the school who are identified through the Early Identification Tool as being at risk of becoming NEET.**

There are 12 members of staff in the Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) team. This includes 1 x team leader, 5 x school based youth workers, 4 x transition youth workers (2 x Yr 6/7, 2 x Yr 11 including year 11 Electively Home Educated young people) and 1 x Emotional and Mental Health youth worker. Usual support includes one to one support and group programmes depending on the needs of the individual in an out of school. Young people develop individual action plans base on their need, and support is provided on both a one to one and group basis. Staff link with Careers Wales, Counsellors and pastoral staff within the schools. Support is also offered to young people during school holidays. Ultimately, the aim of the project is to support young people to remain in school and to reduce their risk of becoming NEET. The impact of the project is good, with over half supported significantly reducing their risk of becoming NEET and 85% improving soft skills such as confidence, self-esteem and managing their emotions.

Since 2016 (when team was established): 752 young people have been supported, 115 above target at this stage (372 males, 379 females), with one young person identifying as Non-Binary. Due to COVID, we have not closed any young people to the service this year. This is being reviewed over the summer. Therefore, the outcomes recorded are those captured up to March 2020. 431 closed, and the following outcomes are recorded:

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

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

Emotional and Physical Wellbeing became the dominant theme for 2020. Ninety wellbeing packs were delivered, qualifications were delivered, support was provided to ensure young people had appropriate equipment and wi-fi access. Staff liaised with schools, arranged community walks and virtual activities. All to keep young people engaged in various ways and offer support.

**In June 2020, the Youth Service won a national Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award and the Inspire programmes were key to that prestigious award.**

#### **For More-Able pupils:**

The quality of support for our more-able pupils is indicated by their progress and outcomes as follows:

The Mean NC progress in English and in maths from FP to end of KS2 was higher for MAT (L5+) pupils than for those attaining L4 or lower i.e. 2.4 as opposed to 1.9. The Mean progress in NT reading and in numeracy reasoning from F Phase to end of KS 2 was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

In KS3 L6+ English results improved in pupils BG for 2019 (against a national backdrop of decline) with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap. The Mean progress in English and in maths between KS 2 and KS 3 was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils than for those attaining L5 or lower i.e. 1.7 and 1.8 as opposed to 0.9 for lower levels. The Mean progress between KS 2 and KS 3 in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

**Overall, MAT pupils not only attain higher NC levels and national test scores, they also progress at a faster rate than those with lower outcomes at the previous key stage.** This indicates that differences in outcomes between low and high attaining pupils increase as they progress through the key stages and that **attainment at both FP and KS2 are significant determinants of future progress.** The quality of support to ensure good progress is of reasonable quality and effectiveness, however, the quality of support to improve early outcomes in the Foundation Phase needs to improve.

Consequently, a key priority is to ensure that support is effective at maximising attainment in the Early Years and on **improving pupils' attainment at the earliest stage possible** i.e. within the FP or prior to this. Work with schools and the EAS is underway to start to address this but this remains a key area for improvement.

### For Pupils Who Present as Low Attenders:

#### KS3

There were 13 low attenders in the 2019 cohort (1 statemented, 3 on SA+, 3 on SA, 3 were LAC, 1 EAL and 2 were YOT. Only 7 had matching data for KS2 & 3. 4 pupils attained NC L5 in English and 8 did so in Maths. **However, all NC and NT results were lower than for the whole BG Y9 cohort.**

One-third of low attenders progressed by at least 1 NC level in English during KS 3 and about two-thirds did so in Maths. **Given the poor attendance and the range of contextual factors related to some pupils, low attenders made reasonable progress during KS3. This suggests that the quality of support was at least adequate. However, the quality and effectiveness of support needs to improve so that outcomes and progress of these at-risk pupils matches those of pupils with average attendance levels.**

#### KS4

There were 38 low attenders in the 2019 cohort. About one-quarter were identified as having SEN. About one-half of them attained grade C or better in English and maths. Two-thirds progressed more than 1 NC level in English and one-third did so in Maths. **However, a significant proportion failed to progress or even regressed in both subjects and particularly so in Maths.**

Overall, low attenders within KS4 had similar or higher outcomes and average progress rates to the mainstream cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This indicates that support in language and maths development for low attenders is generally effective for a majority of low attenders at KS4 and / or a significant proportion of low attendance (of able pupils) was attributable to illness / injury rather than truancy. **Significant additional support will undoubtedly be required to address the lack of progress or regression demonstrated by a minority of these pupils.**

### 2019 Pregnant School Girls:

In July 2019 there were one pregnant school girl and one young mum both of whom have now left statutory education. Pupil A's attendance at the end of 2019 was 45% but prior to starting maternity leave in January 2019 her attendance was 98%. This pupil had no SEN. This pupil is currently being supported by Social Services. Pupil B's attendance at the end of 2019 was 85% but prior to study leave starting in June 2019 her attendance was 95%. This pupil also had no SEN. KS3 attainment for both pupils at KS 3 was good and at L5 for all core subjects including the CSI. At KS4, one of the two pupils achieved 5+ GCSEs grade A-G including English but not maths.

**The Policy for Pregnant School Girls and Young Parents has now been formally adopted by schools who implement the support set out therein.**

### For pupils of Ethnic Minority:

25 pupils in KS 2 in 2019 with EAL attained higher NC levels and NT scores than the Y6 BG cohort as a whole. All but 4 progressed at least 2 NC levels in English and all but 2 did so in Maths. **Over 1/5th progressed 3 NC levels in English and about 1/3 did so in Maths. The mean NC progress rates were higher than the BG Y6 cohort as a whole.**

There were 21 pupils (16 matched) in KS 3 and all but 2 attained L5 in English and Maths. 2/3rds attained L6 in English and Maths. **NC and NT results were similar or higher than BG Y9 cohort as a whole. 1/3rd progressed by greater than 2 NC levels in English and Maths.**

There were 17 pupils in KS 4 10 attained GCSE grade C in English but only 5 did so in Maths. 5 did not make progress but also had SEN and other presenting need.

**Overall, in KS4 EM pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language / literature but lower in maths / numeracy. 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.**

**Outcomes and progress indicate that the quality of support for ethnic minority pupils in all phases and key stages is good, with more improvement in effectiveness of support required in Maths at KS 4.**

#### **Children and Young People Who are Looked After (CLA):**

##### **KS2**

There were 8 CLA in the 2019 cohort (3 on SA, 3 on SA+ & 1 with a statement). 6 attained L4 or better in English and in maths. The mean NC level for CLA was similar to that of the whole BG Y6 cohort in language but lower in maths. Mean national test scores for CLA were lower for both reading and numeracy reasoning. 7 pupils progressed 2 or more NC levels and the mean progress rates were similar to that of the BG Y6 cohort as a whole. **Overall, these outcomes indicate that support for CLA within KS2 is good but that further support is required for reading and numeracy reasoning in order to improve outcomes in national tests.**

##### **KS3**

There were 14 CLA in the 2019 cohort (2 on SA, 4 on SA+ & 2 with statements). 9 pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and in maths. A majority of CLA progressed at least 1 NC level in English and maths during KS3 while the mean progress rates for CLA in reading and numeracy reasoning were notably higher than for the whole BG cohort. **However, the mean NC scores and national test results were lower than the BG Y9 cohort as a whole and particularly so for reading. Overall, these outcomes indicate that support for CLA within KS3 is good but that further support is required to further raise NC outcomes and national test results.**

##### **KS4**

There were 10 CLA in the 2019 cohort. Of these, 4 attained a GCSE grade C or better in English and in maths. **The average grades for CLA were the same as the KS 4 cohort as a whole in BG.** Over one-half of pupils progressed at least 1 NC level in English and maths which was again similar to that of the whole Y11 cohort although both were below expected values. **These outcomes indicate that the quality and effectiveness of pupil support for CLA in English and maths within KS4 is generally good.**

**The LA fulfils statutory duties for children looked after well overall. There are effective links between CLA and Inclusion Officers and arrangements to monitor the educational achievement of CLA placed within the LA have improved to include reporting to Corporate Parenting and ALN QA monitoring group.**



Monitoring arrangements for CLA with statements of SEN and those placed out of county are robust through annual reviews and regular half-termly monitoring meetings. Links across the SEWC are developing to support the sharing of best practice in ensuring that the needs of all CLA pupils, including their educational needs, are fully met, including the appointment of a regional CLA coordinator, although the impact of this has yet to be realised.

### **Elective Home Educated (EHE):**

**At the time of PLASC 2021, there were 89 known EHE pupils in Nursery to Year 11 compared to 70 at the same point in 2020. This is below the mean average for Wales which stands at 180 EHE pupils per local authority.** The rate in Blaenau Gwent equates to 10.4 EHE pupils per 1,000 pupils in Reception to Year 11, compared to 8.3 in 2020. This is above the Welsh average rate of 9.5 per 1,000 pupils (7.0 in 2020). Whilst the rate across Wales increased by 2.5% whilst the rate in Blaenau Gwent increased by only 2.1%, which is slightly below the rate of increase for Wales. **Blaenau Gwent has the 8th highest rate of children per 1,000 that are EHE.**

With regards to the numbers of EHE pupils in SEWC we have the 2nd lowest number of EHE pupils. When compared to our family of local authorities we also have the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest number of EHE pupils. 90% (93% in 2020) of the EHE cohort had previously been enrolled in schools compared to 87% in Wales (88% in 2020). Blaenau Gwent saw a 3% decrease in this figure whilst the average decrease in Wales was 1.0%.

Of the children that had been previously enrolled at a school, in Blaenau Gwent 90% had been enrolled at a LA-maintained school, 0% were from an independent school within the LA, and 10% had been educated outside of the LA area.

14.8% of pupils became EHE in BG compared to an 11.0% average in Wales. Whilst the trend is the same in BG the figures are still above the Welsh average

When looking at pupils that became EHE across key stages, again Blaenau Gwent's data was not a similar picture to the Wales average. Blaenau Gwent had a significantly higher proportion of children in KS3 (BG 55% compared to Wales 33%).

Moreover, on reviewing the Blaenau Gwent EHE pupils by year group at the time of PLASC the highest proportion of children were in year 10 - with 21.3% of pupils in year 11 compared to the Welsh Average of 13.3%. The gender data BG had nearly an equal proportion of girls and boys that were EHE. In BG 53% were boys compared to 52% across Wales and 47% were girls compared to 48% in Wales.

In Blaenau Gwent 75% of families had received a visit in the last 12 months compared to the Wales average of 53%. This indicates that officers in Blaenau Gwent are taking a pro-active approach to supporting families of EHE. There was a distinctive pattern this year with regards to pupils being withdrawn from schools, which correlated to schools reopening for all pupils.

The number of pupils that became EHE in 19/20 are mainly secondary age pupils (52.1%). Abertillery Learning Community account for the largest number of EHE pupils (13), whilst children moving into the area and Brynmawr Foundation School accounted for the next highest numbers of pupils becoming EHE this year (7 per school). When looking at special educational needs 14 of the 69 pupils had additional learning needs.



Monitoring processes are in line with WG requirements when EHE become known to the Directorate. There are good arrangements in place to support EHE families and good work has been done in this area. Fewer pupils have become home schooled during the current academic year. A high percentage of EHE pupils have previously been enrolled in school indicating that EHE is not their first choice.

#### **Children who are Children Missing Education:**

In 2020/21 there were 37 CME referrals for pupils in Blaenau Gwent that left without a destination school. All of these pupils (except 3) have been located and the CTF has been sent to the receiving school. Of the 3 children not located, 2 have only recently moved and the Education Welfare Service (EWS) are chasing up with the new local authority and the other one has been referred to HMRC – who confirmed that they had a new address for the family.

In 2020/21 there were 22 CME referrals for children that had moved into Blaenau Gwent without a forwarding school. 6 of those children were EHE when they moved into the LA. 4 of the 6 are travellers and visits have been undertaken, whilst the other 2 are due to apply for school. 3 children are still waiting to be admitted into school, as parents delayed completing the in-year transfer form, despite numerous visits. 9 children were placed into school and the referring agency notified. 3 children were in Blaenau Gwent for only a short period of time and were tracked into a new local authority. Legal procedures have commenced for one family as they are not engaging with the admission process.

In June 2021 there were also 170 year-6 pupils that had not applied for secondary school places. Work was done to support these families and ensure applications etc. were completed. There are still 9 children that we are still waiting for confirmation from other local authorities or still supporting with applications.

In June 2021 there were 15 nursery pupils that had not applied to reception. Numerous visits were made and all these children have now completed applications for reception or confirmation has been received from other local authorities to say they have school places. In addition to this there were 137 pupils on the live birth data that had not applied for reception places. All except 31 have now been located. Investigations are currently ongoing for these 31 with other local authorities and then the EWS team will liaise with health and HMRC to see what further information they have.

#### **Children Missing Education: the completed audit revealed the following:**

- There are good tracking processes of CME children in place when the local authority.
- There have been some delays in referrals being received and children being removed without a forwarding destination.
- When CME referrals are made by schools, schools keep the pupils on roll until a new school is identified – this helps the LA in their tracking and hence safeguarding processes.
- Unfortunately, other Councils are currently not making the appropriate referrals into the education service – this hampers our effectiveness and needs to be addressed
- Senior management in the Directorate and Council and the relevant safeguarding boards are now in receipt of CME information.
- The lost pupil database is not used by schools as well as it might be but training was delivered to clerks in July 2019.
- There are improved processes in place with HMRC.
- The last 2 years has seen a steady increase in the number of children missing education. This is partly due to COVID and schools being closed for periods and partly due to Brexit and the Right to Remain scheme.

### Children and Young People that Offend:

**In 2020/21, there were 71 statutory school age children (compared to 44 in 2019/20) referred to the Youth Offending Service for either preventative or statutory intervention.** 6 of these children were referred twice meaning that there were referrals for 65 individuals (compared to 38 in 2019/20). When looking at the different types of placements for children from Blaenau Gwent 20% of the children (13 children) were attending an alternative provision compared to 36.8% (5 children) in 2019/20.

The most common school was Ebbw Fawr Learning Community and there were 13 children attending the school. Ebbw Fawr Learning Community also had the highest cohort in 2019/20. There were 65 referrals for children in Blaenau Gwent receiving intervention from YOS in the period covered by this report. Of those

- 52.3% (34 children) were offered full time opportunities at the start of their intervention (25 hours) compared to 71% in 2019/20
- 16.9% (11 children) was offered part time opportunities compared to 23.7% in 2019/20
- 3.1% (2 children) had no provision in place as they were electively home educated (EHE)
- 27.7% (18 children) had no hours recorded as schools were closed due to COVID at the start of intervention

The recommended hours for school age children are 25 hours. When looking at the referrals for 65 children for Blaenau Gwent there were 34 children who were offered the full 25 hours of education at the start of YOS intervention compared to 27 in 2019/20. This equates to 52.3%. There were 11 children who were offered less than the recommended hours. 1 was in an alternative provision, 7 were on partial time-tables and 3 children were on tuition. There were 2 children with no provision in place due to being EHE.

When working out the average number of hours offered for the 65 referrals within Blaenau Gwent it equals 22.6 hours, 2.4 hours less than the recommended 25 hours and 1.5 hours more than last year. The average attendance at the start of intervention for the 65 referrals within Blaenau Gwent equals 13 hours, 12 hours less than the recommended 25 hours and 3.3 hours less than in 2019/20. However, it is important to note that attendance across the board is down this year due to school closures as a result of COVID. However, due to Covid-19 the usual performance information is not available.

The average ranges for children who offend are;

|           | literacy               | numeracy              | reasoning             |
|-----------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| primary   | 82.3 (94.5 in 2019/20) | 82 (100 in 2019/20)   | 81 (113.5 in 2019/20) |
| secondary | 87.1 (94 in 2019/20)   | 90.4 (107 in 2019/20) | 94.9 (104 in 2019/20) |

Performance levels are generally higher in secondary aged children, which would be expected. Reasoning data is no longer collected and usual assessments have not been completed as usual so the data is based on the last available data and may not be as current as in previous years. Of the 65 children involved with the Youth Offending Service, 36 had no additional learning needs, 4 were school action, 15 were school action plus and 10 had statements.

**There are good working relationships between the local authority and the Youth Offending Service. Improvements need to be made regarding the number of hours achieved by children and children of school age despite the YOS working closely with partners in both education authorities to enable each child to receive their entitlement of 25+ hours education per week in an appropriate education setting. We need to ensure that all these children have access to 25 hours. The hours attended has decreased and this needs to improve.**

Links with dedicated members of staff in both local authorities have helped to manage issues before they are allowed to develop, thus ensuring more positive outcomes for children.

## ACES

**In January 2018, YOS completed a piece of work on 22 Blaenau Gwent children, who were open to them at the time to look at ACES. Of the 22 children that were open to YOS on the day of the survey 19 had been known to EWS prior to that date (86%).** Of the 22 children that were open to YOS on the day of the survey 15 had been known to EWS prior to their first intervention with YOS (68%), 1 came to the attention of the EWS in the same year (4.5%) and six were not known to EWS prior to their first intervention with YOS (27%)

It is important to note that on the date of the survey it was not the first offence for all of the children. 20 of the 22 children had attendance issues at some point in their school career (90%). The average attendance for this cohort in 2017/18 was 73.8%. 19 of the 22 children had been excluded at some point in their school career (86%). 13 of the 22 children had received exclusions during 2017/18 amounting to 108 days. This equates to an average of 4.9 days' exclusion for each young person.

21 of the 22 children were known to SS prior to offending (95.4%). The average number of referrals was 11.4. Where data is available most pupils made progress and the mean KS3 level has improved when compared to the KS2 level. The GCSE data is not yet available for this cohort or to make comparisons with all LA pupils.

Average attendance is 79% for this cohort of children which is well below the average attendance for the local authority. There are good working relationships between the local authority and the Youth Offending Service.

Improvements continue to be realised in the number of hours achieved by children and children of school age. The YOS works closely with partners in both education authorities to enable each child to receive their entitlement of 25+ hour's education per week in an appropriate education setting. However, we need to ensure that all these children have access to 25 hours. However, despite the hours being increased the attendance of this cohort is well below the average for the local authority. This is a key area for improvement. Links with dedicated members of staff in both local authorities have helped to manage issues before they are allowed to develop, thus ensuring more positive outcomes for children.

**Work is underway in the following areas to improve the quality of the support provided:**

- ETE hours – all children involved with YOS are to have access to 25 hours, not just statutory interventions. This also includes all PEX pupils.
- At KS2, teachers and schools will continue current levels of support for identified pupils
- At KS3 & 4, teachers and schools need to improve levels of support for pupils in line with required improvements for mainstream pupils.
- Schools / 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 commensurate with their ability a particular emphasis on improving progress and outcomes of pupils in GCSE Maths.
- Over the next 12 months the YOS has committed to developing and implementing a Literacy & Numeracy Strategy to support this cohort of pupils.
- Ensure that the recommendations made by ESTYN are implemented.

### EPS supporting ALNCos to Build Capacity for ALN

**The EPS has maintained performance in providing high quality support and challenge to schools, with all settings confirming that this had improved their capacity to provide for vulnerable learners. 100% of ALNCos reported that the strategies and interventions provided by the EPS had led to improvements in provision, and subsequent outcomes, for vulnerable learners.**

100% of the ALNCos confirmed that the EPS had helped them to develop their skills and knowledge and, consequently, manage their roles more effectively.

#### ELSA

Specifically regarding the ELSA programme, 92% of schools now have at least one trained ELSA. All the ALNCos in these schools state that, where their ELSAs are operating, the programme is making a positive difference to practice and pupil outcomes. Half termly supervision of ELSAs by EPs is rated highly with 100% of ALNCos stating that their ELSAs find it helpful. This is corroborated by mean evaluations from the ELSAs.

#### Bespoke training

The EPS has maintained high quality delivery of bespoke training to settings. 100% of ALNCos that had taken advantage of the offer were able to confirm that they can evidence improved provision for learners with ALN, based on the training received on, e.g., Lego club, precision teaching, practicing relational experiences and understanding anxiety. Staff valuations of school-based professional learning for teachers and TAs show that all training events continue to be highly rated. Of a possible maximum rating of 5.0, overall mean ratings of 4.7 for 'appropriate level', 4.7 for 'degree of detail' and 4.9 for 'quality of presentation' were recorded.

#### Group consultation

Group consultation has been introduced at ALNCo Forums to train ALNCos in the skill of conducting solution-focused conversations where emphasis is placed on the identification of both barriers and enablers to enhance pupil learning. This was continued during 2019/20 through less frequently as the Forum focus has been on preparation for the ALN reforms. Feedback from participants was positive.

#### Further research and training by EPS

ALNCos identified areas in which they would welcome further research by the EPS, illustrated in this word cloud thematic analysis. However, in summary: EPS input was judged to have improved the capacity of staff in all schools. Advice and guidance provided by the EPS is consistently judged to be of high quality by all ALNCos. Outcomes of ALN learners were judged to have improved in all schools following EPS involvement. All schools that received bespoke input from the EPS to develop leadership for ALN, and to provide support for vulnerable learners, reported that the input provided was highly effective. ALNCos identified areas in which they would welcome further research and training – including several areas (SEBD, SpLD, ASD) that have received extensive coverage in recent years, which may be indicative of changes in personnel and / or a shifting landscape of priorities in schools. The ELSA project was rated highly on all criteria by both ALNCos and ELSAs. Some concern was expressed at the lower level of EP provision, due to reduced staffing, but this is further indication of the value attached to the EPS by schools.

**The LA Well-being in Education Strategy and a complementary Good Practice Guide for Schools** shows that this has successfully impacted on improving school practice. Schools are now developing school to school approaches to disseminate and model good practice and have showcased these at Headteacher meetings.

**All schools have access to PASS (Pupil Attitude to School and Self)** This provides high quality, comprehensive and comparative data on aspects of pupil wellbeing. Approximately half of the schools use PASS. There are excellent examples of where PASS has been used very effectively to identify, support and show

sustained improvements for pupil well-being. An area for development is to increase the number of schools using PASS. A behaviour strategy and toolkit with good practice guide is in place. The LA has provided high quality evidence based advice, however, practice in schools is variable. Improving consistency of approach is an identified LA priority for further development.

Robust processes are effective in monitoring and challenging schools to support pupils with behavioural problems to reduce and avoid exclusions. However, reducing exclusions remains a key priority in identified schools. Valuable work is being undertaken to develop a regional approach to reducing exclusions, however, this is in the early stages of development.

Effective referral procedures are in place for EOTAS which are understood by schools. All pupils that have been permanently excluded receive suitable education within 15 days of the exclusion. Most pupils receiving EOTAS have a broad and balanced curriculum.

**All pupils with difficulties in physical or mental health which require access to community tuition** receive as much education as their medical conditions allow. Tailored programmes cater for individual need. Strong links are maintained between pupils and their schools.

**Joint working arrangements between the LA and EAS** have continued to improve through Wider Group meetings. The LA is increasingly effective at identifying underperformance of vulnerable pupils and works well with the EAS to challenge schools to improve. However, joint working between Challenge Advisers and LA officers continues to be an area for development. The Wellbeing data set provides Challenge Advisors with useful data. However, effective use of the data sets is at an early stage and requires further development through better joint working between Challenge Advisers and LA Officers so that there is consistency in challenging schools and promoting evidence based practice.

**Gwent Ethnic Minority Service works very effectively** with schools to raise attainment and progress over time; this is evidenced in the outcomes and progress achieved as set out in IA1. The quality of support and impact evidences that this service is good.

**Effective provision mapping of interventions is variable** this is supported by the outcome and progress profile for those pupils in KS 3 at SA and SA+ which needs to improve. This is an important area for further improvement. The needs of very vulnerable pupils are well supported through embedded practice of the Complex Needs Panel which includes representation from Inclusion, Social Service and Health. Valuable strategic leadership is provided by the multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Corporate Parenting Group.

Through ALN QA, Headteachers are working more effectively with LA officers to monitor provision and plan for building capacity in schools.

**The LA monitors and provides support to schools to help prevent incidents of bullying and a policy is in place but practice in schools is variable.** Robust processes are effective in monitoring and challenging schools to support pupils with behavioural problems to reduce and avoid exclusions. However, reducing exclusions remains a key priority in identified schools. Valuable work is being undertaken to develop a regional approach to reducing exclusions, however, this is in the early stages of development. More positive impact is emerging from the work of the EWS with the Police to provide targeted support and additional challenge to schools regarding how they record race-led incidents.

**The LA meets its statutory duties and provides good quality support for our pupils who are Looked After Children**, promoting race equality, combating racism, preventing and tackling bullying, child protection and safeguarding. The attainment and progress demonstrated of children and young people looked after supports this judgement.

**Systematic support to improve school attendance and coordination** with other teams has maintained good attendance in most Primary and Secondary. Reducing persistent absentees remains a key priority for the County Borough.

**Effective arrangements are in place through the strategic Well-being for Learning Partnership between the LA, other agencies and wider partners to improve provision and outcomes for social and emotional well-being.** The local authority effectively co-ordinates open access and targeted support for vulnerable children and young people. Demonstrable impact has been made through **the Raising Aspirations Group and NEET Practitioner Forum** subgroup to implement the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. This progressive partnership approach, linking with a key range of providers and partners, has been highly effective in steadily reducing the numbers of young people becoming NEET from 8.7% in 2009 to 1.5% in 2019-20.

**The Youth Service provides a number of high quality** projects providing young people with a variety of opportunities in and out of school, day, night and weekends and ranging from group and social activities to personal support, advice, guidance, advocacy and school based counselling services. The ESF Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work programmes are highly effective in supporting young people. The projects demonstrably impact on young people improving their attendance, attainment or behaviour, as well as overcoming personal barriers.

**There is good use of data through the Early Identification Tool** (part of the YEP Framework in BG) and through tracking of progression in collaboration with Schools, Careers Wales and wider partners which has ensured that young people are enabled to access support to take advantage of opportunities available. The Raising Aspirations Group partnership and practitioner sub groups are effective; helping avoid duplication, identify and address gaps through an annual audit and an online directory and allocating and using resources in the most sustainable way. An enhanced wide range of youth support services and personal support is provided in and out of school based on identified need, through regular mapping of services. Facilitated by the Youth Service, key partners include Families First, Social Services, Communities 4 Work, Tai Calon, Llamau, Employability programmes, Regeneration, Careers Wales, Youth Offending Service, Voluntary Sector partners, Coleg Gwent, WBL providers and other ESF projects.

The Education Welfare Service is continuing to work with partners to improve outcomes for vulnerable learners. There are strong links with Social Services and Youth Justice Services, but there is limited progress with working with health services. All pupils with ALN have access to impartial information, advice and guidance on educational training and employment opportunities through SNAP Cymru, Careers Wales.

**Analysis of EPS work conducted in Early Years** settings shows that this is an area requiring further development. The EPS is currently involved in a 'gate-keeping' role only with the sole purpose of gaining additional funding on transfer from early years' settings to school-based nurseries. This is at odds with the philosophy of the service which promotes a collaborative, person centred, problem-solving approach to supporting the needs of learners. The Education and Social Services Directorates are working together and have identified potential solutions.

**All pupils with ALN have access to impartial information**, advice and guidance on educational training and employment opportunities through SNAP Cymru, Careers Wales, and informal advice is also provided through Youth Service settings and school and Gwent College liaison.

There has been strong progress over the last three years with regards to improving attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism. To enhance this, a vulnerable pupil database has been implemented to track vulnerable learners on a monthly basis. The Education Welfare Service has effective working relationships with Youth Justice Services, Community Safety and the Police to address criminal and anti-social behaviour both in school and in the community.

**The Inclusion Service has significantly improved the monitoring of** exclusions and this has been partially effective in reducing the levels of exclusions. For pupils where there are significant difficulties that need to be discussed at ALN panel or Managed Move Panel, the pastoral plans are scrutinised. To improve the quality and effectiveness of Pastoral Support Plans new guidance has been issued to schools. Effective systems are in place to monitor the use of exclusions, challenge schools where appropriate and to refer pupils to support services. Whilst the monitoring has improved, there is room for further progress in reducing the level of exclusions. Effective processes are in place for monitoring and managing managed moves between schools via the ALN Panel. Blaenau Gwent is fully compliant with legislation ensuring that all excluded pupils are in receipt of appropriate education from day 16.

#### **Support for Pupils Presenting with Special Education Needs:**

**Panel arrangements ensure that timely and appropriate support is provided to enable effective transition from EY to nursery settings.** Guidance and criteria for access to resource bases and special school placements are clear, effective and consistently applied. Processes are supported by effective Panels and annual review arrangements. There is good identification for EY pupils with ALN through robust multi-agency and wider partners' collaboration. 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.

Effective support is provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school. The River Centre provides this support. However, further developments are needed to develop capacity within mainstream settings to enable pupils to remain in and return back to their host schools.

**A comprehensive range of specialist provision ensures that the needs of pupils with ALN are appropriately met in these settings.** Evidence shows that nearly all pupils make good or better than expected progress in their learning in nearly all resource bases and the quality of provision in nearly all resource bases is good or better. However, there is variability of practice which is being addressed through an LA specialist resource base action plan through the Resource Base Leads' Professional Learning Network.

**Pen-y-Cwm Special School provides very high quality learning experiences** for learners with severe, complex and profound needs, this is evidenced via the school's most recent ESTYN inspection where excellent practice was recognised; nearly all pupils made good progress from their original starting points. The use of highly effective assessment has continued to improve over the last three years and there are now very refined and sophisticated measures in place to assess pupil needs. Small steps progress is excellently captured through the bespoke PLAT (Pen-y-Cwm learning and assessment tracker). Over time the quality and consistency of teaching and learning has continued to improve as evidenced by MER documentation.

**The CLA Coordinator works very successfully** with schools to ensure the ALN needs of CLA pupils are identified and addressed. There are very good links between CLA and Inclusion Officers to ensure that pupils with ALN are supported appropriately. Monitoring arrangements for CLA with statements of SEN and those placed out of county are robust through regular reviews. Links across the SEWC are developing well to ensure the sharing of best practice.

**The quality of transition between settings has been variable.** New arrangements have been introduced to reduce variability and at present it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these developments. The sharing of information for pre-school children is good although effective planning for transition between settings is

inconsistent and variable. Pupil Centred Practice is being piloted in ten schools to develop practice and improve learner engagement to ensure pupils have a say in key decisions that affect them. All pupils with Statements are consulted on how best to support their needs and in specialist provision, pupils are involved in senior staff appointments.

**Work to support parents and carers of** children and young people in Blaenau Gwent with ALN continues to improve. The SEN team ensures that an appropriate level of support to parents and carers through attendance at school reviews, meetings and telephone consultations has maintained a trend of low trend of SENTW appeals. Parents are effectively supported during statutory assessment processes via a range of media; booklets and the Council's website provide clear information as well as face to face interaction with a named contact at each stage. Annual Reviews are completed. Parental Contribution Forms ensure parents and carers' views and concerns are shared. Parents and carers are signposted effectively to other support services, such as Parent Partnership. The EPS effectively provides advice and support to parents and carers. Families First in Blaenau Gwent is fully aware of the priorities for Welsh Government in terms of Supporting Young People and the importance of supporting their education thus preventing young people from becoming NEET's and thereby working towards their overall wellbeing. The current programme is fully compliant with the delivery specifications as set out by Welsh Government and it measures its outcomes its data monitoring and quarterly reporting recommendations.

There is variable school practice regarding the provision of a graduated response to meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, particularly in KS3 for those pupils at SA and SA+. Excellent practice has been identified in a few schools and the mechanisms for sharing this good practice through school to school work is developing. A few schools use assessment data exceptionally well which is then used very effectively to inform teaching and learning for pupils with ALN. However, practice is variable with a few schools needing more intensive support to improve.

**Leadership for ALN is excellent in some schools. However, practice is variable and the mechanisms for sharing good practice through school to school mechanisms requires further development.** Wider Group minutes and previously Wider SIILT minutes show that provision and leadership for ALN has been improved over time in schools where targeted support has been provided. However, the LA and EAS need 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; analyse the quality of targeted interventions and jointly promote those that are evidence-based in terms of effectiveness and value for money; and to improve distributed leadership for ALN in schools.

**SEBD provision** for FP and KS2 is improving with the development of FP/KS2 provision. The River Centre has supported resource base provisions with Team Teach training and bespoke support. Provision for SEBD pupils at Key stages 3 and 4 is developing but more work is needed to secure good progress and higher attainment, particularly at the end of KS 4. Provision for EOTAS pupils has improved through enhanced community tuition provision.

**The ALN service has been developed so that it can support building capacity across the authority.** Target setting arrangements at individual pupil level are firmly established and continuing to improve though Challenge Adviser work in schools. ALN services are also beginning to develop their use of pupil data to target interventions and challenge schools. Monitoring and tracking of school interventions through an electronic provision mapping tool is currently being implemented, though this is at too early a stage to impact on practice across all schools.

Arrangements for identification, planning and support for pre-school children with complex needs are robust and effective. Good transition planning ensures that information is available to schools upon transition and appropriate support is in place in the vast majority of cases.



**Guidance and criteria for access to resource bases** and the special schools is clear and effective, developed in partnership with Heads. Processes are supported by effective Panels and annual review arrangements. The LA has effective arrangements to ensure that pupils can access support and specialist resource base provision without the need for a Statement of SEN. Schools have clear understanding of procedures for accessing support from LA and consortium services. Commissioned services have clear and agreed criteria for access.

Allocation of funding to schools by formula has provided flexibility for Headteachers and senior school leaders to maximise the benefit of funding for individual pupils.

All pupils with difficulties in physical or mental health, (and therefore requiring access to community tuition) receive as much education as possible in the River Centre. Tailored programmes are provided to cater for individual need. The quality of provision is improving significantly from a low base and there are strong links maintained between pupils and their schools

**There is effective transition support to help pupils with ALN move between settings and stages of learning, supported by clear and improving processes and communications.** Good transition planning for pre-school children ensures that information is available to schools upon transition and appropriate support is in place.

Most pupils with ALN receive impartial information, advice and guidance on educational training and employment opportunities through careers Wales, and informal advice is also provided through Youth Service settings and school and Gwent College liaison. Effective support is provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school in key stages 3 and 4. The quality of provision and support for these pupils has improved significantly from a low base.

At KS2, support for pupils requiring specialist SEBD provision was identified as an area requiring further development. Improved SEBD provision has been established for FP and KS2 which provides for short term and long term pupil needs.

## 2.2 Support for vulnerable learners: - Areas where good progress has been made:

- Progress has been made through the comprehensive ALN provision, but the Inclusion review is on-going;
- 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.
- A report to consider Pen-y-Cwm capacity was approved by the Executive Committee in the Spring 2021;
- Readiness for the implementation of the ALN reform to support learners presenting ALN is strong;
- ASD provision is in place;

The Inclusion service review is well underway 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 largely 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;
- increase 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 where further improvement is required:

- 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.
- 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 for those on the cusp of EHE needs to be more targeted. The Action Plan needs to be fully implemented.
- CME: The local authority needs to continue to monitor CME practices and address any gaps as they arise and embed the agreed processes and ensure that regular reporting continues.
- 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 better blended working with Children's Services to explore how the EPS can work more effectively within Early Years settings. 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 ALNCos' 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 re-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.

- Implement the Pen-y-Cwm capacity plans to meet the increasing demand for places.

### 2.3 Other Education Support Services

**BG Youth Services provide effective information, support and learning opportunities for young people aged 11-25 and also supports young people through earlier transitions from 9 years old, based on a voluntary relationship between the young person and youth worker. In addition, the Youth Service co-ordinates the 11-18 Counselling Service (statutory), the extended 18-25 Counselling Service and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF), which aims to reduce the numbers of young people who become NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) up to the age of 25 through a partnership approach. The partnership now includes a focus on Youth Homelessness and Wellbeing.**

Open Access Youth Services include D of E (Duke of Edinburgh), Detached and Outreach, Youth Information Service and Youth Info Champs, Young Reps Volunteering programme, Youth Ambassadors (YAMs), Health and Wellbeing workshops and training, Youth Clubs, Open for Youth Nights, school holiday programmes and the 11-25 Counselling Service.

Targeted Youth Services include Inspire to Achieve 11-16, Inspire to Work 16-24, Youth and Community Team (Youth Homelessness and Mental Health) and the Positive Futures anti-social behaviour programme.

**All the work of the Youth Service is preventative in nature.** At a very basic level, the support and opportunities can help young people to meet with each other and with trusted adults, feel part of their community which can prevent low levels of mental health, prevent incidents of anti-social behaviour and help young people become active citizens. Both Inspire programmes are preventative in their approach. Inspire 2 Achieve exist to help 'prevent' young people from becoming NEET by focusing on their wellbeing, attendance, behaviour and attainment. Inspire 2 Work exists to 'prevent' young people from developing ingrained negative behaviours and lifestyles into their future.

**Since March 2020, the Youth Service has supported the response to COVID-19 effectively.** Although school based youth workers and counsellors returned to buildings in September, initially, the service refocussed to identify and support the most vulnerable young people known to the Youth Service, Education and schools. Since March 2020, the service supported 600 11-16 year olds and 250 16-25 year olds and from March to July made weekly contact. Initially the focus was supporting young people around the challenges they faced linked to the pandemic, including delivering essentials such as food, toiletries, wellbeing packs, supporting issues around lack of money, losing employment and facing eviction. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation and the local authority placed some young people who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support.

Over time, the emergency response changed to support young people around their wellbeing. Online activities were developed such as music, cooking and art club, and face to face activities included wellbeing walks, supporting attendance at college and job interviews. The Counselling Service has continued throughout, providing online sessions, meeting young people outside, in school and the youth centre. A full summer programme was provided including a mixture of online and face to face activities. Throughout, youth club staff have been redeployed to provide outreach and the detached team have continued to work in the evenings, responding at times to requests from the Police and community members. This has been an opportunity to keep young people informed about the restrictions, any changes and what that means for them. Between April 2020 and December 2020, 24 referrals (MARFS) were made to Social Services.

### **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework:**

**The Youth Service co-ordinates the Welsh Government's 'Youth Engagement and Progression Framework' through a strategic multi-agency partnership the Raising Aspirations Group (RAG). The partnership is mature and effective and continues to address all 6 key areas of the framework.** This includes using the Early Identification Tool (7th year), updating the provision map (7th year), updating the online directory of support (7th year), further developing the 'lead worker' role and further refining the tracking and support of young people. All areas of the Blaenau Gwent action plan are developing well and either met or are on track.

The Youth Service also facilitates two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships, sub groups of the RAG, which co-ordinates the Early Identification process, allocation of lead worker role, and robust tracking and monitoring of transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.

**As a result of this co-ordinated approach with partners, there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET when they leave school, reaching 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019.** This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the lowest figure ever achieved and below the Welsh average of 1.7%. Considering the context of the past year, it is extremely positive that so many young people transitioned successfully and maintained their post 16 placement.

The Youth Service reports to a number of external funders and provides an annual audit return to Welsh Government. The Raising Aspirations Group monitors the progress of the local delivery of the two Inspire programmes. A performance monitoring report is presented annually to Education Scrutiny to scrutinise the Youth Service performance. Annual reports and evaluation reports are also provided to Education DMT. Feedback is provided to young people on a regular basis.

**The Education Transformation (ET) team is responsible for the following areas with the aim of improving the delivery of and access to education throughout Blaenau Gwent; ultimately, securing higher standards of success and achievement among the pupil and emerging adult population:**

- School Admissions and Appeals
- The Planning of School Places
- Education Facilities Management
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Delivery along with Education Projects and Programmes
- School Organisation and Associated Project Implementation/ Delivery
- The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- The ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity Project
- Accessibility and Medical Needs Strategy, Policy Development, Procedures and Forums
- Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy, Procedures and Appeal

### **School Admissions – 2020/21 Admissions Round Analysis (Implementation during the 2019/20 academic session)**

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

**100% of applications were processed within 48 hours and 100% of standard in-year transfer requests were processed within 15 days of receipt in accordance with the WG School Admissions Code (2013) and Blaenau Gwent's School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education.**

The primary reason for in-year transfer has been inward migration of families into the Blaenau Gwent area, with an upward trend in inward migration seen between 2016 and 2019. The transfer rate decreased slightly due to the COVID-19 pandemic to **229 in 2019/20 (151 primary transfers, 78 secondary transfers)**. The primary reason for in-year transfer has been inward migration of families into the Blaenau Gwent area.

There were 3 appeals held for the reception year group during the summer period 2020, which is less than the number of appeals held in 2019. All 3 appeals were upheld in favour of the Council. The numbers of in-time applications received for pupils who applied for a school place during the 2020/21 admission round, increased slightly for nursery and reception but decreased for secondary when compared to 2019/20, this was due to the birth rate for the year 7 cohort being lower. Please refer to Figure 1 for the in-time percentage comparisons:

Figure 1: In-time Application (%) for each admission round

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

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

Figure 2: First Preferences Met %

| % of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2017/18 | % of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2018/19 | % of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2019/20 | % of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2020/21 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nursery – 100%  | Nursery – 100%  | Nursery – 100%  | Nursery – 100%  |
| Reception – 99%   | Reception – 99%   | Reception – 99%   | Reception – 99%   |

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

The pilot phase of on-line admission arrangements was launched on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. Online applications have increased overall over the course of the last 4 academic sessions, as detailed below:

#### 2017/18

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

#### 2018/19

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

#### 2019/20

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

#### 2020/21

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

**The Admissions Policy for 2021/22 was also consulted upon and published in line with the Welsh Government's deadline (15<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – the year preceding the academic session to which the policy applies).**

The Admissions Forum met 3 times over the last year. The Forum has sustained a good level of attendance at each meeting, working closely with the Education Transformation team in order to:

- improve school and Council awareness and partnership approaches in respect of the implementation and monitoring of the admissions round;
- improve tracking processes from live birth to secondary education (whilst ensuring alignment with Inclusion);
- address issues i.e. ensure that when in-year transfers are allocated a place a start date is offered within 10 days;
- explore a wider ranging data set i.e. Flying Start, placement outside of the chronological year group, home tuition and attendance data etc. Ensuring that there is a holistic approach to the management of pupil places; and,
- monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon admissions
- work towards implementation of the new Capita One Online system.

### Planning of School Places

Councils have a duty to manage, monitor, review and plan pupil places on an annual basis in line with:

- Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011)
- Welsh Government School Admission and Admission Appeals Code's (2013)
- Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2013)

Capacity calculations were determined for each of the schools in October 2018, which informed the final admission numbers for the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy 2020/21. Projections are calculated for a 5-year period for primary and for a 7-year period for secondary schools. Pupil projection accuracy has improved considerably over the last 3 years, with 100 % of primary and 98% of secondary projections confirmed to be accurate during the 2019/20, 2018/19 and 2017/18 academic sessions; in comparison to 97% for primary 94% for secondary during the 2016/17 academic session.

**Between January 2019 and January 2020 the percentage of surplus places within primary has seen a slight increase from 11% in Jan 2019 to 12% in January 2020 due to in-year transfers out of borough; however, the 19% surplus for secondary in January 2019 has decreased to 16%. 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 11%, by the 2023/24 academic year – with the overall combined projected status at 10%.**

**The School Organisation Policy (2017) set a target of reducing surplus places to 15% by 2020 across the County Borough;** by which time the primary sector is projected to have 10% and the secondary sector 15% surplus places. The Education Transformation team targeted the following schools whereby the percentage was 15% or over, in line with the delivery of surplus place reduction action plans during the 2019/2020 academic session:

- Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg – Admission number reduced from 258 to 241 resulting in the surplus % reducing from 17% in 18/19 to 13% in 2019/20
- Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Primary Phase - Admission number reduced from 360 to 324 the surplus % reducing remained at 25%, with further reduction required for 20/21

The Education Transformation team's strategy for the 2019/20 academic session is to work on the development of surplus places reduction action plans with the following schools who are projected (as at January 2020) to have over 15% surplus between 2020 and 2023:

- St Illtyd's Primary School currently have 12% surplus in 2019/20 but projected to rise to 19% in 2023/24
- St Marys Roman Catholic Primary School currently have 18% surplus in 2019/20 but projected to rise to 19% in 2023/24
- Cwm Primary School currently have 22% surplus in 2019/20 but projected to rise to 32% in 2024/25

Glyncoed Primary School are projected to have sufficiency issues between 2022 and 2023 this will be addressed via the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, whereby sufficient capacity will be built in to accommodate pupil projections and demand. There is also a projected sufficiency issue in 2023 (- % of the pupil population or 3 pupils) for Coed y Garn Primary School, which can be addressed by increasing the capacity of the school, which has been reduced in previous years. In addition, Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus, is projected to have sufficiency issues in 2025/26 (- 3% of the pupil population or 21 pupils), which can also be addressed via the annual assessment of school capacity as above.

Over the last academic session, the team have submitted the following Section 106 requests for developer contributions, in-line with securing increased capacity in schools within the development area:

- Ebbw Fawr Valley – 1 for primary provision
- Ebbw Fach valley – 1 for secondary provision
- Tredegar Sirhowy Valley – 1 for primary and 1 for secondary provision

**During the last 4 years there has been a considerable reduction in surplus places within the primary sector. The secondary sector has fluctuated in line with transfers out of borough in particular. The secondary sector has remained below 20% surplus places for the last 4 years (Please refer to Figure 4 ).**

**Figure 4– Blaenau Gwent Surplus Place Percentage Comparisons**

| Year    | % Surplus Places -Primary Sector | % Surplus Places Secondary Sector |
|---------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2011/12 | 28.7                             | 19                                |
| 2012/13 | 28.1                             | 19.7                              |
| 2013/14 | 25.9                             | 20.2                              |
| 2014/15 | 17.5                             | 18.3                              |
| 2015/16 | 18                               | 20                                |
| 2016/17 | 16                               | 17                                |
| 2017/18 | 14                               | 19                                |
| 2018/19 | 11                               | 19                                |
| 2019/20 | 12                               | 16                                |



Figure 5 (below) sets out the comparative percentages of surplus places across the family of Local Authorities, with the last data set being 2018/19. **Blaenau Gwent has joint second lowest number of surplus places within secondary, and the second lowest within primary in 2018/19.**

The Council are presently awaiting the Family of Local Authority and All Wales comparative data sets for the 2019/20 academic sessions, which are scheduled for release in autumn 2021.

**Figure 5 – Family of LA Status (based on percentage)**

| Local Authority Family | Primary | Secondary |
|------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Blaenau Gwent          | 13.7%   | 18.50%    |
| Caerphilly             | 14.8%   | 20.60%    |
| Merthyr Tydfil         | 9.4%    | 14.90%    |
| Neath Port Talbot      | 17.9%   | 18.50%    |
| Rhondda Cynon Taff     | 16.20%  | 23.90%    |

#### **All Wales Position**

The January 2018/19 surplus places comparative data for Wales Blaenau Gwent's position was:

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

#### **Education Facilities Management**

##### **Maintenance, Repair and Planned Works**

The Red Book Guidance associated with the repair and maintenance of Blaenau Gwent schools has been in existence since October 1999, in response to the funding provisions of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Local Authority Financial Scheme Regulations 1998. Education Transformation and Technical Services undertook a review of the Division of Responsibilities Guidance and TE100 procedure in the spring-term of 2019, with the updated version circulated among schools for implementation from September 2019.

442 TE100's were received between September 2019 and August 2020, 100% of which were acknowledged and received a response within the specified timeframe. 94% (415) of the 629 TE100 requests have been completed with remaining 6% scheduled for completion within the summer and autumn terms 2019. Delays to resolution have been due to the following factors:

- budgetary issues in line with identified costs;
- securing contractors to undertake the work;
- the capacity of Technical Services to assess the extent of repair/ maintenance work and associated costs;
- works to be undertaken outside of school operation; and
- forms submitted at the end of term, when schools are scheduled to be closed.

### **Facilities Review**

The facilities review process and pro-forma were updated in line with lessons learned from 2018/19 and implemented alongside surplus place, capacity and school plan/treadmill reviews in the autumn-term 2019. In addition, bi-monthly monitoring meetings have taken place in order to actively monitor school facilities action plans. Half termly meetings took with all schools where all outstanding TE100's, H&S and FRA actions were discussed, and a timeline agreed for resolution agreed.

### **Health and Safety and Fire Risk Assessment**

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005; places a duty on the Council to monitor compliance and management of health and safety and fire risk assessment related matters in school's/education buildings. The Education Transformation team monitor accidents and incidents, action plans and delivery timeframes with both schools and Technical Services. The team also work with Corporate Health and Safety Colleagues to address policy and guidance issues in schools i.e. adverse weather.

### **School Trips and Visits – Evolve**

All schools within Blaenau Gwent are now using EVOLVE and have a full appreciation in terms of what is expected of them with regards to trips, visits and activities. The benefits of EVOLVE and its continued use are as follows:

- Best practice – the system is used by the majority of Welsh Council's, schools and academy groups throughout the U.K.
- Consistent approach - all schools are following the same procedures.
- Regular monitoring - EVOLVE provides access to all planning documentation which is tracked and monitored.
- Council oversight - providing the opportunity for regular reports, monitoring etc. by Councils to ensure compliance and provide a level of assurance.
- Ensures compliance – the system offers monthly and termly statistical reports, with schools being monitored and advised of any concerns.
- There is a clear audit trail in the event of an incident/accident.
- All visit information is retained in the medium to long-term on an independent server.
- Training and professional support is provided and can be accessed via a specialist Outdoor Adviser, who liaises with the Council.
- The Council and schools have continued access to Welsh and U.K. National guidance and support via Outdoor Education Advisers Panel

The establishment visit data demonstrates that all schools have used EVOLVE over the last year, with 13 being the minimum number of visits recorded. As is the case throughout Wales, there are considerable variations in the number of visits added by schools. Even those schools with a poor track record of use are now increasingly utilising the system, adding a greater number of visits.

Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC) training courses are held annually and ad hoc training is offered to schools as requested. Figures 5 and 6 contain a summary of the educational visits data for 2019/20:

**Figure 6: 2019/20 Statistical Summary**

| Summary of Approved and Processed Visits During the 2019/20 Academic Session | Statistical Summary |
|--|---------------------|
| Total number of visits   | 2315                |
| Total number of students   | 46164               |
| Total number of days   | 2381                |
| Total number of participant days   | 48575               |

**Figure 7: 2019/20 Breakdown by Visit Type**

|                                    | Abroad | Residential | Adventurous (External) | Adventurous (Own staff) | Other | Onsite |
|------------------------------------|--------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|--------|
| <b>Total no. of visits</b>         | 4      | 29          | 67                     | 16                      | 2232  | 5      |
| <b>Total no. of establishments</b> | 4      | 15          | 16                     | 2                       | 29    | 3      |
| <b>Total no. of students</b>       | 207    | 897         | 1977                   | 755                     | 43786 | 61     |
| <b>Total no. of days</b>           | 25     | 95          | 114                    | 17                      | 2232  | 5      |

#### **School Building Condition and Suitability**

Welsh Government has requested that Council's use Faithful+Gould to undertake school building condition assessments. F+G utilise the AMP methodology to determine an overall school condition grade. **The 2019/20 position for school building condition and suitability continues to improve in line with figure 8 data overleaf:**

**Figure 8 – Overall Building Condition and Suitability Ratings**

|  | 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>                         | 0 | 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 |

The Council are reviewing the criteria and methodology linked to suitability assessments. **There is only one school building categorised as a 'D' (Glyncoed Primary School) within the school estate, which is programmed for replacement in 2023.**

#### **Emergency Planning**

**The ET team have secure emergency planning procedures in place, including a Severe Weather Policy and associated procedures.** The ET team dealt with school closure and facilities management in line with the Emergency Response Team (ERT) throughout 2019/20. 0 closure day took place in the 2019/20 due to severe weather, however all schools closed at the end of March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Education has secure emergency planning procedures in place, which have been tested extensively during COVID and are deemed to be effective.**

### **Schools Repurposing and COVID-19 Emergency Response**

In mid-March 2020, the Local Authority successfully developed and led on the emergency planning arrangements and repurposing of schools aligned to the COVID-19 pandemic. The LA in partnership with its schools successfully established 7 re-purposed childcare hubs to support childcare for the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. Throughout the emergency response period, the LA has provided childcare for over 500 critical workers via school childcare hubs and/or private childcare provision. 377 children accessed a key worker childcare place at a school hub between March and early July 2020. Effective management and monitoring processes were established via a dedicated Schools Repurposing Planning Group, childcare hub guidance was developed, issued and monitored along with emergent issues and planning aligned to the reopening of schools in the summer-term 2020. The Youth Service have supported over 500 young people

### **Free School Meals**

**The LA quickly and effectively responded in order to fulfil their duty in establishing provision for free school meal eligible pupils during the school closures from March 2020.** In the first instance, a packed lunch collection/delivery process was established. This then progressed to a weekly meal box delivery scheme managed by the catering department. It was then determined that the Council would implement a direct payment method and associated application process, which was run alongside the meal box delivery until September 2020 when the meal box provision ended. The FSM direct payments were administered directly to eligible families to support them during any school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, any self-isolation periods for the pupils and the school holiday periods. The FSM direct payments continue to be active during self-isolation periods and school holiday periods, families can apply via the online application form which is regularly reviewed and re-opened for newly eligible families. Applications are subjected to an eligibility and quality checks, once the eligibility has been confirmed the applicant is set up as a Blaenau Gwent creditor, the payments are then sent made via the weekly BACS schedule. The number of pupils entitled to and claiming the FSM direct payments has grown significantly over the last 12 months from approx. 1,847 pupils to the current 2,550 pupils, this equates to 89% of the total eligible pupils within the authority. The Education Transformation team pick up all queries relating to the payments, relevant departments are then consulted as required. Queries can range from a change of bank details for a claimant, to a change in pupil's residency.

### **School Reopening 2020/21**

#### **Pupil and Family Engagement**

An initial parent survey was undertaken on behalf of all BG schools. Responses were received for 4,221 (out of a possible 8,134) children, out of which the parents of 2,219 or (53%) stated that they intended to send their child/children back to school during the summer term. However, the remaining 2,002 or (47%) parents indicated that they did not intend on sending their child/children back to school during the summer term. A follow up survey was undertaken by each school based upon further communications provided to parents, in which schools requested that parents confirm their intentions based upon updated information on school operation etc. In order to oversee the reopening of schools in Blaenau Gwent, Education established two Executive School Planning Groups - one for the secondary sector inclusive of special schools, along with one for primary sector inclusive of Welsh-medium provision. The aim of these groups was and continues to be the development of a common framework and key principles within which the reopening of schools could take place. In addition, a Local Authority Transition Group was established with representation from key services including Education, Organisational Development, Health and Safety, Property Services, Insurance, Environmental Health, Social Services etc. The purpose of this group was to develop and oversee a transition plan which met the key support service requirements associated with the reopening of schools.

#### **Facilities, Health & Safety**

Technical facilities assessments were undertaken in preparation for reopening to assess physical works and adaptations i.e. maintenance and ventilation requirements etc. Work was then programmed accordingly. In addition, a comprehensive water testing, management and mitigation programme was established and monitored by

Education, Property Services, Health & Safety and Environmental Health. Effective monitoring and control measures were employed, meaning that 25 out of 29 school sites were able to reopen in week 1, with all 29 school sites operational by the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the summer-term.

Capacity assessments and facilities planning sessions were programmed and facilitated by Education in partnership with headteachers and relevant school staff, on an individual basis. This process was used in order to inform the operational plans for each school including: maximum pupil numbers and grouping; operational layout, set-up and systems i.e. one way; room usage; decant and resource management requirements. Guidance was provided to schools regarding the use of PPE in general, for first aid, medical, intimate care and other purposes. PPE and other resource requirements i.e. signage, spill kits etc. were audited on a school by school basis. Plans were established and schools were provisioned for accordingly.

A cleaning service specification and associated guidance were produced and shared with schools. Individual cleaning plans were then established for each school, which are being monitored and will be used in order to inform future resource planning. It was agreed that catering would not be provided within school settings from week commencing 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and for the remainder of the summer-term. Catering staff were then redeployed into the cleaning service to increase capacity and resilience. A reopening risk assessment template, guidance and example were produced and shared with headteachers. These documents were then completed by school leaders and validated by the Local Authority. All risk assessments were deemed to be suitable and sufficient.

### **School Improvement**

**Throughout each phase of the pandemic the range of support to schools has flexed in order to respond to emerging needs.** The LA has effectively engaged the EAS, our commissioned school improvement service throughout this time has worked closely with the LA, school leaders, staff and governors to support these needs. Indeed, the Principal Challenge Adviser of the EAS is now a key member of the Executive groups that oversee the planning for the reopening of schools.

Moving forward and as we move to the next phase of the recovery of education, schools have and will continue to be supported through a range of strategies and key to this is the one stop shop playlist known as “supporting our schools”. This playlist has been and will continue to be a key mechanism of communication. However, as the return progresses support will continue to be tailored to meet the emerging needs.

Below is a high-level summary of the extensive work that is ongoing:

- Providing timely communication and access to virtual networks for school settings and governors
- Supporting adaptive and innovative leadership to manage change
- Providing bespoke leadership support to schools and settings with a focus on self-evaluation, quality assuring current provision and planning for return
- Providing wellbeing resources and guidance materials
- To continue to provide a range of professional learning that meets the needs of the entire workforce (and governors) over the next academic year
- Access to advice support and guidance to support curriculum for Wales
- Ensuring that the commissioned improvement services work is continually aligned to the meet the needs of schools

### **Home to School Transport**

Education determined that transport provision would be sought and agreed, in consideration of availability and safe operation. However, the primary message to parents was that, where possible, parents should transport/walk their child to school. In addition, it was determined that transport would not be provided for school childcare hub children and young people, in order to maximise the offer and safety of provision for those who need it most. It was expected that parents will continue to facilitate this as has been the case throughout the repurposing process.

Pupils from 15 schools within Blaenau Gwent are currently eligible for transport in line with the BG policy, along with pupils from 12 schools/specialist education facilities outside of the County Borough. The Council was able to fully address the transport requirements identified by schools within and outside of the borough.

### **Outcomes**

26 out of 29 school sites were operational in the first week of the summer-term, with all 29 operational by the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the summer-term. The preparatory work undertaken by schools in close working partnership with the Local Authority, resulted in 42% of the pupil population or 3,393 pupil's returning to the 26 operational school sites within the first week. All 29 school sites were fully operational as of Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020, with 48% of 3,941 pupils returning to school in the final week of the summer-term. School childcare hub provision was consistently delivered between March and July 2020 with approximately 600 attendees per/week during the summer-term, and approximately 300 vulnerable learners in attendance at both school and hub provision during the summer-term.

### **Accessibility and Medical Needs**

The Blaenau Gwent Accessibility Strategy 2017-2020 and associated action plan are scheduled for review and consultation over the next year. An Accessibility Forum was developed in 2018, in order to coordinate a review of both the strategy and action plan, whilst also ensuring that there are effective accessibility identification and management processes in place aligned to delivery. The Forum was active between 2017 and early 2020, when the frequency of meetings declined, due to resource-based pressures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the action plan has been continually monitored by Education throughout the course of the pandemic. In addition, accessibility issues have and continue to be identified, managed and monitored on a case by case basis.

### **Strong progress was made against the Strategy and associated action between 2017 and 2021, as follows:**

- Blaenau Gwent Council were recognised by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2018, as being one of the only Councils in Wales to have a published Accessibility Strategy and action plan.
- The Forum was established to oversee implementation of key strategic priorities, along with delivery and monitoring of the action plan, whilst also ensuring due regard was given to related policy and legislative developments.
- A facilities review process has been established and completed with all Blaenau Gwent schools, in order to facilitate development, publication and action planning processes on a school-by-school basis. This is also being rolled out to wider education, alternative and informal learning settings/facilities. The facilities management aspect of the Education Transformation team work closely with Technical Services, who have and continue to embed accessibility into the facilities review, maintenance, condition and suitability processes.
- All Blaenau Gwent School have Accessibility Plans in place, which were last reviewed during the 2019/20 academic session.
- Pupil accessibility needs are identified pre-admission, monitored, managed and resourced as required. There have been three cases over the course of the 2020/21 academic year, whereby physical works have been undertaken and schools supported to meet the needs of the pupils in question.
- The Blaenau Gwent school maintenance strategy and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme have and continue to address accessibility issues to the greatest degree possible throughout the school estate. There are two school settings within Blaenau Gwent which are not fully accessible. However, depending on the needs of the child or young person additional adaptations, work and provision may be required within those setting that are considered to be accessible.
- Staff training programmes have been developed and delivered, with learning incorporated into future programmes to increase awareness, knowledge, experience, understanding and management of accessibility issues.
- A Complex and Medical Needs group has been established with representation from Health, Education, Community Services, Health and Safety and Social Services (along with other relevant partners as determined in line with each case), to address individual cases whereby complex needs prevent pupils from attending their chosen/preferred school. Thus far five cases have been resolved, one of which was subject to an independent equality impact assessment.

- An early identification process is in development, to ensure that the Council is able to manage accessibility issues technically, financially and educationally, prior to pupils reaching statutory school age.

**A fundamental review of the school estate and associated accessibility plans is required. In order to undertake this review, Education plan to develop a 3 to 5-year programme of detailed accessibility audits, starting with the oldest settings and those with the lowest condition and suitability ratings.** In conjunction with this, Education will work with key partners and professionals including the Forum, to fundamentally review the Accessibility Strategy over the course of the 2021/22 academic session, for adoption in the summer 2022, and implementation from September 2022. The Education plan to develop a Healthcare Needs Sub-group of the Accessibility Forum, to work on the development of localised operational guidance in line with the aforementioned policy, including early identification and management processes. The guidance will cover both the administration of medicines and medical needs.

### **Home to School and Post 16 Transport**

Local Authorities have a duty to publish their home to school and post 16 transport policies in accordance with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 ("the Measure"), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the "Regulations"). The current policy was published on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 for implementation in the 2020 academic year, post approval by Executive Committee in September. The Council are more generous in respect of home to school transport entitlement, than the Welsh Government statutory limits. The Council offer a non-statutory travel grant for post 16 learners of £150.

### **Blaenau Gwent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme**

#### **SEWC 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Regional Group**

Since 2016/17, the Education Transformation team led on the creation and administration of the South East Wales Consortia (SEWC) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Regional Group, based on a strategic need to share good practice and learn from other Councils who are engaged in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools and All-Through Schooling (ATS) agendas. Blaenau Gwent's lead role on the SEWC 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Regional Group has enhanced the profile of the Council on a regional and national basis. The establishment of the group demonstrates an outward looking approach and will contribute to Blaenau Gwent taking forward the review and implementation of the School Organisation Policy (2017) in the 2019/20 academic session.

#### **Blaenau Gwent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme**

The Education Transformation team manages the programme and all associated 21<sup>st</sup> Century School's projects. 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 in the autumn-term of 2019, with the delivery of the final project, Six Bells Campus.

The Band A Programme realised an investment of £20.25m in school estate between 2014-19 (50/50 WG and Council funded) as follows:

- **Tredegar Comprehensive School Remodelling Project £2.3m:**

The project concluded in 2017. A project closure/ evaluation workshop session with Construction Excellence Wales (CEW) deemed the project to be an example of best practice in terms of:

- value for money;
- partnership working;
- project management arrangements; and,
- effective delivery on a live site.

The project closure report has now been submitted to Welsh Government.



- **Abertillery Learning Community (Tillery Street Campus) New Build Primary School - £9.8m:** The new school was occupied by staff and pupils June 2016. Phase 4 of the project, which involved demolition of the former school and external works, concluded in November 2016. The Welsh Government Minister for Education officially opened the Tillery Street Campus in January 2017. The closure report has been finalised and submitted to Welsh Government.
- **Ystruth Primary School Remodelling Project - £635,900:** The focus of the project was to remodel key areas of the school to meet the changing needs of the pupil population. The project had a specific focus on the transformation of provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The project commenced in October 2017 and concluded in August 2018 on programme and profile.
- **Abertillery Learning Community (Six Bells Campus) New Build Primary School - £8.8m (inclusive of an additional £150,000 of funding secured from Welsh Government in January 2019):** The project involved the development of a 360 place new build primary school along with a 60 place nursery and a 9 place resource base, to accommodate pupils from Queen Street and Bryngwyn Primary Campuses. Sewer diversion works concluded in July 2018, and the formal school build process commenced. Education was successful in securing an additional £150,000 to increase community parking on the site. This falls outside of the project and is planned for delivery between 2021 and 2022. The Minister for Education opened the Six Bells Campus in September 2019.

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.

Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme has an established programme management structure, delivered in line with the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) methodology. The Programme Board who oversee it, is comprised of key Council Officers, along with external partners, and is accountable to Corporate Leadership Team, who act as Programme Sponsor. Projects are managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent's Corporate Project Management Framework and PRINCE 2, and each has a dedicated project management team.

Welsh Government encourages and expects Councils to participate in a Gateway Review process. The Gateway Review is a form of peer review, which tests the Council's readiness and capacity to successfully deliver projects and programmes. 4 reviews have taken place to date within Blaenau Gwent, with the latest having taken place in 2019.

**The Education Transformation team agreed with the review team that, due to the programme status, the delivery confidence assessment should be split as follows, one for Band A and one for Band B respectively. For Band A, based upon a Gateway 5, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Green. For Band B, based upon a Gateway 0, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Amber, due to early stage of the programme. The outcome report, highlighted that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme management arrangements are to be commended, as follows:**

***‘...all of the projects within the Portfolio have been successfully completed... ongoing monitoring and realisation of benefits is well-evidenced. The positive impact of these projects on education and wider societal outcomes in the Blaenau Gwent area is also clearly evidenced... the very high quality of programme management in evidence is impressive’.***

An audit of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band A Programme was undertaken during the 2019/20 academic year, the outcome of which was a grading of ‘reasonable assurance’. Only 2 weaknesses were found which pre-date the existing programme team. The weaknesses found were pertaining to the Band A SOP (submitted in 2010), along with business case submissions pre-2014. Both of these weaknesses have subsequently been addressed by the current Programme team.

**The Band B Programme commenced in April 2019 and is set to conclude in 2025. The Programme will realise an investment of £19.6million throughout the Blaenau Gwent school estate.** The Welsh Government intervention rate for Band B is a 65/35 split, in favour of Local Authorities. The Band B Programme seeks to deliver the following key projects in line with the investment objectives:

- Continued secondary school re-modelling within the following priority schools:
  - Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus
  - Brynmawr Foundation School
  - River Centre Learning Community
  - Tredegar Comprehensive School

This project will be a continued focus due to the level of investment required, in line with future bandings of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme – **Business case submission is programmed throughout 2021.**

- The development of a new 360 primary school to replace Glyncoed Primary, which is the only category ‘D’ building in terms of condition within county borough – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government**
- Primary School remodelling within the Ebbw Fawr Valley consisting of Beaufort Hill, Cwm and Rhos y Fedwen Primary Schools – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government.**
- Remodelling of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to address ongoing condition and suitability issues – **The business case for which has been submitted and approved by Welsh Government.**

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018 that £30 million (100% funding, with no match requirement from Councils), would be allocated to support capital projects dedicated to and growing Welsh language in education (the grant was to be administered in addition to the capital allocations confirmed in Band B). In addition to the Band B funding envelope, Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million from 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 consultation, which is scheduled to conclude on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The delivery programme/timeline has and continues to be subject to regular review throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**School Organisation/ Transformation Project Implementation and Delivery-** the Education Transformation team manage wider Education project development and delivery, ensuring that there is clear alignment with all relevant fields and areas of work, including the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme. Over the last academic year, the following projects have been managed by the team, in close working partnership with other relevant service areas.

**Brynmawr School 3G Pitch Project** – Two business cases were developed and both prudential borrowing and external funding were approved for the project. The Education Transformation team secured £200,000 from the Artificial Surfaces Collaboration Programme – the largest donation made by the programme, towards the development of a 3G pitch. The project is currently within the implementation phase and scheduled to conclude in the autumn of 2021.

**Class Size Grant Revenue and Capital Funding** – The Education Transformation team secured £338,108.10 of revenue funding which is to be reviewed annually in terms of allocation, in reducing class sizes. The team also bid for capital funding and successfully secured £199,600 and effectively delivered 2 projects on programme and profile in Willowtown and Georgetown Primary Schools.

**Welsh Government Class Size Revenue Grant** - criteria was to reduce the number of classes in schools of 29 and over in the foundation phase, along with one or more of the following:

- significant levels of pupils who are eFSM;
- significant levels of pupils with ALN/SEN;
- significant levels of pupils who are EAL/WAL;
- schools with below average outcomes which categorised as red or amber under the School Categorisation System.

The grant allocation of the last 2 years is as follows:

- 2019/20 - £105,659.25 was split between Blaen y Cwm Primary School and Abertillery Learning Community
- 2020/21 - £198,664 was split between Brynbach Primary School, Abertillery Learning Community, Deighton Primary School, Ebbw Fawr learning Community and Coed y Garn Primary School

In January 2021 Welsh Government decided to extend this for another round of funding:

- 2021/22 - £130,938 has been split between Brynbach Primary School, Abertillery Learning Community, Deighton Primary School and Ebbw Fawr learning Community

**Rural Schools** - The Council has been successful in securing Welsh Government 'Small and Rural' Schools Grants in order to support schools with low pupil populations and categorisation to:

1. **Encourage innovation**
2. **Support greater school to school working**
3. **Provide additional administrative support**
4. **Increase the community use of school buildings**

The recipients and grants within Blaenau Gwent over the last 3 years are as follows:

- 2019/20 - £35,873 **Sofrydd Primary School**
- 2020/21 - £35,904 **Rhos y Fedwen Primary School**
- 2021/22 - £35,944 **St Mary's R.C Primary School**

**Tredeggar 3G Pitch** - In December 2019, the Education Transformation team secured funding to deliver a new 3G pitch, to replace the existing Astroturf at Tredeggar Comprehensive School, this successfully concluded in February 2020, and became operational in August 2020.

**St Mary's CIW MUGA** - The Education Transformation team completed a business case on behalf of St Mary's CIW School, to secure funding for a Multi-Use Games area. The project was successfully concluded in September 2019.

### **Period Equity Project**

The Period Equity Project in Blaenau Gwent has been hailed as an example of best practice by both Welsh Govt. and the UK Period Poverty Task Force. The project case study was presented at both the UK Task Force and the Period Dignity Round Table with the Deputy Minister Jane Hut in February 2020. BG employed a project methodology in order to deliver against the Period Dignity Grant, which commenced in 2018. A project group was established with representation from relevant Council services, health, private and third sector groups and organisations, along with Trade Unions.

A School and Community Engagement plan was established and baselines assessments was carried out with children, young people and the wider community, in order to establish the level of access and wider issues relating to period poverty. Questions were tailored to the target audience. A Neighbourhood Community Network with a period poverty focus was established by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, to compliment the project group, broaden its reach and scope. The project was also aligned to the work of the Healthy Schools Coordinator, via the delivery of and training around the Growing up Resource and School Health Research Network. The purpose of this was to assess the status of delivery in terms of education, raise awareness of the project, explore and address gaps.

School Councils and the BG Youth Forum have been actively engaged in promoting awareness and understanding around access to products, peer support and to inform education and training requirements. Working in partnership with PHS, the Council has sourced and is committed to providing eco/environmentally friendly products from 2020 onwards. The project reach is significant and includes: schools co-located sporting and leisure facilities, youth centres childcare and early years' settings and community centres. In addition, alternative funding has been sourced by groups and services in order to compliment delivery i.e. the Rotary Club.

Over the course of the last year, our priority has been to ensure sanitary provision continued to be made readily available to all pupils - particularly pupils. This has been achieved via effective working with school's partner organisations i.e. Tredeggar Comprehensive School hand delivered supply of products to females during lockdown. The Council ensured that products were made available to pupils either via schools, community settings or as part of the delivery of free school meals throughout the pandemic. In addition, childcare hubs were run via BG schools where free products were readily made available. During the past year Education have continued to monitor stock and replenish schools and community settings as and when required.

### **The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan**

Section 84 of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, requires each Council to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The purpose of the WESP is to set out the Council's strategic approach and direction in the development and delivery of Welsh-medium provision and Welsh education. The plan was approved by the Executive Committee and signed by the Corporate Director in 2016. The WESP is underpinned and informed by Welsh Government's current Welsh-medium Education Strategy (April 2010), along with the policy statement for 2015-16.

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20 is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language frameworks and strategies. The strategic priorities highlighted within the BG WESP document can be summarised as follows:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2020, to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year's provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg by 50% in 2020.
- Work regionally with South East Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision between 2017-2020 and beyond.
- Improving Welsh medium learner outcomes by 2020 so that learners raise aspirations and improve their life chances.

The Blaenau Gwent WESP was formally approved by Welsh Government in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent was the first and only Council within the SEWC region at the time to have the plan approved with no further amendments. Alongside a review of the WESP, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation are reviewed and strengthened annually. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, 3 out of 4 WEF meetings took place throughout the course of the academic year 2019/20 with membership, attendance and engagement sustained to a high standard throughout. Partners have commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which has in turn had a positive impact upon membership, attendance and outcomes.

The Council has worked with neighbouring authorities via the regional POSP forum, to develop a booklet promoting the benefits of being bilingual. The document is reviewed annually and shared with the families of prospective pupils. The booklet is also linked to the admissions process and is shared via health professionals, early year's settings, schools and other relevant partners/professionals, in order to promote Welsh language opportunities and education locally. A copy of the booklet is also available via the Council's website.

It has been a difficult year to sustain the strong progress made in relation to the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan since 2019. However, the LA and its partners have remained committed to the delivery of the WESP, whilst also supporting the development of resources and engagement throughout the LA during the emergency response period and subsequent reopening of schools.

**Blaenau Gwent 2019/20 WESP self-assessment is based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment has been sustained at an 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.**

#### **Blaenau Gwent 10 Year Plan**

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 current BG WESP will remain in force until that date. Education has already begun working with the BG WEF in order to establish a draft 10-year plan for consultation and approval by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022. Following ministerial approval, the plan will come into effect on 1 September 2022. A workshop has been programmed with relevant services and partners in December 2020, to begin working on the priorities and associated consultation process.

**The Education Transformation Service is delivering effectively against its statutory duties, is fully compliant with legislation and the associated policy in doing so.** The Service has not only worked within its regulatory framework, but strived to identify and develop additional resources and tools to add value to its work. For example, the TE100 and Facilities Review Processes. Timeframes are often challenging due to the nature of the statutory processes and high workload of the

service area; however, the service area has to date delivered on all relevant policy, strategy, programme and project targets. The ET team aim to increase non-statutory related performance also i.e. increase TE100 maintenance and repair resolution rates and decrease associated timeframes. Performance assessments for each of the areas within the ET service are completed via the FADE process.

## Early Years

### Partnership work with Early Years

The Early Years Childcare and Play Manager and the Service Manager – Education and Business Change meet termly to discuss and monitor:

- Childcare and admissions data, planning, development and management
- The development of childcare aligned to education settings
- Transition planning from early years to foundation phase
- Non-maintained settings uptake/ admission, progression and development
- Facilities based developments such as after and pre-school provision
- Demand for childcare and education places etc.

There is an effective communication process in places and both teams are working in partnership to ensure a synergy between the two services areas.

The Early Years, Childcare and Play (EYCP) team within the Social Services Directorate meets the statutory requirements placed on the Council to ensure a sufficiency of childcare (under the Childcare Act 2006), to provide a Family Information Service (under the same Act) and the sufficiency of play opportunities (Children and Families Measure 2010). A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is conducted every five years, with annual action plans and progress reports being reported to both Council and Welsh Government in the intervening years.

### Childcare

**The 2020/21 CSA progress report and action plan noted that progress against last year's actions have been impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic and many will be taken forward as priorities for 2021/22.** The main focus of our work as a Local Authority team during the last year has been on supporting the childcare sector to stay open and remain sustainable and supporting families requiring/using childcare.

The picture for settings in the early days of the pandemic was changing rapidly with providers making decisions about whether opening was a viable option for them, whilst the Local Authority team was striving to put in place arrangements to ensure a service could be provided to key worker and vulnerable children. The Flying Start team re-purposed one of their settings within a week to specifically support vulnerable children, completing a variation for Care Inspectorate Wales to enable them to offer extended provision to a greater age range to accommodate sibling groups. The Flying Start team also worked closely with Social Services Children's teams and the Family Information Service to help place children who couldn't access the repurposed hub. The EYCP team set up the Welsh Governments C-CAS scheme within a very short time-frame at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure that places were found for children and funding was delivered quickly to providers delivering these necessary services. The level of commitment and flexibility within the sector was further tested in response to Summer holiday arrangements for vulnerable children and the sector responded magnificently, with excellent examples of providers going above and beyond, including setting up new settings and systems to ensure they could offer services to children who needed it.

Several schemes to support settings financially have emerged during the year including the Economic Resilience Development Fund, Childcare Provider Grant, Childcare Offer Small COVID Grant and the Cwtch grant, in addition to other forms of government support. Whilst there have been challenges in setting up administrative systems quickly to deliver these grants, they were successfully delivered in partnership with other Local Authority colleagues, Umbrella Organisation support and with the childcare providers themselves. Over £250,000 has been distributed to settings during the second half of the year. Additionally, it has been

necessary for the team to share guidance and updates in respect of other schemes impacting on the sector including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Protective Measures in Childcare, the Self Employed Income Scheme along with other grant programmes and sources of support.

The closure of childcare to children other than keyworker and vulnerable children demanded that we review our support for children with ALN and children attending childcare through our Assisted Places schemes, who were unable to access their childcare place. Plans were put in place to offer alternative services with resource packs being delivered to children's homes and regular contact maintained with professionals within the EYCP team to support families to continue with play, learning and development at home.

After a period of suspension during Summer Term, the Childcare Offer was restarted during August and presented a huge challenge for the Local Authority team and providers, due to the shortened time-frame for dealing with double the amount of applications, but also with changes to the eligibility guidance which needed to be understood and implemented. A huge effort on both the Local Authority and provider parts meant the scheme was back up and running from September 2020. The level of challenge there has been for childcare providers and the teams supporting providers, both within the Local Authority and in other organisations, during 2020-21 cannot be overstated.

In terms of supply and demand the report notes;

Despite challenging circumstances, the service has had some new providers open during the year including a new Day Nursery in Aberbeeg, a new Full Day Care provision on a school site in Tredegar, as a sister setting to an existing successful Day Nursery in Tredegar and one new childminder.

There has been a loss of two providers during the year with the closure of an After School Club in Brynmawr and a Full Day Care facility in Tredegar. Whilst the pandemic had some impact on the latter provider, there were ongoing sustainability issues with both that could not be overcome despite support being provided through our team.

During the pandemic a significant number of providers in Blaenau Gwent remained open to provide a service to keyworker and vulnerable children. During the first lockdown period, only 33.9% of services closed completely representing 42.8% of childcare places. Providers that had closed, have re-opened from late June 2020 and remained open, with the exception of most after-school provision that have been impacted by concerns around use of school buildings, the mixing of bubbles and school closures.

In terms of overall childcare numbers there has been again been a further modest year on year increase in the number childcare places in Blaenau Gwent over the last year, from 1403 places to 1476 places. There has been an increase in the number of Day Nursery places, from 314 places to 352 places. A new provider offering sessional care was registered for 19 places during the year. One new childminder registered during the year offering 8 new places.

### **Play**

A Play Sufficiency Assessment is conducted every three years, the last full assessment being completed in 2019, with progress reports and updated action plans being submitted to Welsh Government in the intervening years. The team has secured good progress since the last full assessment with action plans being kept under regular review with partners. As with the CSA, progress against the PSA Action was hindered by the pandemic during 2020/21, but there was some significant progress which includes; after-school play provision for children with disabilities was established at Blaina ICC, progress at improving play areas in line with the corporate strategic play area review was achieved, play provision for vulnerable children offered during school holidays and Wild Camps project launched.

The team has an active group of play volunteers who have become qualified and experienced through support given and opportunities to practice and this has allowed us to expand opportunities being offered for Play across the Borough. We now have a well-established Wild Tots group, an outdoor parent and toddler group providing rich opportunities to play, with plans to extend the provision to two additional locations in Blaenau Gwent. We have also in 2021 been able to use our own volunteer team led by a Play Leader to deliver open access play sessions across six locations in Blaenau Gwent.

### **Non-maintained Foundation Phase Nursery**

The EYCP team provides support and monitoring for those childcare providers registered to provide Foundation Phase Nursery places. There are currently three providers in Blaenau Gwent, with a new Welsh medium provider registering from Summer term 2021. They offer 28 am and pm places, but also offer Flying Start, Childcare Offer and fee paying provision. In recent years non-maintained providers have delivered FPN Education to between 1 and 9 children in any one term. The team supported Welsh Government, via the Education Achievement Service, to test the new early year's curriculum for non-maintained providers. The team worked closely with selected childminders to support them in testing the new curriculum and reporting back to Welsh Government and worked in partnership with PACEY Cymru to provide weekly support sessions from May – July 2021. The team co-ordinated the distribution of the 'Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: Accelerating Learning' grant to the sector in March 2021.

### **Family Information Service**

The Family Information Service continues to act as an information resource for parents/carers, childcare and play providers, for the team and other professionals, needing to access sector data and information on wider services of interest for children and families. The service has a very active social media presence, has a recently developed website (to be launched shortly) and continues to deal with enquiries via telephone, social media and email. The service supports the Information, Advice and Assistance function of the Council as established in line with the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

Key facts and figures;

- Social media followers – 3852
- 2,657 enquiries handled via telephone calls, social media questions/comments and email

### **Childcare Offer**

The team have been delivering the Welsh Government Childcare Offer since 2017, firstly as a pilot authority and subsequently as a delivery' authority for both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen County Borough Councils. Key facts and figures;

- Processed over 1000 applications from Blaenau Gwent families
- Processed over 1500 applications from Torfaen families
- £3.8 million has been drawn down in childcare funding
- £4.1 million capital investment programme secured

The team secured the £4.1M capital investment under the Childcare Offer Capital Programme and worked closely with colleagues in Education Transformation to identify opportunities for childcare developments to align to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Programme plans under Band B. The Council were successful in securing Welsh Government Childcare Capital Grant during the 2018/19 academic session. A business case was submitted by Social Services at the end of September 2018, for the £60m Grant. Blaenau Gwent were successful in their submission, resulting in an award of £4.7m, to deliver the following schemes:

- A full day care facility in Six Bells (since abandoned due to siting issues with funding being redirected to the other schemes)



- A day care facility in the Glyncoed area
- An extension of Flying Start's provision in Swfrydd
- Remodelling work at Blaina ICC
- A small grant scheme for childcare providers

The above projects are being reported via 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board and the Early Years Development Childcare and Play Partnership.

### **Additional Learning Needs – Early Years**

The EYCP team and Flying Start programme supports children with Additional Learning Needs accessing pre-school provision between the ages of 2-3 years. Work to prepare for the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill 2018, has continued and the team has built up stronger relationships with the Education Inclusion Service, particularly the Early Years ALN Lead Officer. Training had to be revamped to allow for virtual delivery and the team has been delivering the Gwent approved modular ALN training to the sector. Person Centred Planning is starting to be embedded into practice and settings are becoming more confident in the use of new paperwork. It has been agreed as part of a team restructure that we would seek to appoint an ALN support worker to complement the work of the Early Years ALN Lead Officer and the job description and person specification for this post is currently under construction. The work of the ALN sub group, which is a multi-disciplinary group of professionals that decide on support to be offered to pre-school children, has been reviewed and streamlined and a further review in the light of developments is underway currently (August 2021).

### **Speech, Language and Communication**

Through 2019 /20 the team has been a member of the Gwent Regional Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Needs group (SLCN) which has been coordinated by ComIT – Communication Intervention Team covering the 5 Gwent areas. Some BG schools and settings have had draft copies of the 3-3;11 booklets and all other booklets have been finalised. A meeting to agree rollout plans has been organised for September 2021.

### **Welsh Medium Support**

The Council has been committed to increasing the numbers of Welsh language settings and has worked in partnership with Mudiad Meithrin and Education colleagues in recent years to raise the profile of Welsh medium childcare and education. The EYCP Manager sits on the Welsh in Education Forum and also the Communications sub-group of the Forum to contribute to the work of raising the profile of Welsh medium education and childcare and thereby stimulating demand. Unfortunately, the pandemic has hindered plans to have promotional events in the last year, but plans will be revisited when it is deemed safe to do so. The team has supported the Mudiad Meithrin SAS programme and a new Cylch Meithrin in Tredegar has been established and further Welsh medium sessions are being run at a local English medium session, widening language choice in the Ebbw Vale area. Plans to develop a Welsh medium Day Nursery at Glyncoed are progressing well, with the final design being agreed and plans submitted to Planning. The team has also recently secured new Ti a Fi provision to be delivered from the Integrated Children's Centre in Blaina, starting in September 2021.

### **Transition**

The EYCP team, alongside the Flying Start Advisory Teacher work closely with childcare settings and school nurseries to implement the transition policy which includes the expectation that all schools and settings engage in termly area cluster meetings to share information about children transitioning to Nursery and good practice. This process continued throughout covid-19 via phone calls and TEAMS meetings. Paperwork was completed and sent electronically to the nursery teachers. Paperwork was updated in-line with the new ALN bill and now takes the format of the One Page Profile. This has supported discussions with nursery teachers as this

format is common between childcare and schools. The ALN Lead Officer and Flying Start Advisory Teacher supports enhanced transition arrangements for those children with AN identified through the AN Sub Group. A PCP transition meeting is held for all children who receive support through the EY AN Sub Group.

The compliance with this policy is monitored and the attendance of schools and settings is logged with follow-up undertaken if needed. Previously, there have been concerns regarding transition processes where schools do not always release staff to attend transition events. However, virtual meetings led to an improvement in engagement levels. Teachers who attended the virtual transition meetings report that they find them useful and it supports children to settle in the nursery.

The need for closer working remains and a pilot project was proposed for Spring Term 2020, however this was postponed. As COVID guidance is changed and relaxed and face to face meetings are resumed there are plans to introduce an Early Years network in Tredegar to strengthen joint working and sharing of practice between schools and settings. Tredegar has been chosen for the pilot as the schools and settings consistently engage well with each other and professionals. The proposed format for the network is for schools and settings to alternate quarterly hosting a short meeting after the working day. The agenda will be decided by the members of the network and facilitated by the FSAT. This will then be rolled out across the LA and will take place in clusters

### **Pandemic Response**

The team responded quickly in March 2020 to ensure that a range of childcare settings were supported to remain open to allow keyworkers and vulnerable children to access childcare, later then in April 2020 setting up and delivering the Welsh Government Childcare Coronavirus Assistance Scheme in a matter of weeks, to support those keyworkers and vulnerable families with funded childcare. That scheme supported 276 children. At the same time the Childcare Offer was suspended to new entrants, then later reopened to all new application in August 2020 with revised guidance to take account of changes in employment status for some parents, caused by the pandemic. The team maintained weekly contact with all childcare providers from April to June 2020 to share emerging guidance, give advice and monitor the number of places open and filled. Guidance was pulled together in a local encompassing document to assist providers and support has been offered and taken up by settings in accessing a range of grants. The team have co-ordinated and supported different grant schemes introduced by Welsh Government to support the sector (Childcare Provider Grant, additional Children and Communities Cwtch Grant, additional Childcare Offer capital small grant scheme, Playworks).

### **2.3 Support for Other Services :Areas where good progress has been made:**

- **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 99.1% and is in line with 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 implementation stage (Summer 2021).

### 2.3 Support for Other Services: Areas requiring improvement:

- The delivery of the WESP targets is dependent upon the Welsh medium seedling proposal. The new 10 year WESP is under development.
- 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 underway 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.
- There are risks associated with the revenue implications associated with the Youth Services Inspire initiative, which is currently funded through European (ESF) funding.
- Review progress against the Childcare Sufficiency Audit (CSA).
- Responding to the COVID-19 emergency to ensure that learner progression is maintained in safe and blended learning settings.

### Inspection Area 3 – Leadership and management Lead LP

#### 3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

**The Education Directorate has a new and vibrant leadership team with a permanent Corporate Director of Education and Head of School Improvement appointed during academic year 2020-21. This restructure has also created new roles for Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change and Young People and Partnerships and this has created additional capacity, especially for the school improvement agenda.**

**The Council has approved its Corporate Plan which acts as the Council's business plan and covered the four-year period 2018/22.** In order to comply with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the priority areas act as both the Council's Well-being and Improvement Objectives. As part of the Council's annual assessment of performance, the Council has identified that our ambitious programme of activity was in the early stages of development and implementation. As part of this we were honest in that we may need to make some changes to the Corporate Plan moving forward. This resulted in some amendments being made to the Outcome Statements in order to better demonstrate the contribution different areas across the Council will contribute to achieving them, enhancing our 'One Council' approach. The overall emphasis of each Outcome Statement has not changed, but involves cross-cutting activity.

From these considerations, the Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Statements 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 Outcome Statements have been written to be cross-cutting in nature and shows how education makes a key contribution to all of priority areas within the Corporate Plan. The global pandemic also provided the opportunity to consider priorities, particularly for the Education Directorate and this has manifested itself in our Recovery and Renewal Plan. The Executive (July 2021) has received the plan and was agreed to monitor the progress within the 4 corporate priorities of Education/learners, Community, Economic/Business and the new operating model. This will consider approach will consider the impact of the pandemic and ensure the focus of business planning up to 2022 and delivering on the outcomes needed to support the community and local economy. Education has completed an impact assessment and is well-placed to make further progress against the backdrop of COVID-19. Indeed, Estyn produced a positive overall letter for BG in line with the national Thematic Review and this was followed-up by a further constructive letter in the Summer of 2021.

**CLT and the Members had an active leadership role in undertaking the refresh of the Corporate Plan. Consequently, the Education Directorate business plans have been aligned to the Corporate Plan to ensure that progress against the outcomes can be clearly demonstrated.** This will be reported periodically through the Finance and Performance Report, presented to CLT, Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee. Regular reporting through the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee also takes place as identified through the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme. This ensures a level of accountability to the work being undertaken by the Directorate with Scrutiny Committee able to challenge the work undertaken, particularly establishing robust self-evaluation arrangements. Clear areas for further improvement are well defined and based on a thoroughly forensic approach to data analysis and an embedded culture of robust self-evaluation. Improvement processes are well embedded into routine work. On-going evaluation is an area of strength and is an embedded feature of the work of the Education Directorate and the Council.

On a regular basis, as part of the Council's Corporate Performance Framework, the Director of Education and the Executive Member meet to discuss work being undertaken in the directorate including areas of good progress and where further improvement is required. The Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny are also invited to attend these meetings on a less frequent basis. This is to align the work of Scrutiny and the Executive.

The PSB is working towards five well-being objectives as outlined in their Well-being Plan 2018/23:

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect the natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage healthy lifestyles

The Council's refreshed Corporate Plan is clearly aligned to the Well-being Plan and its five objectives.

The PSB has developed a Strategic Work Programme which was signed off in January 2020. This Work Programme has identified five High Level Actions to be taken forward:

- First 1,000 days and Early Years Pathfinder;
- Building a healthier Gwent / Integrated Well-being Networks;
- Climate Change;
- Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food Programme; and
- Foundational Economy.

Each of the high level actions has an identified PSB Sponsor. The Education Department is clearly aligned to a number of these actions and will be involved in their delivery moving forward and progress will be evidenced through the Directorate business plans.

**The Improving Schools report (Summer 2021) that discusses school categorisation and the school inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates the effectiveness of leaders and managers in Local Government Education Services.** The Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) provides an effective strategic framework to support improvement in Education. These are interpreted further in the underpinning 4 strategic improvement objectives in the Education Directorate's Education Improvement Plan (EIP). The priorities in the EIP have been reviewed and the on-going and cyclical self-evaluation processes evaluate progress against our key priorities, identify where good progress has been made and where further improvement is needed. These processes are embedded and well led.

Effective leadership across the Council has been demonstrated via the Transforming Blaenau Gwent Programme of change; service delivery has changed as a result and efficiency savings have been made. Citizen voice is visible in Council plans and has underpinned cultural change across the board. Financial Efficiency Projects (FEPs) and more recently the Bridging the Gap initiatives have established balanced revenue budgets. The schools' Individual School Budget (ISB) has been protected (uplift of 3.6% 2021-22). The new political administration has taken difficult decisions against the backdrop of continuing austerity measures and prioritised school improvement accordingly.

The Vision for Education based on a school-led self-improving system is under review alongside the much improved school categorisation and school inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates that schools are taking a school-led approach, are working with other schools in a school-to-school way and beginning to improve outcomes and wellbeing for children and young people. Schools are embodying the vision and supporting the approach to school improvement locally, regionally and nationally, particularly through effective cluster working arrangements.

**Effective strategic collaboration through working closely with the EAS is demonstrated in the LA/EAS Business Plan, which are well understood by school leaders and members; termly monitoring of progress against targets provide useful information to CLT, Scrutiny and Executive Committee as well as annually to all schools and school Governors.** Scrutiny has improved, with challenging questions from Members now illustrating their improved understanding. Many Members of the new administration were previously members of scrutiny committee/executive and as such their understanding has continued to develop over the last 3 years. However, changes to reporting of school performance in line with the national reform agenda will need to be worked through in 2021. It is anticipated that school performance reporting will focus more on progress measures using matched-data and it will be important to develop members understanding further in this regard.

Additionally, the Service Manager for Inclusion has worked with HTs to redesign the ALN Service operating out of Pen y Cwm Special School and the operating model for the River Centre. Similarly, effective leadership is demonstrated by the Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change in the implementation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, for example, Band A is now fully complete with the opening of the new Six Bells Primary Campus in September 2019 (part of the Abertillery Learning Community), and the agreement of Band B plans. The Band A programme was delivered on time and within budget. Leaders in the Directorate work well with officers across the Council this is illustrated by the fact that plans are informed by audit, data analysis and self-evaluation is evident in the quarterly joint performance and finance report. The findings from internal audit informs the next round of school audit plans, sufficiency of childcare places audit informs placement planning, parental questionnaires inform development programmes in Flying Start settings. Corporate join-up between leaders across the Council is clear.

**The quality and effectiveness of senior officers in the Education Directorate is evaluated regularly, for example, through the Corporate Performance Management processes comprising Interim and Annual evaluations throughout the academic year.** 360 degree evaluations comprise part of this process. The Managing Director of the Council leads the review panel for CLT officers, which includes annual reviews for both the Corporate Director and Head of School Improvement and Inclusion. The Executive Member for Education is the Chair of the regional Joint Executive Committee, which is well led.

**The impact of leadership at officer and member level is demonstrated via the improving performance profile of schools via their categorisation, school inspection outcomes, the pace of school improvement and the robustness of their use of full statutory powers of intervention. Full powers of intervention are currently in place in two underperforming secondary schools and both have demonstrated improved results in KS4 in 2020-21, although it is acknowledged through CDGs.**

**The Service Manager-Education Transformation and Business Change is a highly effective manager who leads the regional 21<sup>st</sup> Century planning group** and the Service Manager for Inclusion leads the regional Inclusion Group. Similarly, the Service Manager for the Young People and Partnerships (previous Chair of the National Youth Service Board) also contributes to the National Youth Work Group and sits on the national Youth Work Board.

**Leadership of the Youth Service is strong,** enhanced by an effective annual training programme for all youth workers, prepared each year using feedback from a workforce development survey. The local authority effectively co-ordinates open access and targeted support for vulnerable children and young people.

Demonstrable impact has been made through the Raising Aspirations Group and NEET Practitioner Forum subgroup to implement the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. This progressive partnership approach, strategically and operationally linking with a key range of providers and partners, has been highly effective in steadily reducing the numbers of young people becoming NEET from 8.7% in 2009 to 1.5% in 2020.

**Similarly, the work of the intervention panel for Schools Causing Concern has progressed well under the Chair of the Executive Member for Education.**

This work is challenging and effective leadership at both political, officer and EAS level has been clearly demonstrated. The statutory warning notice in EFLC has been lifted and ESTYN has removed the school from significant improvement follow up. The ALC Corporate Group has been re-established to oversee both the work of the Learning Community in raising educational standards and securing sustainability in reducing their net revenue budget deficit. The SWN at BFS will be reviewed in the Autumn term 2021 and ESTYN have convened an improvement conference as part of the WG's Support for Schools in Special Measures initiative. There is a 'One Plan' approach in place for BFS and the Council are leading on subsequent meetings. Both ALC and BFS have improved governance arrangements. The River Centre has been issued with a pre-warning notice letter and is formally recognised as a School Causing Concern. There are stringent monitoring arrangements in place. Sofrydd Primary School is likely to be removed from the SCC protocols, once a permanent Headteacher is appointed in the Autumn term 2021.

Good leadership through clear communication of performance priorities has been a key feature of the work of the Directorate; with DMT, CLT, School Improvement and Inclusion Leadership Teams, Wider Group, DMT meetings with the Executive member for Education, meetings, during Headteachers, with the EAS Challenge Advisers, with the PSB, with the Governors Association and with team leaders of LGES services e.g. the corporate self-evaluation group.

During recent years, **Members have made difficult decisions such as protecting school budgets, prioritising the allocation of significant capital funding to Blaenau Gwent's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools investment programme, reducing financial inefficiencies in certain parts of ALN provision whilst prioritising growth in this area going forward, in line with ALN reform. Difficult decisions have also been made regarding the need to undertake a series of service review for example, the Home to School Transport and Post 16 Transport Policy, School Crossing Patrols, and Welsh medium provision to name but a few.**

Moreover, capital budget decisions regarding affordability of the agreed proposals set out in the Band B 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme are now confirmed. Members are well informed and keen to ensure that reviews are scheduled in a timely way thus avoiding any unintended consequences.

**Members are taking responsibility for the quality of their work, this is evidenced by Members undertaking self-evaluation; an evaluation of each Scrutiny meeting is taken with both officers and members and evidence from this is used throughout the year to make minor amendments and to feed the evidence used for the annual evaluation.** All work undertaken throughout the year is captured in a Scrutiny Forward Work Programme, which is updated quarterly and reported into the Executive Committee for decision-making and finally to Full Council

### 3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers: Areas where good progress has been made:

- 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 2020 to 2026 period.

- Regional leadership is being exercised well by senior officers e.g. regional Welsh medium POSP group.
- Member understanding and engagement in LGES activity, particularly the Exec Member and Scrutiny arrangements.
- Appointment of a permanent 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 appointing an additional post for school improvement capacity.

### 3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers Areas requiring improvement:

- 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.
- There are risks associated ALN Reform and with securing appointment to the Service Manager-Inclusion role for the Education Directorate, with recruitment initiated in the Autumn term 2021.

### 3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning

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

**LGES services that are working well and those requiring improvement are clearly set out in the main Self-Evaluation Report (SER), last updated in September/October 2021. Progress against our key priorities are also evaluated and reported to Scrutiny and Executive Committees.**

Arrangements to share and consult with others regarding the draft SER are well established: the draft SER document is shared with Scrutiny annually to seek their views as part of the agreed Scrutiny Forward Work Programme. A high-level evaluation Summary SER sets out where good progress has been made and where further work is needed. This information is further distilled down to draw through key items of information which are then reflected as actions for improvement in Business Plans. This process works well for the Directorate and helps to sustain improvement in pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

**The Council provides effective corporate support for self-evaluation and improvement planning; the Corporate Performance Framework provides the strategic guide to align our work with the corporate model. The SER underpins the quarterly Finance and Performance report.**

Corporate support for self-evaluation directly informs and aligns to the business planning and improvement processes which are also aligned to the Risk Management Framework. The higher level risks are escalated to the Corporate Risk Register and kept under quarterly review. Risks from the Directorate are escalated to CLT as appropriate and equally when reviewed, risks from CLT may be de-escalated to the Directorate level.



**The Council's Performance Management framework effectively integrates people, service and financial planning.** The Joint Performance and Finance Report Reporting arrangements have been improved by the continued development of outcome focussed measures. The Finance and Performance report is presented to CLT, Executive Committee and corporate overview scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis and the Director provides a commentary update on progress made within the Directorate for the Executive and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committees. The Joint Performance and Finance report is a key part of the governance and accountability arrangement

Blaenau Gwent is committed to partnership working to raise standards, through its active participation with the SEWC/EAS regional school improvement service, through the regional GEMs service for pupils with EAL, through the regional VI/HI or SENCom provision etc.

The PSB is working towards five well-being objectives as outlined in their [Well-being Plan 2018/23](#):

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect the natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage healthy lifestyles

The Council's refreshed Corporate Plan is clearly aligned to the Well-being Plan and its five objectives.

The PSB has developed a Strategic Work Programme which was signed off in January 2020. This Work Programme has identified five High Level Actions to be taken forward:

- First 1,000 days and Early Years Pathfinder;
- Building a healthier Gwent / Integrated Well-being Networks;
- Climate Change;
- Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food Programme; and
- Foundational Economy.

Each of the high level actions has an identified PSB Sponsor. The Education Department is clearly aligned to a number of these actions and will be involved in their delivery moving forward and progress will be evidenced through the Directorate business plans. The Council has led on the establishment of a Post 16 Partnership Board. The Board's terms of reference are agreed, the body has met and the partnership will involve the Council, Coleg Gwent, secondary/special schools and work based learning providers.

**Partnership working between the Council and the EAS is strong and is subject to significant joint working and quality assurance.**

Blaenau Gwent is a key partner in the 5 Counties Adult and Community Learning (ACL) Partnership. Blaenau Gwent's most recent Estyn inspection was a joint inspection across the partnership and a joint action plan was developed. The inspection of the Adult and Community Learning Partnership in confirmed that outcomes were Good and Prospects for Improvement were Excellent.

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| On-going evaluations of progress through the business plan form a fundamental part of the monthly performance coaching sessions with all managers. Six monthly and annual PDR processes are underpinned by evaluations of progress against business plans which are robustly challenged by elected members who comprise the PDR panel.  |
| <b>3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning: Areas where good progress has been made:</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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 Bryn Bach Primary, Glyncoed Primary School. Sofrydd Primary School in ALC (ESTYN monitoring visit likely in Autumn term 2021). Progress in ALC will continue to be monitored.</li> </ul> |
| <b>3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning: areas requiring improvement</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To continue to engage members in meaningful self-evaluation activity, for example the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.</li> <li>• To continue to ensure that business plans bring about the improvement required.</li> <li>• To continue to engage with a wider stakeholder group when undertaking evaluations, particularly Headteachers</li> <li>• To continue to ensure that regional SCC protocols deliver improvements in ALC, BFS, River Centre and Sofrydd Primary School.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>3.3 Professional learning</b>  |
| <p>Professional learning is part of everyday business and staff keep up to date with knowledge about their own areas of responsibility via their professional associations, the EAS professional development events, via DMT meetings and through pan-Council participation in projects and task and finish groups as well as sharing practice across SEWC and all Wales professional groups for example, the SEWC sub groups of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools (Chaired by BG), the SEWC Inclusion Group (Chaired by BG), national ALN and School Improvement reform via the ADEW/ALN and School Improvement group with representation from the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion. The Youth Service Manager is Chair of the all Wales Youth Services Manager Group.</p> <p>Regular contact with Welsh Government officials and groups also support the CPD of staff for example, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools team, Gateway Review activity, membership of ESTYN working groups (new LGES), EOTAS group and ALN Bill Reform group for EPs. Professional development opportunities for key staff have been provided via the national (ADEW) Aspiring Directors Programme, MSP and PRINCE 2 training, WG Programme Delivery CPD event, to name but a few.</p>  |

**Headteachers, school leaders and Governors have access to the EAS Professional Learning Offer: impact is evaluated and demonstrable in improved outcomes, improved school inspection judgements, improved school categorisation profile.** Greater impact needs to be secured for our vulnerable learners in KS3 and KS4 as well as eFSM learners and these are key priorities for the Directorate going forward.

The Headteacher induction programme for new heads and aspiring deputies, was organised by an experienced Headteacher, which is in line with the Vision for education. There were 9 participants who engaged in 3 day HT induction that took place in the early part of the Autumn term. Participants decided which modules they wished to access. The modules that were offered were: Safeguarding, Managing allegations against staff, Audit and Finance, Organisational Development and Health and Safety. Many participants confirmed that the most popular sessions were managing allegations against staff and health and safety to which many participants attended. Whilst, all participants confirmed that the course objectives were met in full and many (80%) participants confirmed that the delivery of the courses were very good with a few confirming that it was good. Some participants made helpful suggestions as to how future courses could be further improved and

**The Council jointly plans with a number of agencies: the Education Achievement Service (EAS), Partners in the Learning Themed Group, Safeguarding with the Social Services Directorate, Coleg Gwent via the Post 16 Partnership Board, Schools via the agreed Partnership Agreement, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools team via the regional programme, services for VI/HI and EMAS via the SLA and the Youth Service with a number of key partners, such as Families First, Communities First, Careers Wales, Youth Offending Service, Social Services and Voluntary Sector partners. These all provide officers with opportunity to learn from elsewhere and is considered an important aspect of CPD.**

Effective collaborations are well established through the Youth Service, for example through the partnerships established within the YEP Framework, through programmes such as the Independent Counselling Service, the ESF funded Inspire programmes via partners in the Raising Aspiration Group (RAG) and Practitioner forums. The Raising Aspirations Group is led by the LA and has taken part in many WG trials to further development the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. Levels of coordination and collaborative activity are high as evidenced by improved outcomes and reductions in the level of NEETs.

The Directorate makes a significant contribution to the work of the EAS via participation in regional SEWC Directors' meetings on a fortnightly basis, planning meetings with the EAS MD on a fortnightly basis, fortnightly and monthly progress meetings between the Council's School Improvement function and Principal Challenge Adviser facing BG, joint planning arrangements for schools causing concern, a timetable of Intervention Meetings between senior Directorate Officers, EAS Headteachers and Chairs of Governors for schools causing concern. These opportunities are again viewed and highly valued as CPD opportunities for BG officers.

### 3.3 Professional learning: Areas where progress has been made

- **Senior Officers now hold Chair positions across a number of all Wales groups; this supports their ongoing professional development.**
- **Monthly 121 performance coaching sessions are embedded as routine practice.**
- **Performance Coaching is 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 School Improvement and Inclusion.**
- **New Headteacher and aspiring deputy induction learning offer is in place and led by an experienced Headteacher.**

### 3.3 Professional learning: Areas requiring further improvement

- 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.

### 3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements

**The Local Authority's systems, practice and policy demonstrate that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements as detailed in Keeping Learners Safe.** The Managing Director has overall strategic accountability for securing effective safeguarding arrangements across the Council. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy identifies key personnel and their deputies (including elected members) across all Council services with responsibility and accountability for safeguarding. The Council has a well-established Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee in place that scrutinises safeguarding performance across the Council's services and also involves key partners. CLT monitors arrangements closely, including Professional Strategy Meeting (PSM) progress. The strategic leads group keeps safeguarding arrangements under close scrutiny and is key in implementing the WAO action plan on safeguarding arrangements. Within this audit no key areas for the education service were identified as requiring improvement.

**Clear lines of accountability and reporting are in place.** Named officers with clear responsibilities and accountabilities are in place. At Directorate level the Strategic Safeguarding in Education lead (SSL) is Michelle Jones and the Deputy is Claire Gardner. The Safeguarding in Education Manager is Sarah Dixon with responsibility for the operational management and oversight of child protection and safeguarding issues in education, particularly for schools. This post is located within the Social Services Directorate and is line Manager by the Children's Services Manager with responsibility for Safeguarding.

The Designated Senior Person for Youth Service is Claire Madden and for Early Years and Play, Claire Smith. The matrix evidences that all schools have a designated senior person DSP, a deputy DSP and a designated governor for safeguarding. All of the above ensure that there are clear reporting structures in place for each of the settings aligned to the Safeguarding in Education policy. All schools have a designated Lead for Children Looked After (CLA) who work closely with the CLA Education Coordinator and Mentors. The contact information is reviewed every September to ensure appropriate structures are in place in each setting.

Monthly meetings between the Strategic Safeguarding in Education Lead and the Safeguarding in Education Manager provides the mechanism for supporting a coherence in approach and consistency of practice. The Professional Lead for Community Safety, who is the Council's Community safety and Preventing Violent Extremism lead, joins for part of these meeting to ensure that any broader community safety issues are shared and a joint multi-agency approach implemented. Regular meetings with corporate officers supports a coherence of approach, for example, the Safeguarding in Education Manager meets termly with the early years and play, youth service, home to school transport, and school DSP's.

**The Education Safeguarding Policy is updated annually and most recently during the Summer term 2021 and covers all education settings.** The effectiveness and impact of policies is monitored through regular review of the findings captured in the safeguarding matrix. Similarly, this information is contained in the quarterly reports for Safeguarding presented to the Education and Social Services Joint Scrutiny Committee. Findings feed the ongoing work programme for the Safeguarding in Education Manager.

Monitoring of safeguarding procedures have been enhanced by the development of a Quality Assurance protocol for validating processes across education services and a reporting timeframe into DMT. Learning from these visits informs future policy and practice. The Safeguarding in Education Manager visits schools and other

settings throughout the year, currently taking place on a virtual basis. **The statutory Partnership Agreement makes clear schools' obligations regarding safeguarding.** Adoption is monitored via close scrutiny of the Matrix. The annual return from commissioned services demonstrated that all services have appropriate safeguarding policies and practice in place. (EAS, GEMS, Youth Offending, SRS, and Gwent Music). Evaluation of the joint quarterly report identifies any emerging trends which are used by the Safeguarding in Education Manager to directly inform her work in schools.

Schools are supported in their early intervention and prevention work through the provision of the Families First social worker in school model. From September 2020, Families First have increased their provision from two to four social workers designated to support pupils, teaching staff and families. The service is provided on a weekly basis to each school and from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021, carried out 124 school consultations.

The role of the social workers in schools has evolved to meet the needs and demands of each school and its pupils and includes signposting families to a range of services including: Ar Trac – Cyfannol Women's Aid; New Pathways; GP; Sparkles; SNAP Cymru; Flying Start; NYAS; Supporting People; ELSA support; transition support to college; School Health Nurse; Family Matters Mediation; Bereavement services; REACH; PlatFform; and Umbrella Cymru; The role has also supported the establishment of support groups for LGBTQ+ and bereavement.

Initial evaluations confirm that school staff have felt more upskilled in dealing with the difficulties and challenges families are experiencing. The Children Missing in Education Policy has been implemented in all schools. In 2020/21 there were 37 CME referrals for pupils in Blaenau Gwent that left without a destination school. All of these pupils (except 3) have been located and the CTF has been sent to the receiving school. Of the 3 children not located, 2 have only recently moved and we are chasing up with the new local authority and the other one has been referred to HMRC – who confirmed that they had a new address for the family.

In 2020/21 there were 22 CME referrals for children that had moved into Blaenau Gwent without a forwarding school. 6 of those children were EHE when they moved into the LA. 4 of the 6 are travellers and visits have been undertaken, whilst the other 2 are due to apply for school. 3 children are still waiting to be admitted into school, as parents delayed completing the in-year transfer form, despite numerous visits. 9 children were placed into school and the referring agency notified. 3 children were in Blaenau Gwent for only a short period of time and were tracked into a new local authority. Legal procedures have commenced for one family as they are not engaging with the admission process.

In June 2021 there were also 170 year-6 pupils that had not applied for secondary school places. Work was done to support these families and ensure applications etc. were completed. There are still 9 children that we are still waiting for confirmation from other local authorities or still supporting with applications. In June 2021 there were 15 nursery pupils that had not applied to reception. Numerous visits were made and all these children have now completed applications for reception or confirmation has been received from other local authorities to say they have school places. In addition to this there were 137 pupils on the live birth data that had not applied for reception places. All except 31 have now been located. Investigations are currently ongoing for these 31 with other local authorities and then we will liaise with health and HMRC to see what further information they have.

Annual visits by LA Officers to EHE pupils provide valuable information regarding the efficiency of the education provided. This is in line with the EHE policy that was reviewed and adopted by the Executive Committee in 2017/18. Support is offered to reintegrate or to signpost. However, EHE numbers have increased following COVID-19 in line with national trends. Home visits are offered, parents who refuse are few. Neutral venues are offered and School Attendance Orders are considered.

Information about pupils who are subject to or witness to police attended incidents of domestic abuse is shared through Operation Encompass in addition to the usual reporting mechanism. Headteachers report that Operation Encompass is helpful to them in their daily work supporting pupils at risk. From 1.1.20 to 31.8.20, there were 454 occurrences involving 553 children. 17% of these children were involved in more than one incident. Seven of these occurrences were categorised as high risk and involved 9 children. From 1.9.20 to 31.3.21, there were 383 occurrences involving 454 children. 18% of these children were involved in more than one incident and 13 children were linked to high risk occurrences.

Information about pupils who experience / or who are affected by high risk domestic abuse is shared via representation by Education Welfare Service on MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

During 2020/21, Education were represented at most case conferences, with attendance being 94%, compared to 83% the previous year. Conferences have been held on a virtual platform for the whole academic year which has helped facilitate greater attendance. Any non-attendance is discussed on an individual basis with each setting. There has also been an increase in the number of education reports provided for conference with the majority (60%) of settings providing a report. Individual discussions with settings continues in order to improve compliance in the provision of conference reports from education.

Legislation (the Children (Performances and Activities) (Wales) Regulations 2015) regarding child performances came into force in Wales. Whilst Blaenau Gwent was compliant with legislation for those pupils that performed for larger companies, the data clearly demonstrates a growing awareness of the legislative requirements under these regulations and the associated work undertaken to identify the range of amateur dramatic groups. Consequently, as training has been implemented, there has been an increase in the number of licences issued and notification of appearances of children performing under BOPA. This work is kept under review.

Blaenau Gwent's anti-bullying strategy and toolkit provides support to schools when tackling alleged bullying in Blaenau Gwent schools. The local authority has a clear Behaviour Strategy, based on inclusive principles which underpin process and procedure, written within the context of a range of policies, provided by Welsh Government. Monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure the local authority is able to respond appropriately to incidents of bullying in schools.

Monitoring of racist incidents is carried out on a termly basis, monitored by the Inclusion team. Further wider partnership engagement with organisations such as Show Racism the Red Card and the Ethnic Minority Youth Support Team in Wales (EYST) takes place to support schools and individuals affected. The local authority has provided all schools with Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) and reduced timetable guidance. All reported incidents of RPI are scrutinised and recorded by the appropriate Officer and follow up actions carried out. Such incidents are recorded within the Inclusion data and are also reported to joint scrutiny. The local authority also monitors reduced timetables, ensuring appropriate support and planning takes place.

Processes dealing with allegations against professionals are managed by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit in Social Services in accordance with Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP). The systems are embedded and WSP, Welsh Government guidance and Gwent Safeguarding Board guidance underpins this work. The Safeguarding in Education Manager reports the current position to DMT, which is then shared by the Corporate Director with CLT.

The Recruitment and Selection Policy, Safer Recruitment for Schools is considerate of safe recruitment principles for supply staff. This policy has been adopted by school Governing Bodies. The process for managing DBS compliance is embedded across education services and schools. DBS compliance is managed by Organisational Development and any non-compliance is escalated and managed by Directors and senior managers in all departments. CLT receive quarterly DBS position statement and this is also shared with Corporate Safeguarding Leads.

Early years have an established safeguarding quality assurance processes. Analysis of this is a feature of safeguarding meetings with this service and joint visits have been implemented with the Safeguarding in Education Manager. In addition, early year's childcare and play staff have systems in place to monitor the uptake of relevant safeguarding training with all DSPs in these settings being trained.

Evaluation of the Matrix reveals that all schools have updated their whole school safeguarding training within the last 3 years. The matrix reveals that all DSPs have had training and nearly all have refreshed their training in the past 3 years.. DSP training is also supplemented through regular updates provided during termly DSP meetings.

PREVENT training continues to be offered to schools and settings and in the governor training offer. Training for governors is offered through the BG specific EAS training programme and upon direct request from schools. Group 1 Training for VAWDASV was rolled out to educational settings in early 2018. Specific Blaenau Gwent education sessions for Group 2 Ask and Act training have taken place during March 2021.

Keeping Safe Online: By the end of the academic year 2020-21, all schools had registered with the 360 degree safe Cymru tool, with 68% of these having completed all aspects of the tool. Work needs to continue to promote the ongoing use of the tool.

The Council are currently in the process of the roll-out the MyConcern safeguarding system across all of the schools in 2020-21. Over 90% of BG's schools are engaged in the roll-out and the team are working towards 100% implementation.

Youth Workers and Counsellors promote the social, personal and emotional development of young people in a safe space; this proves highly effective in promoting the improved wellbeing of young people. Safeguarding processes are established in the Youth Service. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, with records kept on all safeguarding matters including Multi-Agency Referrals to Social Services, feedback and staff training.

Termly meetings are held between the Youth Service and the Safeguarding in Education Officer; emerging trends are highlighted to inform practice. All Youth Service staff have received training in Prevent.

The Local Authority has a comprehensive range of Health and Safety policies, procedures and guidance in place, which clearly sets out the management of Health and Safety, both at a Corporate, Directorate/school management level.

All schools have competent persons such as first aiders and educational visits co-ordinators to manage any risks. The Local Authority and schools meet the standards set out in HSE and WG guidance for Educational Visits.

Exemplar policies are provided for Drug and Substance Misuse and Sex and Relationships Education. Monitoring of policy through to practice is undertaken with training and resources are provided to deliver health topics.

In addition, following an increase in violence and aggression and more extreme incidents a threat to staff protocol has been developed and shared with schools which has been supported through presentations by partners at Headteacher meeting on matters such as knife crime.

Arrangements for educational visits are effective and improving because: the revised Educational Visits Policy (2017) is in line with the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel National Guidance (OEAPNG); the Outdoor Advisers monitors all trips and visits and reports to Head of Service, indicating the level of authorised school visits on a monthly basis; and, all schools are complying with the EVOLVE system. School visits to high footfall areas now include the terrorist threat risk assessment as part of the EVOLVE process.

Evaluations of approaches to prevent CYP from being drawn into terrorism activities indicates that all DSP's in schools had received WRAP training. In addition, the Education Safeguarding policy contains a policy statement on community cohesion and a further policy briefing has been developed for schools Respect and Resilience (Preventing Extremism).

Following the step change in terrorist tactics following the attack in Manchester and the attacks in London led to a review that saw Terrorist Threats considered as part of the school's risk assessment for visits to 'high footfall' areas. A Respect and Resilience Action Plan has been devised and implemented; the plan identifies the key areas from an Education Directorate perspective, including the Youth Service.

#### **3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas where progress has been made**

- **The Safeguarding Matrix approach to capturing information is helpful and supports the ongoing improvement in practice in this area.**
- **The close working arrangements between Education and Social Services have developed well, further supporting a coherence of approach regarding safeguarding in schools and settings. The Safeguarding Policy is regularly reviewed and understood by key stakeholders.**
- **Recent work to respond to community safety issues, counter potential terrorism and extremist behaviours has progressed well, for example, the Safer School Partnership, the Respect and Resilience Action Plan.**
- **The Operation Encompass work has progressed very well and supports schools in this regard.**
- **Quality assurance processes to test the robustness of safeguarding processes have been implemented and inform ongoing work in this area.**
- **The Safeguarding Policy and 360-degree Safe Cymru Policy has been agreed by the Executive and implemented in all schools, work needs to continue to promote the ongoing use of the toolkit.**
- **The new Council Policy requiring all school Governors to be DBS cleared is being implemented.**

#### **3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas requiring further improvement**

- **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.**
- **Full implementation of VAWDASV (Group 1) training needs to be achieved at school level, as well as the implementation of Group 2 training across all LGES settings.**
- **Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability.**



- **Provide greater flexibility in the training offer to increase the uptake of safeguarding training by school governors.**
- **Roll-out of the MyConcern software across all of BG's schools, since revenue funding was secured in early 2020.**
- **Review the Safeguarding self-evaluation report and areas for development, presented the Scrutiny Committee in the Summer 2021.**

### 3.5 Use of resources

**The Council is of the view that this investment is fundamental to securing improvements in educational outcomes and wellbeing. Sound financial planning underpins recent financial management and increasingly evidences better value for money.** The Education Directorate has a new and vibrant leadership team with a permanent Corporate Director of Education and Head of School Improvement appointed during academic year 2020-21. This restructure has also created new roles for Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change and Young People and Partnerships and this has created additional capacity, especially for the school improvement agenda. The new leadership has a progressive working relationship with the Resources/Finance team.

**The Education Portfolio Budget for 2021/22 is £59.7m. Education is a priority in the Corporate Improvement Plan and the Council agreed a 3.3% increase to the ISB for this financial year and in addition, the ISB was increased due to an increase in pupil numbers.**

**The provisional revenue out-turn for 2020/21 reported a favourable variance of £351,000 against a budget of £57.7m** and this was due to a number of reasons: the impact of Covid-19 on services was the primary driver for lower than normal spend. This manifested itself through reduced costs in for example, Home to School/Home to College Transport and additional grants from Welsh Government, totalling £3.2m for both revenue and capital.

**The Council to date have successfully drawn down £20.25m from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band A programme and secured appropriate match funding for the immediate projects under Band B;** the Directorate will propose further match funding amounts annually thereafter.

This programme is a priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Education's capital budget out-turn position for 2020-21 was balanced and an additional £1.3m was secured for the Six Bells new school build project. WG has also recently given their 'in-principle' support for a Band B programme that would result in an additional investment of £19.6m into the school estate. The 65/35 intervention rate is helpful. WG has recently awarded the Council £825,000 for the Education Maintenance Capital Grant for 20-21.

The Council's Executive approved an ICT business case for a new delivery model, which will address existing gaps and ensure future sustainability of the ICT infrastructure and connectivity across the Blaenau Gwent school estate. The proposal has been created in line with Welsh Government's strategic perspectives for digital competency across Wales. The capital elements of the project circa £600,000 are jointly funded by the schools and central education budget via prudential borrowing. A new schools' SLA with the Shared Resources Services (SRS) and the additional revenue costs have been agreed with schools. This project will ensure that all schools and their learners have consistency of access to ICT provision that meets the requirements of WG's Digital Competency Framework (DCF). The implementation of the project has been now completed following an implementation plan and delivery programme over an 18-month period.

Additionally, WG has awarded £2m to complement the aforementioned ICT infrastructure project with £900,000 confirmed for FY19/20 and a further £1m over the next 2 years. This funding has also been used to upgrade school devices and the Directorate continue to work with schools to secure their device replacement sustainability plans.

Regular finance meetings between the Resources Accountant, the Corporate Director and relevant budget holders provide opportunity to discuss financial matters, budget forecasts, schools causing concern, cost pressures etc. and quarterly budget monitoring reports are presented to Corporate Leadership, Joint budget Scrutiny, Executive Committee for scrutiny, monitoring and challenge. For cost pressures, action plans are developed and monitored monthly via the Corporate Cost pressure sub-group.

**The Individual Schools Budget (ISB) for 2021/22 is £46.5m. Overall surplus balances increased in 20/21 primarily due to the impact of Covid-19 on schools spend and additional WG grant allocations;** as shown in the table below:

| 2018/19         | 2019/20         | 2020/21 (provisional out turn) |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| £1.05 m Surplus | £1.32 m surplus | £3.68m surplus as at 05.08.21  |

Pupil Numbers:

| sector    | Sept 2016 | Sept 2017 | Sept 2018 | Sept 2019 | Sept 2020 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| secondary | 1,351     | 1,361     | 1,335     | 1,394     | 1,343     |
| middle    | 2,806     | 2,782     | 2,773     | 2,791     | 2,811     |
| primary   | 4,450     | 4,454     | 4,523     | 4,470     | 4,417     |
| special   | 105       | 139       | 153       | 165       | 168       |
| total     | 8,712     | 8,736     | 8,784     | 8,820     | 8,739     |

**The growth in pupil numbers is reflected in the growth trend in the ISB in recent years from £41.5m in 2017/2018 to £46.5m in 2021/2022**

P104 (P108)– Surplus/(Deficit) Summary as at 05.08.21

| Sector    | 2019 - 2020 | 2020 - 2021 |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Secondary | £336,432    | £810,014    |
| Middle    | (£829,421)  | (£259,758)  |
| Primary   | £1,532,120  | £2,744,327  |
| Special   | £286,016    | £387,088    |
| Total     | £1,054,512  | £3,681,671  |

During the 2020/21 financial year a review of school funding was undertaken which suggested that the funding should be moved between the sectors in the 2020/21 financial year. This was agreed on a phased basis. The movement in funding for 21/22 is shown overleaf:

| Sector    | Funding Change |
|-----------|----------------|
| Secondary | +£67,000       |
| Middle    | +£46,000       |
| Primary   | -£115,000      |
| Special   | +£2,000        |
| Total     | £0             |

Schools forecasting a deficit budget are required to develop a medium term deficit reduction plan, which is approved by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Corporate Director of Education and Chief Officer Resources. These plans are monitored and regular meetings are held between the School Support Officer and the Headteacher. School Balances report is presented to Education DMT and CLT on a termly basis. Schools with balances in excess of the prescribed amounts, are required to submit spending plans in accordance with delivering school improvement.

The School Budget Forum is effective in championing the resource management matters for schools and the Forum has the opportunity to feedback to the Council on strategic resource considerations that are facing schools. All schools have bought into the Council's SLA for financial support, with each school having a dedicated support officer providing:

- Forecast financial information for a number of years
- Budget modelling & Planning
- Support with SIMS
- Provision of financial information to present to Governor
- Grant monitoring
- Financial Support
- Finance Training

**The Council's total gross budgeted expenditure per pupil for 2021/22 is £6,980 which is the 2nd highest in Wales and £593 above the Welsh average of £6,387. This is made up of delegated gross expenditure of £5,962 across all sectors (1<sup>st</sup> in Wales), which is £637 above the Wales average of £5,325 and central expenditure of £1,017 per pupil and £45 above the Welsh average. When compared to the family of similar local authorities, delegated gross expenditure is ranked highest, with central funding ranking lowest.**

**For 2021/22 the funding delegated to schools was 85.4% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of schools. (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2021/22).**

The ALN provision expansion model amounting to approximately £6M revenue is a programme clearly prioritised at need. Blaenau Gwent accommodates some of the highest level of SEN need in Wales. Outcomes and progress for pupils presenting with statements of SEN are good and more variable for pupils at SA and SA+ (A1.1).

Out of County Placements (OOC): In line with the revised model for ALN provision, the process for approving out of county placements has been strengthened. Blaenau Gwent ALN students are appropriately placed and there have been no tribunals in recent years. This budget is monitored closely and offset by income from recoupment for pupils placed in settings in Blaenau Gwent. The 20/21 provisional out turn is an overspend of £34,000.

The School Budget Forum has been effective in carrying out focussed pieces of work such as: debating the funding formula for schools, which central budgets can be delegated to schools; providing feedback on the budget setting process and service level agreements, the process for the clawback of funding and the establishment of a Premature Redundancy/Retirement budget (PRC Budget)

**The Council has been very successful in accessing external funding. Council's Youth Service is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in Wales for core funded expenditure per head for youth population but raises to 2<sup>nd</sup> when including external grant expenditure.** The Youth Service has accessed European Social Fund (ESF) financial support for the Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work initiatives.

The LA compares its performance across a range of indicators with its Family of LAs; namely RCT, MT, CCBC and NPT. Pupil outcomes and LA Rank is used to compare performance in BG and help support value for money judgements. However, the availability of LA aggregated data going forward will present as a challenge due to changes in the publication of data associated with the removal of high stakes accountability systems and in line with the National Reform agenda.

The adoption of a pupil-led formula for placement in ALN resource bases has reduced the number of surplus staffed places and has introduced a flexible model which responds to changing needs. Through the review of resource bases, provision for ASD and SEBD is secured in line with emerging demand within existing budget revenues. Close working with Headteachers has ensured collective commitment and ownership of these significant changes.

**The FADE evaluation illustrates that there are robust Corporate and Directorate resource management arrangements in place that is contributing to an improving value for money assessment. This evaluative judgement is evidenced through the following;**

- **A balanced 2021-22 capital budget and relatively minor revenue underspend out-turn position;**
- **Education is a corporate priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and revenue and capital budgets have been largely protected during the difficult financial climate;**
- **There are effective leadership and management arrangements in place to monitor and plan for resource management across the Council, and indeed, within the Education Directorate;**
- **The ISB and schools' financial position is clearly understood and schools that are in surplus/deficit situations are challenged and supported well; and,**
- **Overall value for money is improving, linked to improvements in school categorisation and performance overall.**

**In 2020/21 the Youth Service** was funded partly through a core budget of £372,000 and external grants of £1,158,000 (from ESF - European Social Fund, Positive Futures and Welsh Government Youth Support Grant). Therefore, the total income for the Youth Service in 2020/21 was £1,530,000. All grants have been secured for the next financial year, with the ESF funding secured up until 2022 and additional funding sourced from Welsh Government to enhance the youth work offer to young people around youth homelessness and mental health.

The reliance on external funding is identified as a risk. Securing ESF monies until 2022 provides some stability for targeted services. However, the majority of grants are funded on an annual basis, with annual action plans, which does not allow long term financial planning. This has been flagged up as a concern and needs to be considered in future planning.

The Youth Service's core revenue budget is effectively used to employ a small core team to access and administer external grants to meet identified need. These grants include European Social Funding, Welsh Government Youth Support Grant, Positive Futures and Children in Need. The grants enable the service to provide support to the most vulnerable young people in the community through providing individual tailored support as needed.

**Other areas:**

**SLAs with schools; the Council will be working with schools to renew the 3 year SLA arrangements with schools from the Summer 2021 for implementation from April 2022. This is circa £3m worth of buy-back business from schools to the Council across 16 SLAs.**

**EAS: The Council commissions the EAS to deliver the statutory functions of school improvement. The annual financial costs being £351,000 which has reduced over the last 3 years. Schools categorisation profile has improved over the last 5 years against a backdrop of decreasing contributions to the EAS: this effectively represents good value for money.**

SENCOM: the financial contribution had been renegotiated last year via a review conducted by WLGA. The Council currently contributes the reviewed amount of £247,000 (previously £252,000). This again represents good value for money as progress of our statemented pupils is generally good.

GEMS: WG grant for £32,000 (MEAG) is transferred to GEMS: pupil outcomes and progress is very good; hence, the service provides very good value for money.

CAPITA: The existing contract with CAPITA was £92,000 for the CAPITA ONE programme; however, following negotiations with CAPITA the new contract from 21/22 will now reduce to £75,000 (a reduction of £17,000 per annum or £85,000 over 5 years) and has additional modules such as on-line admission arrangements as well as the safeguarding module MyConcern. This agreement was signed off at the end of January 2020. This represents another example of how the Directorate secures good value for money and a new focus on commercial activity.

### 3.5 Use of Resources: Areas where progress has been made

- **The school's Individual Schools Budget (ISB) has been prioritised. Schools have been given a 3.3% uplift for 21/22. Capital has been secured to match fund the 21st Century Schools Programme. Overall, schools have healthy balances across the school estate.**
- **Effective Education leadership team in place, which has also generated revenue savings.**
- **Financial Efficiency Savings: devised, approved and budget agreed for 2020/21. No additional savings are required for FY 21/22.**
- **SENCom Review on-going – BG contributed extensively to the review and support 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 e.g. termly Exec/CLT briefings.
- Use of resources i.e. Education staffing have been significantly streamlined to ensure greater value for money.
- 21st Century Band B Programme has been approved and is in implementation phase.
- 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 up to 2022.

### 3.5 Use of Resources: areas requiring improvement

- The corporate 'Bridging the Gap' programme implementation 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 e.g. SENCom review.
- Schools balances in the secondary/primary sectors have increased in one school, but needs to be kept under close review going forward; timely support to be provided by the Council 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 and home to school transport revenue budgets 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.
- SLA renewal with schools by April 2022, which is circa £3m+ income to the Council.

19.07.21

Dear Michelle Morris,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with an overview of the progress you have made in relation to recommendations from the overarching thematic report we published in January. The narrative reflects the information and views you shared with our link inspectors during their engagements with you throughout the term,

The thematic identified five recommendations for the Welsh Government and recognised that a whole system approach was needed to address these. The first three recommendations were more immediate and urgent in nature, whilst the last two recommendations will take longer to address. From our discussions with you, feedback from learners and our engagement work with schools, it is clear that, through collaboration, progress was made across Wales in equipping schools and learners to provide better remote learning experiences during the second lockdown.

In line with our new approach for thematic reports, we will be writing to the Welsh Government in early 2022 to seek feedback on the work they have done to address the recommendations we made to them.

We hope you will find this summary a helpful affirmation of the work that you have done to support your learners and learning communities during the last six months.

### **R1 Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity**

The local authority has appointed a designated officer to oversee securing devices for pupils in need. This officer works closely with school leaders to carry out weekly assessments of the provision needed for individual pupils. The officer also attends a monthly monitoring meeting to consider the local authority's overall digital support for schools and families. The local authority commissions the Shared Resource Service (SRS) who acquire, build and distributes devices and Mi-Fi units to digitally disadvantaged learners within seven days of a need being identified. Feedback from head teachers is that this arrangement has worked very well, and in most cases the local authority has provided a device within 48 hours. The local authority has planned to continue with these arrangements until at least the end of the summer term 2021, with pupils able to retain devices at home during this period.

As of May 2021, the local authority has loaned 1,359 devices and 161 Mi-Fi units to pupils. During the first lockdown, the local authority was aware that a minority of pupils had to share devices with siblings. However, in more recent months, officers have ensured that nearly all pupils have access to a suitable individual device.

Officers are carrying out a review of the 'Digitally Disadvantaged Device' project plan future provision to allow all families continued digital access. Officers feel that they reacted responsively at the start of the pandemic but have now had time to reflect and look at the digital learner journey more strategically. Officers are mindful of the sustainability of their ICT support programme and are looking at how they will continue to provide support for home learning in the years ahead.

The local authority has recognised that many parents have a lack of pedagogical understanding and that their children have become disadvantaged as parents 'do it differently' to their teachers. The local authority recognise that in the future, they need to provide more learning opportunities for parents on how to support their children's literacy and numeracy at home, should there be a third wave of the pandemic.

**R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs**

Local authority officers are very positive about the work of Blaenau Gwent schools in developing and improving regional blended learning approaches. The Celebrate, Support, Share and Refine (CSSR) pilot involved 13 out of 25 local authority schools and will be extended in the summer term to include all schools. Officers feel that this project will help identify and share good practice in individual schools to help strengthen practice across the local authority. Local authority officers have monitored each school's provision using a blended learning survey. This has helped them identify areas that schools need to improve and to celebrate and share successful practice.

All schools in the local authority have access to the extensive EAS blended learning offer, resources and training. School leaders have reported that they find the EAS distance learning website helpful in supporting them to develop and improve distance and blended learning approaches, including improving teaching. Schools have appreciated that, through this offer, they have had access to external consultants and a range of influential speakers for training sessions.

The local authority's recovery and renewal plan outlines how they aim to build on the responses to their pupil survey to further strengthen distance learning should there be another wave of the pandemic. In the coming months, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion will be meeting with various groups of pupils to gain more information on the impact of blended learning experiences on their education. She intends to use the findings to work on a plan to further improve blended learning provision across all schools in the future.

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

The local authority's Head of School Improvement and Inclusion is taking lead responsibility for the 'Education Recovery and Renewal' working group. This group's membership includes headteachers and other key partners. One purpose of the group is to support the progress of all learners, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable pupils who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The work of this group will be complemented by a local authority review of their Inclusion Services to enable support to be targeted effectively at vulnerable pupils.

The EAS has provided useful guidance for schools within the local authority on how to effectively use their recovery grant with a focus on catch up skills in literacy and numeracy and support for pupils' wellbeing. In addition, head teachers and other school staff have the opportunity to attend sessions on effective approaches that could be funded through the grant. Headteachers appreciate the proportionate approach that the local authority has taken to evaluating their use of additional funding.

Officers have used the findings from a school survey to identify groups of pupils with particular concerns. They are concerned with the lack of engagement of many Gypsy, Roma or Traveller families and the impact that this has had on pupils' progress. To help overcome this, the local authority has used a Welsh Government grant to appoint an additional member of staff to their Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil support team. The team are now visiting schools to work individually with pupils on face-to-face catch-up interventions and provide additional support to families.

Across the local authority, there has been an increase in demand for counselling services. As a result, the local authority has increased their counselling team. Until recently, direct contact has been difficult,



but counsellors are now fully back in schools and youth centres providing face-to-face support for pupils in need.

Since the start of the pandemic, the local authority has seen an increase in demand for elective home education (EHE). This has mainly been due to anxiety issues and officers are hopeful that many of these pupils will return to school in the future. Educational Welfare Officers have been keeping in touch with these families and has been linking them with schools so they can have support from professionals with home learning. Officers realise the importance of maintaining strong links between the families and schools to support pupils' return to school in the future.

#### **R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils**

The local authority's 'Education Recovery and Renewal' working group has a strong focus on supporting the physical and mental health of pupils. Officers feel that, over the last year, supporting pupils' wellbeing has been a strength in all schools. This was recognised in pupil surveys and from schools' engagement with parents.

The long term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils is one of the local authority's strategic level corporate recommendations. The Head of School Improvement has considered a range of evidence on the physical and mental health of pupils to help the local authority plan their support for pupils. She will also be engaging with a wide range of stakeholders during the summer term to obtain first-hand evidence of the impact of the pandemic on pupils' mental and physical health. The local authority's current recovery and renewal action plan for Summer 2021 to Summer 2022 will then inform a three-year plan to support the long-term actions needed to improve the physical and mental health of pupils.

Breakfast provision has now resumed in schools and from September 2021, the local authority plans to resume the 'normal' arrangements for breakfast clubs and after school clubs to help support pupils' health and wellbeing.

Members of the Aneurin Leisure Trust have recently undertaken an analysis of the quality of provision of school sport and swimming in Blaenau Gwent, recognising the impact of the pandemic on their ability to deliver physical activity programmes. The local authority is committed to continue to deliver a wide range of sport, physical activity, community engagement and swimming opportunities across Blaenau Gwent. The Trust intends to build on their current 'Family Engagement' project to inspire the most vulnerable families across Blaenau Gwent to be active, healthy and to participate in activities as a family. They will identify those most in need of support and will then provide a programme of free activities and access to free leisure centre membership. They will undertake regular health checks throughout the programme to monitor its success.

Following very positive feedback from last year's project, the local authority has secured funding to pay for the six schools with the highest number of eFSM pupils to run the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP). This is a school-based education programme that provides food and nutrition education, physical activity, enrichment sessions and healthy meals to children in areas of social deprivation during the school summer holidays.

The local authority's Youth Service are continuing to offer support to young people in schools and across communities. They are continuing to work closely with organisations, such as the Rotary Club, to help fund essential items such as food hampers. Officers are also engaging with schools to address the

period dignity agenda, including working with third party organisations to help with the distribution of products for all family members.

**R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design**

Education officers present regular reports to the Education and Learning Scrutiny and Executive Committees to reflect upon and to evaluate the effectiveness of the local authority's response to the pandemic. The top priority for education officers and the EAS business planning for 2021/22 is to maximise pupil progression and minimise the impact of the pandemic on learners.

The local authority has developed local policies, guidance, risk assessments and operational plans for and with schools. Officers ensure that they regularly review their plans, and they discuss progress at their fortnightly Executive School Planning meetings. These group meetings have been operational throughout the 2020/21 school year, to support effective communication and engagement between education officers and headteachers.

Officers feel that they have clear processes to monitor this work and are mindful of the need to plan strategically. This includes supporting schools who have large school balances to ensure that leaders are aware of the need to plan for the medium and not just the short term.

The local authority has established a head teacher curriculum reform group with representation from all sectors. In this group, schools are invited to share their progress with curriculum reform. Representatives then highlight which schools have good practice to share and which schools need additional support in implementing the new curriculum. There is a representative on the group from each school cluster and they then liaise with other cluster schools to ensure that information is shared, and support is provided when needed. Officers feel that the EAS has provided very good curriculum training sessions for all schools and the uptake from Blaenau Gwent schools has been high. They feel in a good position to build on the positives from their blended learning approach to enhance curriculum reform. This includes enhancing opportunities for pupils to work independently using blended learning approaches.

In the summer term, the school improvement officer will be visiting each school to discuss curriculum reform with each head teacher and to determine support that each school needs. In conjunction with the EAS, the local authority will organise bespoke training packages to avoid duplication. Officers feel that the local authority are in a good position for schools to support each other on their journey.

Thank you for your work and for your ongoing professional dialogue with our inspectors.

Regards,



**Jassa Scott**  
Strategic Director

## Education Impact Assessment (Working Document)

| Impact Area           | *RAG | Key Impacts  | Identified Needs / Actions                  | Responsible                                 | Success Criteria (indication we have recovered)                              | Measure - separate meeting to be held with AP / GW / ME  | 2019/20 Outturn | 2020/21 Outturn | Tolerance |
|-----------------------|------|--|---|---|--|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| <b>Priority Areas</b> |      |  |   |   |  |  |                 |                 |           |
| 1. Learner Wellbeing  | Red  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental health (short and long-term)</li> <li>Emotional and physical health</li> <li>Engagement with school and peers</li> <li>Social skills and language acquisition</li> </ul> | As detailed within the learner theme below. | As detailed within the learner theme below. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved learner wellbeing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualitative wellbeing surveys</li> <li>Attendance and exclusion rates</li> <li>SEN data (ELSA)</li> <li>Access to counselling services</li> <li>Schools baseline data (emotional and skills upon entry)</li> <li>Speech and language support data</li> <li>Early years and pre-school uptake</li> </ul> |                 |                 |           |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

|                        |     |   |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |
|------------------------|-----|---|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
|                        |     |   |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nursery uptake</li> </ul>  |  |  |  |
| 2. Vulnerable Learners | Red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased vulnerability</li> <li>Neglect</li> <li>Domestic violence and family issues</li> <li>Social exclusion and isolation</li> <li>Poverty</li> <li>Unidentified needs (short and long-term)</li> <li>Hard to access specialist provision resulting in provision needing to be increased.</li> </ul> | As detailed within the vulnerable learner theme below. | As detailed within the vulnerable learner theme below. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vulnerable learners are identified and supported</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free school meals data</li> <li>SEN and ALN Data</li> <li>Admissions data</li> <li>Attendance and exclusion data</li> <li>Referral data (i.e. Social Services)</li> <li>RPI data</li> <li>Digitally Disadvantage data</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| 3. Academic progress   | Red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners not achieving expected progress/levels</li> <li>Pupils that did not engage with blended learning</li> <li>Impact upon transition (both entry into statutory education and</li> </ul>  | As detailed within the learner theme below.            | As detailed within the learner theme below.            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners make expected progress</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School data (upon re-introduction)</li> </ul>  |  |  |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

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|----------------------|-----|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|
|                      |     | school leaver transition) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased numbers of electively home educated pupils</li> <li>• Resources to support progression</li> </ul>  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |
| 4. School operations | Red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools ability to fulfil the statutory obligations associated with curriculum and ALN reform</li> <li>• Reduced options and increased control measures within each school setting</li> <li>• Staffing considerations (wellbeing, resource availability, skillsets)</li> <li>• Reduced capacity and availability within support services.</li> </ul> | As detailed within themes 3,6,7 and 8 below. | As detailed within themes 3,6,7 and 8 below. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased school operations to facilitate effectively delivery</li> <li>• Effective implementation of ALN and Curriculum reform</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational plans – increased operations within school settings</li> <li>• Progression data aligned to the implementation of curriculum and ALN reform</li> <li>• Staff wellbeing survey</li> <li>• School workforce position statements</li> <li>• EAS staff training</li> </ul> |  |  |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

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|------------------------|-------|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
|                        |       |  |  |  |  | records/engagement<br>• Support service data  |  |  |  |
| <b>Key Themes</b>      |       |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |
| 1. Learners            | Amber | Impact of missed time in school – education, social, emotional, physical and mental health implications (short and long-term). | <p>Develop a recovery and renewal plan with a focus on education and wellbeing.</p> <p>Link with national and regional priorities.</p> <p>Undertake stakeholder engagement to facilitate learning from experience, and renewal of practice.</p> <p>Partnership work with the EAS to broker support in line with the EAS Business Plan.</p> | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  | <p>PIs for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational attainment</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• CAMHS referrals</li> <li>• EOTAS</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| 2. Vulnerable learners | Red   | Impact of missed time in school – education, social, emotional, physical and mental health.                                    | Develop recovery and renewal plan with a focus on provision for vulnerable learners.   | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  | <p>PIs for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational attainment</li> <li>• Surveys</li> </ul>   |  |  |  |

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|-----------------|-------|---|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
|                 |       | For those with disabilities and additional needs, provision and processes have been restricted.   | <p>Link with national and regional priorities.</p> <p>Undertake stakeholder engagement to facilitate learning from experience, and renewal of practice.</p> <p>Partnership work with Social Services, Health and Safety and the EAS to broker support.</p> |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAMHS referrals</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| 3. School staff | Amber | <p>Impact of missed time in school – professional development, social, emotional, physical/mental health and general wellbeing in line with the need to adapt to blended learning.</p> <p>Staff childcare implications relating to school closure.</p> <p>LA's and schools have been required</p> | <p>Develop recovery and renewal plan</p> <p>Link with national and regional priorities.</p> <p>Undertake stakeholder engagement to facilitate learning from experience, and renewal of practice.</p> <p>Partnership work with OD, Health &amp;</p>         | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  |   |  |  |  |

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|---|-------|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
|   |       | to establish and implement control and safety measures to support clinically vulnerable staff. This has impacted upon both staff and school operations.<br><br>For those with disabilities and additional needs, provision and processes have been restricted. | Safety and the EAS to broker support.  |  |  |   |  |  |  |
| 4. Childcare                            | Red   | After school and pre-school provision which has been reduced and/or is not available due to COVID restrictions   | Childcare operational plans and risk assessments to be reviewed and monitored by the Childcare Sub-group.          | Service Manager -ET and BC   |  | PIs for Consideration:<br>• Breakfast clubs<br>• After school clubs                   |  |  |  |
| 5. Staff training                       | Red   | Staff training needs aligned to operations are not all currently adapted to be delivered online i.e. first aid and RPI   | Training plan review in partnership with Health and Safety and OD colleagues.                                      | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager -ET and BC |  | PIs for Consideration:<br>• Training uptake<br>• DBS compliance                       |  |  |  |
| 6. Education assets and site management | Amber | Statutory functions, testing and inspection (Health and Safety, Fire Risk Assessment, maintenance and site management,   | Review school operational plans and WG guidance to inform priorities and changes to local guidance and operations. | Service Manager - ET and BC  |  | PIs for Consideration:<br>• Maintenance within the schools<br>• Fire risk assessments |  |  |  |

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|                      |               |  |   |                           |  |   |  |  |  |
|----------------------|---------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
|                      |               | ventilation), operations are regularly reviewed in line with the latest guidance and governed by risk assessments  | Review guidance and associated policy, risk assessment and operational plan bi-monthly, in partnership with Health and Safety and the Technical Working Group.  |                           |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools</li> </ul>   |  |  |  |
| 7. School operations | Red/<br>Amber | Catering, cleaning, access to school sites, movement in and around the school, trips and visits, visitors, refuse, PPE and resources are all under continual review. These areas are subject to risk assessment and reduced operation in line with the COVID alert level implementation. Changes to the school day have been implemented throughout the school estate to support staggered start and finish times. | <p>Operational plan to be monitored, provision, guidance and policy to be adapted accordingly.</p> <p>Regular monitoring required as above</p> <p>ICT Plan and associated strategy to be developed in partnership with SRS and the ICT Strategy Group.</p> <p>Monthly review in line with the latest regulations. Procurement and operations review</p> | Service Manager ET and BC |  | <p>PIs for Consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ICT provision</li> <li>Grants</li> <li>training</li> </ul> |  |  |  |

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|----------------------------|-----|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
|                            |     | <p>Changes to statutory functions and regulations which affect school operation e.g. school admissions.</p> <p>ICT infrastructure, devices, access to resources, systems and software for both pupils and staff in line with digital exclusion and blended learning are continually reviewed to support inclusion.</p> <p>Home to school and post 16 transport operations, have been restricted, reconfigured and subject to detailed risk assessment.</p> |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |
| 8. School support services | Red | <p>School support service operation i.e. Educational Psychology, ALN, Social Services etc. has been prohibited due to lack of access, which has affected pupil and family</p>  | <p>Inclusion Service review to be undertaken.</p> <p>Transition to be developed.</p> | <p>Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC</p> |  | <p>PIs to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Educational Psychology referrals</li> <li>• Safeguarding referrals</li> </ul> |  |  |  |

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|  |  | <p>engagement and progress.</p> <p>Transition at all phases has been affected by key support services having restricted/no access to schools.</p> <p>Human Resource management processes and engagement via OD are now online focused, but will require review to support effective school operations that were paused due to COVID. Wellbeing support services require monitoring in terms of access and uptake.</p> <p>Additional insurance and financial implications for schools as a result of the pandemic. EAS support for schools has transitioned to</p> | <p>Work with OD to undertake an impact associated and establish an operational plan around schools.</p> <p>Working with Finance and Insurance colleagues to undertake an impact assessment, in order to inform future planning.</p> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

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|-----------------------------------|-------|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|
|                                   |       | online with a deficit to levels of engagement and to the brokerage of relevant support at all levels e.g. LNS Schools.  |   |  |  |   |  |  |  |
| 9. School accountability services | Red   | <p>EAS Challenge Advisors have not been able to hold schools to account and school's data monitoring has been suspended.</p> <p>Esytn has suspended inspection resulting in risks to school – particularly those in a category, who are in for longer than planned.</p> | <p>Review EAS Business Plan in line with WG regulations and guidance.</p> <p>Multi-agency partnership working with Estyn in order to support schools causing concern.</p> | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  | <p>PIs for Consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools causing concern</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| 10. School leadership             | Amber | School governance has been adapted online, therefore, the evidence base is largely restricted to Headteacher report and narrative.  | Work with the EAS to review current practice for governance and school leadership.  | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  |   |  |  |  |

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|------------------------|-------|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|--|
|                        |       | Support for current and new school leaders has been limited to online, and school to school working opportunities have mainly focused on wellbeing and operational issues.  |   |   |  |   |  |  |  |
| 11. Poverty            | Red   | Family entitlement to benefits has increased across Blaenau Gwent and the region, including free school meals. Additional funding has been allocated to support these families, however, many schemes are not sustainable and so the ongoing impact will need to be assessed. | Working with Finance and Benefits colleagues to undertake an impact assessment, in order to inform future planning. | Service Manager ET and BC/ Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  | PIs to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FSM</li> <li>Impact assessment of benefit uptake</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| 12. School community   | Red   | Limited face to face contact and the shift to online engagement has challenged communication and relationships.   | Provide support for individual schools to address barriers to parent engagement in partnership with the EAS.        | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion                            |  |   |  |  |  |
| 13. School development | Amber | School development plans have had to be largely adapted in  | Provide support for individual schools in   | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion                            |  |   |  |  |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

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|  |     | order to react to COVID-19.   | partnership with the EAS.   |   |  |   |  |  |  |
| 14. Safeguarding - children                                | Red | School closure has meant that children and young people are at greater risk of harm e.g. adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Service support intelligence and capability has been restricted. | Supporting Schools to ensure that they are able to effectively identify and manage risks, via structure an effective multi-agency approach. | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC |  | PIs to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safeguarding</li> <li>ACEs</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| 15. Safeguarding - adults                                  | Red | Vulnerable adults are more exposed to risk factors with limited access to support services.   | Supporting Schools to ensure that they are able to effectively identify and manage risks, via structure an effective multi-agency approach. | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC |  | PIs to consider: Referrals to safeguarding  |  |  |  |
| 16. Voluntary/ Third Sector/ Charities work and engagement | Red | Opportunities to engage partners have been restricted significantly due to operational implications associated with COVID-19.   | Establish a stakeholder re-engagement and support plan for Education and schools.   | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC |  |   |  |  |  |
| 17. Preventative health measures                           | Red | School-based preventative strategies to support healthcare needs of pupils have either been stopped or  | Work closely with ABUHB, Public Health Wales and associated partners to review and  | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/Service Manager ET and BC  |  |   |  |  |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

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|--|-------|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|
|  |       | largely disrupted by COVID-19 i.e. vaccinations, growth and development checks, dental health, period equity etc.   | develop a school health plan .   |   |  |   |  |  |  |
| 18. COVID control measures                           | Amber | LA's and schools have implemented a series of control measures in order to manage community health i.e. vaccinations, Lateral flow tests, use of PPE, positive case management and risk assessment. | Review and evaluate existing control measures in line with the latest guidance, regulations and associated operational plans, in order to inform business continuity planning. | Service Manager ET and BC/Health and Safety                         |  | PIs to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COVID cases</li> <li>LFT</li> </ul> |  |  |  |
| <b>Recovery Review - Areas that have worked well</b> |       |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |  |
| Relationships and Engagement with headteachers       | Green | Throughout the course of the pandemic relationships, communication and engagement with school leaders has improved significantly. School leaders have had the opportunity to work                   | Continue with the current engagement format to aid recover and ensure effective engagement and participation opportunities are in place for/with school leaders                | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC |  |   |  |  |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

|                   |       |   |   |   |  |
|-------------------|-------|---|---|---|--|
|                   |       | together with the Council, shaping provision and informing key developments throughout the response period. In addition, they have been empowered to share and seek solutions to issues which have emerged, whilst working closely with the Council to achieve consistency in delivery methods etc. |   |   |  |
| Digital inclusion | Amber | Throughout the course of the pandemic both Welsh Government and the Council have worked to secure and invest in devices and connectivity to address digital disadvantage. As a result, there is now an improved understanding of the level of digital disadvantage throughout the school estate. In | Ensure a full review of provision and requirements takes place, to aid device/provision sustainability plans in line with the Education ICT Strategy and blended learning developments. | Service Manager ET and BC/ Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact



|   |       |   |  |  |  |
|---|-------|---|--|--|--|
|   |       | addition, there are established methods and solutions by which the impact of digital disadvantage can be addressed.   |  |  |  |
| Business continuity – service design and delivery | Amber | Both schools and associated Council services have established effective service design and delivery models, along with business continuity arrangements, ensuring effective response to the pandemic. | Continue to review operational and business continuity plans, to ensure that alert level response and associated delivery can be managed effectively.                                      | Service Manager ET and BC                |  |
| Learners  | Amber | Many pupils have developed skills through engaging with distance learning e.g. resilience and time management.  | Continue to build on these skills in a face-to-face setting, ensure schools provide catch up support for pupils who have not developed such skills/not engaged well with distance learning | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  |
| Teaching staff                                    | Amber | Many teachers and teaching assistants have developed their use of ICT to deliver learning, many schools have used   | Continue to build on these skills in a face-to-face setting. Work with the EAS to ensure blended learning continues to   | Head of School Improvement and Inclusion |  |

\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  | ICT in creative and engaging ways to encourage, motivate and support learning. | be a key priority in school development planning |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

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\*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

# Agenda Item 8

*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: **14<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Report Subject: **Inclusion Strategy and Review (2021-2022)**

Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member, Councillor Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education and  
Luisa Munro-Morris, Head of School Improvement and  
Inclusion**

| Reporting Pathway           |                           |                          |                 |                               |                    |                     |         |                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| ✓                           | 26.09.21                  | 01.09.21                 |                 |                               | 14.09.21           | 22.09.21            |         |                      |

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to outline plans to review the Inclusion Service during the period of September 2021 – August 2022, particularly in light of the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) (referenced in this report as ALN Act). The Education Directorate's Inclusion Strategy will be subsequently reviewed in September 2022.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The ALN Act provides the legislative framework for the planning and delivery of additional learning provision. The ALN Act will be supported by regulations and a statutory ALN Code. The ALN Code and operational regulations were laid before the Senedd in March 2021 to support the commencement and phased roll out of the ALN Act from September 2021. However, due to the impact of the pandemic on ensuring the relevant processes and practices are in place, this roll out has been delayed until January 2022 for nearly all pupils, except pupils who are newly identified as having ALN (those pupils who have not already been identified as having a special educational need (SEN), or are not awaiting or undergoing a SEN assessment), who will still move to the new ALN system from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021.
- 2.2 The Welsh Government has requested that the period between September and January is used to reflect on guidance, to begin preparatory work and to ensure that transition arrangements are in place for those pupils identified SEN (School Action or School Action Plus) to the new arrangements. To support with this work, the Welsh Government will publish technical and practitioner versions of the implementation guidance early in the Autumn term, to help navigate the processes and requirements for transition to the

new system. This time will be used to review and ensure the current inclusion and additional learning needs processes in the Council are fit for purpose.

2.3 The primary reason for this report is to outline the need for the Inclusion arrangements, policies and practices to be reviewed, specifically arrangements for supporting pupils with additional learning needs, in light of guidance from the Welsh Government (early Autumn term) and in light of the ALN Act, in order to ensure the Council is compliant and can meet the needs of all our school settings and learners. It is, therefore, proposed that the Education Directorate's Inclusion Strategy is subsequently updated in academic year 2021-22 and this will feature as a report to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee later in the cycle of meetings for full implementation from September 2022. The Inclusion Strategy will, however, involve the following priorities:

- 2.4
- Strategic review of Inclusion services to ensure that all requirements of the ALN Act are met, including the existing ALN Panel arrangements;
  - Review the policies and practices for supporting pupils with ALN;
  - Ensuring that Inclusion resources are aligned and targeted to meet learners' needs;
  - Review of the ALN Service Level Agreement (SLA) to ensure that schools are supported to meet the needs of all their learners, particularly those with ALN;
  - Work closely with partners, including schools, in particular Tredegar Comprehensive School, and the EAS, to ensure that all schools are supported to implement all aspects of the ALN Act; and,
  - Introduce a Blaenau Gwent common approach to developing and reviewing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for learners.

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

3.1 There are two options for consideration:

3.2 Option 1: to maintain the status quo

3.3 Option 2: to agree to the review of the Inclusion Service to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act are met, this will include reviewing relevant resourcing, structures, job descriptions and ensuring that relevant arrangements are in place to fulfil the needs of the ALN Act.

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

One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan aims for every child to have the best start in life. We seek to ensure that education provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of all 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 Option 1: Under this option, the statutory requirements of the ACT cannot be fulfilled and whilst there are no direct financial implications in maintaining the current position, there may be indirect consequences as a result of failure to meet statutory requirements.
- 5.1.2 Option 2: (preferred option) – A review of current roles and job descriptions within the Inclusion Service for the purpose of ensuring that all requirements of the ALN Act are met. It is not anticipated there will be any additional cost pressures on the Council, specifically the Education Directorate. Full Council agreed to support a £100,000 revenue cost pressure as part of the budget setting process for financial year 2021-22 and this will be fully allocated to the new resourcing and structural requirements.

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

- 5.2.1 There is a risk that without a review of the Inclusion Service, the Council will be unable to fulfil statutory duties under the ALN Act. The Inclusion service is also a key component of the Estyn LGES Inspection Framework and the service needs to be fit for purpose.

### **5.3 Legal**

- 5.3.1 The ALN Act provides the legislative framework for the planning and delivery of additional learning provision. The ALN Act is supported by regulations and a statutory ALN Code. The ALN Code and operational regulations were laid before the Senedd in March 2021 to support the commencement and phased roll out of the ALN Act from September 2021.

### **5.4 Human Resources**

- 5.4.1 The Education Directorate's senior management structure was agreed by Full Council in November 2020, including creating the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion role. This post has been filled on a secondment basis in academic year 2021, however, a permanent appointment has been made and will start on a full-time basis in September 2021. Therefore, the review of the Inclusion service is timely with the new Head of Service in place. From a HR perspective, the two options detailed in the report have the following implications;
- 5.4.2 Option 1 – Under this option, the statutory requirements for ALN will not be fully met.
- 5.4.3 Option 2 – A review of the Inclusion Service is needed to fulfil the requirements of the ALN Act.
- 5.4.4 Discussion has taken place with OD for advice and guidance on the review of the Inclusion Service. The vacant Service Manager – Inclusion post is

currently going through the recruitment process, with a view to appointing early in the Autumn term.

## **6. Supporting Evidence**

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

6.1.1 The ALN Act will place additional responsibilities on members of the Inclusion team, including time needed to manage new IDP processes, gathering information, coordinating and running IDP meetings as well as the completion of statutory paperwork following IDP meetings and reviews. The initial IDP process involves a Person Centred Review meeting to confirm the child has ALN which requires additional learning provision. If agreed the Council has 12 weeks to gather necessary reports from all services involved, including the child and finalise an IDP.

6.1.2 All IDPs require an Annual Review, although those holding parental responsibility can call an early review if they wish. The Annual Review will need to take into consideration updating a Personal Education Plan, for pupils who are looked after (CLA pupils), and updating the IDP for all pupils. There can be significant planning required to identify suitable provision to meet the needs of pupils as identified in the IDP.

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

6.2.1 Pupils with additional learning needs are provided with high quality education, appropriate to their educational needs, to ensure they have the best chance of reaching their potential and improving their life chances.

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

6.3.1 Welsh Government have carried out a full consultation on the ALN Act and Code.

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

6.4.1 The implementation date of the ALN Act and Code is from September 2021, although for most pupils this will now be from January 2022.

### **6.5 Preventative focus**

6.5.1 Planning for the implementation of the ALN Act and Code will ensure that the statutory requirements for pupils with additional learning needs are met and that they have the best chance of fulfilling their potential.

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

6.6.1 A review of the Inclusion Service with include collaboration and partnership working with Headteachers, ALNCOs, Pen y Cwm, in their capacity of managing the ALN SLA, Tredegar Comprehensive, in its capacity of

supporting senior leaders to implement the requirements of the Act, the EAS and relevant partners across the region.

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

- 6.7.1 The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion will take the strategic lead on relevant panels including the Complex Case Panel and Sensory and Communication Service to ensure appropriate information sharing. There will be monthly Inclusion team meetings, to ensure appropriate information sharing. All members of the inclusion team will be consulted and their opinions sought at all stages of the review process. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion will work closely with the Service Manager-Education Transformation and Business Change and the Service Manager-Young People and Partnerships to ensure that the needs of all schools and learners are met.

## **6.8 Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

- 6.8.1 In all areas of review of provision for pupils with ALN, decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions will be a priority consideration. For example, grant funding has been applied for to create new provision in Pen y Cwm, or another site, with the aim of supporting with information gathering as part of the IDP process, consideration will be given to the creation of this room in terms of materials used.

- 6.9a **Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment** (complete an impact assessment to consider how the decision might help to reduce the inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage).

- 6.9b. **Equality Impact Assessment** (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)

Ensuring that the Council are able to meet their requirements under the Act will ensure that the needs of all learners are able to be met.

## **7. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 This work will be monitored e.g. through both the professional and political reporting management arrangements, including;

- Implementation of OD review processes;
- Consultation meetings with key stakeholders;
- Council/Directorate performance management arrangements; and,
- Reports to Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

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# Agenda Item 9

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: **Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Report Subject: **Education Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan Review**

Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Cllr Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education – Lynn Phillips  
Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change – Claire Gardner**

| Reporting Pathway           |                           |                          |                 |                               |                    |                     |         |                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| 23.8.21                     | 26.8.21                   | 01.09.21                 |                 |                               | 7.9.21             | 22.9.21             |         |                      |

1. **Purpose of the Report**  
The purpose of the report is to provide Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with an overview Education Accessibility Strategy Review process and associated timeline. The revised Strategy will be implemented from September 2022.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 **Background and Context**  
The Blaenau Education Accessibility Strategy aims to ensure that appropriate educational provision and support services are available to meet the diverse needs of children, young people, parents and carers.
  - 2.2 Welsh Government issued the following updated Guidance in March 2018 'Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils'. The purpose of the updated guidance being to support local authorities to meet their statutory duties under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, which provides that: *'A local authority must, in relation to a school for which it is a responsible authority, prepare, implement, review and update written accessibility strategies'*.
  - 2.3 The Blaenau Gwent Education Accessibility Strategy (please refer to **Appendix 1**), was last published in 2017, for the period 2017-20. Local authorities are required to prepare, implement review and update their Accessibility Strategy documents every three years.
  - 2.4 In 2017 upon publication of the updated Strategy, the Education Transformation team established an Accessibility Forum. The purpose of the Forum was to monitor implementation of and work towards a detailed Strategy review plan, whilst overseeing delivery of the action plan and ensuring effective education accessibility issue identification/management processes are in place.

2.5 Strong progress was made against the Strategy and associated action between 2017 and 2021, as follows:

- Blaenau Gwent Council was recognised by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2018, as being one of the only Councils in Wales to have a published Accessibility Strategy and action plan.
- The Forum was established to oversee implementation of key strategic priorities, along with delivery and monitoring of the action plan, whilst also ensuring due regard was given to related policy and legislative developments.
- A facilities review process has been established and completed with all Blaenau Gwent schools, in order to facilitate development, publication and action planning processes on a school-by-school basis. This is also being rolled out to wider education, alternative and informal learning settings/facilities. The facilities management aspect of the Education Transformation team work closely with Technical Services, who have and continue to embed accessibility into the facilities review, maintenance, condition and suitability processes.
- All Blaenau Gwent School have Accessibility Plans in place, which were last reviewed during the 2019/20 academic session.
- Pupil accessibility needs are identified pre-admission, monitored, managed and resourced as required. There have been three cases over the course of the 2020/21 academic year, whereby physical works have been undertaken and schools supported to meet the needs of the pupils in question.
- The Blaenau Gwent school maintenance strategy and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme have and continue to address accessibility issues to the greatest degree possible throughout the school estate. There are two school settings within Blaenau Gwent which are not fully accessible. However, depending on the needs of the child or young person additional adaptations, work and provision may be required within those setting that are considered to be accessible.
- Staff training programmes have been developed and delivered, with learning incorporated into future programmes to increase awareness, knowledge, experience, understanding and management of accessibility issues.
- A Complex and Medical Needs group has been established with representation from Health, Education, Community Services, Health and Safety and Social Services (along with other relevant partners as determined in line with each case), to address individual cases whereby complex needs prevent pupils from attending their chosen/preferred school. Thus far five cases have been resolved, one of which was subject to an independent equality impact assessment.
- An early identification process is in development, to ensure that the Council is able to manage accessibility issues technically, financially and educationally, prior to pupils reaching statutory school age.

**Current Context**

2.6 The Forum was active between 2017 and early 2020, when the frequency of meetings declined, due to resource-based pressures associated with the

COVID-19 pandemic. However, the action plan (please refer to **Appendix 2** for further information), has been continually monitored by Education throughout the course of the pandemic. In addition, accessibility issues have and continue to be identified, managed and monitored on a case by case basis.

- 2.7 The current Blaenau Gwent strategy was due for review and consultation in 2020, however, due to the pandemic both review and consultation processes were delayed. Since the initial review in 2019/20, there have been a number of strategic and other significant developments: Additional Learning Needs Reform, the new Curriculum for Wales, changes to the operation of education and childcare settings in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Welsh Government are also currently in the process of reviewing the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008, and the School Admissions Code (2013). In addition, there has been significant capital investment, and as a result, physical changes within education settings throughout Blaenau Gwent over the course of the last 4 years. These changes are a result of minor and planned work schemes, the Councils facilities review and maintenance processes/plans, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme, Section 106 developer contributions and other Welsh Government capital funded projects, including:
- The Childcare Grant
  - Welsh Medium Grant
  - Education Maintenance Grant
  - Rural Schools Grant
  - Class Size Capital Grant
- 2.8 Therefore, a fundamental review of the school estate and associated accessibility plans is required. In order to undertake this review, Education plan to develop a 3 to 5-year programme of detailed accessibility audits, starting with the oldest settings and those with the lowest condition and suitability ratings. In conjunction with this, Education will work with key partners and professionals including the Forum, to fundamentally review the Accessibility Strategy over the course of the 2021/22 academic session, for adoption in the summer 2022, and implementation from September 2022. For a detailed overview of the associated plans, actions and timeline, please refer to **Appendix 2**. In the interim, the action plan will be developed and monitored on a monthly basis, with continued identification and case management processes in place to address accessibility issues and needs as they arise.
- 2.9 Education also plan to work with the Forum to develop an accessibility needs identification protocol. The aim of the protocol is to ensure that children, young people and parents have the right support in place to make informed choices in relation to their education options, and that the school estate is able to cater for the accessibility needs of the pupil population. This in turn will assist more pupils with disabilities to attend the education setting or provision of their choice, and ensure equality of access to education linked to the child/ young person's social, emotional and educational development and wellbeing.

2.10 The Accessibility Strategy review will be subject to an informal consultation process, which will commence in the spring-term 2022. Via the consultation exercise, Education will seek to engage with a series of key consultees and stakeholders including but not limited to:

- Special schools
- Resource bases
- The Disability Forum
- The Schools Grand Council
- The Youth Forum
- The Youth Service
- Young people accessing alternative learning settings (EOTAS and off site activity)
- Pupils and Students
- Parents
- School Governors
- School Staff
- Council Services
- Aneurin Leisure Trust
- Blaenau Gwent Access for All Forum
- Partner Organisations i.e. Banardo's, SNAP Cymru, Disability Wales
- Transport Providers

2.11 **Alignment with the Administration of Medicines and Medical Needs**

Welsh Government produced new guidance during the 2018/19 academic session around "Supporting Learners with Healthcare Needs". This placed new expectations on all Councils, schools and pupil referral units to produce a 'Supporting Learners – Healthcare Policy'. The SEWC ALN Group took a regional approach to the writing and production of the Policy, along with a template to assist schools in developing their own individual policy. This approach was agreed by Welsh Government and work commenced with colleagues in the Health Sector in developing and producing the aforementioned documents. Subsequently, SEWC Directors approved the regional policy along with the template for schools. The policy and associated documents were shared with schools in 2019, followed by implementation of a training and engagement programme led by Inclusion.

2.12 The Education plan to develop a Healthcare Needs Sub-group of the Accessibility Forum, to work on the development of localised operational guidance in line with the aforementioned policy, including early identification and management processes. The guidance will cover both the administration of medicines and medical needs.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

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

3.2 **Option 2:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 Education is a strategic priority for the Council and key to achieving the outcomes within the Council's Corporate Plan. Accessibility is an essential component of and key priority for Education and key to ensuring equality of access to education for all pupils. The Council a statutory duties and responsibilities in line with:
  - Equality Act 2010
  - Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
  - Part IV of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by sections 1-8 of the Education (Wales) Measure 2009)
  - Education (Special Educational Needs) (Information) (Wales) Regulations 1999
  - Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales Regulations 2012
  - The Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015
  - Welsh Government Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils Guidance (2018)
- 4.2 The Accessibility Strategy seeks to respond to the Council's wellbeing goals for all learners.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There are no direct budget implications associated with this report. However, depending on the needs of the child or young person additional adaptations, work and provision may be required within those setting that are considered to be accessible and these will be funded through existing revenue and capital resources e.g. Education Capital Maintenance Grants.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The Council have a statutory duty to comply with Welsh Government legislation and policy as detailed above. The primary risk and mitigating action is ensuring compliance with statutory duties and legislative obligations aligned to education-based accessibility requirements. The risks are largely mitigated by the Accessibility Action Plan and associated monitoring, identification and management processes. The review process is key to securing compliance.
- 5.3 ***Legal***

The Council are legally required to prepare, implement and update accessibility strategies for all schools for which they are the responsible body.
- 5.4 ***Human Resources***

The strategy document and associated plan have been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee and monitor the progress of the actions highlighted in the action plan, along with review and publication of the Education Accessibility Strategy. The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, will have key roles in ensuring the effective implementation and resourcing of the strategy.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

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

Blaenau Gwent Council have an existing Education Accessibility Strategy and up to date action plan. All Blaenau Gwent Schools have Accessibility Plans in place, with annual monitoring activities undertaken by the Council; as a result, the Education Directorate currently has a detailed appreciation of both school and pupil accessibility needs/requirements.

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

The Education Accessibility Strategy and associated action plan seek to secure appropriate education provision and support services to meet the diverse needs of children, young people, parents and carers.

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

Stakeholders and end-user needs and engagement are of paramount importance to the Education Accessibility Strategy and associated action plan. An Education Accessibility Forum has been developed to secure inter-departmental working across the Council, aligned to effective delivery of both the strategy and plan. In addition, all relevant stakeholders will be consulted in line with the review process.

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

The Strategy is aligned to the Corporate Plan and covers the period 2017 to 2020, with a review programmed for this academic year, followed by publication of the new strategy in 2022 for a period of three years.

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

The strategy and action plan will support the Council to better understand, plan for, manage and monitor accessibility issues and needs for all learners throughout the school estate and other education settings.

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

Key management and operational staff across the Council and school estate are and will be involved in the Forum, annual reviews, production of and consultation upon the Education Accessibility Strategy. Education will consult with a cross-section of services, providers, users and partners in line with the preparation, review and production of the Blaenau Gwent Education Accessibility Strategy.

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

The review process, strategy and action plan are cross-cutting in the sense that they impact upon Education, schools, Health and Safety, Policy and Performance, Planning and Building Control, Community Services, Social Services etc.; therefore, service area involvement is key to effective implementation.

### 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

Any physical works planned and undertaken within education settings are planned in order to take account of decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

The existing strategy was created prior to the socio-economic duty commencing. However, it is a strategic decision, which will require the assessment during the review process.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

EqlA screening and impact assessments are carried out on a case by case basis, however, during the strategy review a full EqlA will be carried out and presented to consultees and stakeholders as part of the consultation process.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Education review and monitor the Accessibility Action Plan consistently throughout the year, incorporating learning from the previous year. The Strategy will undergo review over the course of the next academic session, and once produced, will be taken via the Council's political processes for approval prior to publication.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – BGCBC Education Accessibility Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Education Accessibility Action Plan

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# Education Accessibility Strategy (2017-2020)

*Date: Approved:* 2017

*Review Date:* 2020



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## **EDUCATION DIRECTORATE**

### **IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS**

#### **Introduction**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council values all persons equally and aims to ensure that appropriate educational provision and support services are available to meet the diverse needs of children, young people, parents and carers.

These principles were first formally set out in the “Schools and Learning Centres Accessibility Strategy 2004-2007”. This revised document reflects changes to organisational structures and National and local policy objectives.

The key aim of this strategy is to provide a framework for the Council and schools to work within compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation and guidance.

It is important that the Council and schools work in partnership to provide the right kind of support in all aspects of school life for children and young people. We also recognise schools as a community asset and workplace and the legitimate needs of staff and the public must be addressed as part of this strategy.

In recent years, there has been considerable expansion in the support services provided for parents and carers and we need to ensure equality of opportunity in accessing these services.

This guidance is designed to assist schools and governing bodies to develop their own school accessibility plan

Any comments on this document can be sent to the Corporate Director of Education, Education Directorate, Anvil Court, Abertillery, NP13 1DB or e-mail [education.department@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:education.department@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

**Lynette Jones**  
**Corporate Director of Education**

## **THE DRAFT ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2017-20**

Equality legislation places responsibilities on Councils and responsible bodies of schools to improve access to their schools.

Requirements for Councils to put in place an accessibility strategy are specified in schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

This schedule provides for accessibility arrangements for pupils.

An accessibility strategy aims to do the following;

- a) increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums;
- b) improve the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools; and,
- c) improve the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.

The delivery must be: -

- a) within a reasonable time;
- b) in ways which are determined after taking account of the pupils' disabilities and any preferences expressed by them or their parents.

In keeping with the legislation, this Accessibility Strategy sets out the ways in which Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will continue its strategic approach to planning for increased access to its schools, for which it is responsible.

### **LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

#### **The Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination, victimisation and harassment on the basis of the following characteristics:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender Reassignment;
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (protection against direct discrimination only);
- Pregnancy and Maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or (non-belief);
- Sex; and
- Sexual Orientation.

The Act was developed to strengthen, harmonise and streamline 40 years and 116 pieces of equalities legislation, improving its effectiveness and providing the same level of protection from discrimination for all protected characteristics. The Act replaces all the existing equality law, including:

- The Equal Pay Act 1970;
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975;

- The Race Relations Act 1976;
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Under the new legislation the protection against discrimination, victimisation and harassment already in place continues, with the new Act ensuring that certain protected characteristics now have equal protection to those already in place.

The Equality Act has introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (sometimes also referred to as the 'general duty') that applies to public bodies, including maintained and which extends to all protected characteristics – race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment. This combined equality duty came into effect in April 2011. The duty has three main elements. In carrying out their functions, public bodies are required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations across all characteristics – between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs are expected to be educated in a mainstream school unless this is against their parents' wishes or is incompatible with the efficient education of other children. It is reasonable to expect that planning to increase access for disabled pupils will support the inclusion of children and young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

From 1996, schools and Councils had already held statutory responsibilities under the DDA and, since September 2002, it had been unlawful for schools and Councils to discriminate against disabled pupils in their arrangements for admissions and exclusions and for the provision for education and associated services.

Under these duties, schools and Councils had to:

- ensure that disabled pupils were not treated less favourably than other pupils; and,
- take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage (The 'Reasonable Adjustment' Duty).

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, place a duty on Councils to prepare an accessibility strategy and a duty of responsible bodies of schools to prepare an accessibility plan. It also places a duty on Councils/Governing Bodies to plan to increase the accessibility of their schools.

The Act stipulates that the purpose of an accessibility strategy is to:

1. increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school's curriculum;
2. improve the physical environment of the school to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can make best use of the opportunities available at the school; and
3. improve delivery of accessible information.

Similarly, individual schools' accessibility plans should be designed to further these three objectives and should take account of the disabilities of the pupils attending the school and the preferences expressed by them and their parents. Both strategies and plans have to be

regularly reviewed and, if necessary, revised and the Council or school must consider the need to allocate adequate resources for their implementation.

Alongside these accessibility requirements, any new building work must comply with Building Regulations, including Part M, which covers access to and use of buildings and the ACOP BS8300:200. It contains specific requirements on providing accessible entrances and suitable sanitary facilities. BS8300 covers every physical disability issues in buildings and part of the part M approved document.

### Definitions

Children and young people falling within the definition of 'disability' will have a wide range of needs and requirements, including restricted mobility, visual or hearing impairment, learning difficulties, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, mental health conditions, and health problems such as epilepsy or asthma, and progressive degenerative conditions such as cystic fibrosis. Children and young people with a disability should not automatically be considered to have a special educational need.

The Equality Act defines a disabled pupil as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

The Education Act 1996 states that children have a special educational need if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.

Children and young people have a learning difficulty if they:

- have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children or young people of the same age;
- have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children and young people of the same age in schools within the area of the Council; and,
- are under compulsory school age and fall within the above definitions, or would do so if special education provision was not made for them.

Children and young people who are subject to a Statement of Special Educational Need may be eligible for additional support in school but this does not automatically mean they are disabled pupils.

### **The Inclusion Context**

Welsh Government has published statutory guidance for schools and Councils on Inclusive Education. The guidance contains practical advice on the statutory framework for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), which includes pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and pupils with disabilities. This inclusion framework provides checklists for schools, Councils and other providers to help them evaluate the nature and quality of their current provision.

The guidance suggests the following principles for an inclusive education service:

- inclusion is a process by which schools, Councils and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include pupils;
- all children and young people should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential;

- with the right training, strategies and support nearly all children and young people with additional learning needs can be successfully included in mainstream education;
- an inclusive education service offers excellence and choice and seeks and responds to the views of parents, carers and children and young people;
- the interests of all children and young people must be safeguarded;
- schools, the Council and others should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation;
- all pupils should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential;
- mainstream education will not always be right for every child or young person all of the time but if mainstream education is not right at a particular stage this should not prevent the child or young person from being included successfully at a later stage; and,
- those pupils not in mainstream education should have links to their peers in mainstream schools.

## **The Accessibility Strategy 2017-20**

This strategy describes how over the next 3 years the Council intends to continue to:

1. improve access to the physical environment of schools;
2. improve access to curriculum; and
3. improve access to written information provided by schools.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Corporate Improvement Plan acts as the Council's Business Plan and is directly linked to the priorities identified in the 20 year Community Strategy and the 4 year Single Integrated Plan.

### **Improving Access to the Physical Environment of Schools.**

Councils and schools have a responsibility to ensure accessibility to the physical environment of schools will be improved to ensure that accessibility is not a barrier to learning and other opportunities for pupils.

The planning duty under this heading includes improvements to the physical environment of a school and the provision of physical aids to education.

Improvements to physical access include a wide variety of adaptations from the very simple to major refurbishments and alterations.

Physical aids to education would include specialist furniture or equipment, information and Communication Technology equipment or mobility aids. Improved access to the physical environment can also be achieved by re-arranging room space, removing obstructions from walkways, changing the layout of classrooms or re-allocating rooms to particular subject specialism and improving the acoustic and visual environment.

One of the key aims of the Council has been and will be, the replacement of older primary school buildings which are considered unsuitable to meet future needs, including those related to disabled access. These proposals are included in the Council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Plan.

The Council will:

- Work with schools to promote positive whole school approaches and to support individual pupils in order to avoid exclusion. In particular they should offer advice and send clear messages on policy on the following:
  - Identification of additional behavioural needs.
  - The use of PSP's for all pupils in danger of disengagement and exclusion.
  - The unacceptability of 'voluntary withdrawals' where pressure is put on parents to remove their children from school to avoid exclusion.
- ensure that any new school buildings will take account of the needs of children and young people with disabilities and, where appropriate, staff and other members of the school community and other site users;
- review on an on-going basis, through the Schools Asset Management Plan, physical access and suitability audits of all schools,
- continue to prioritise schemes.



- on a phased basis, continue to progressively increase the number of accessible mainstream schools both at primary and secondary level so that children and young people can access education in their local schools;
- continue to provide specialist aids/equipment to meet the needs of individuals via its specialist Gwent Hearing Impaired / Visual Impairment Service, and in liaison with the Local Health Board;
- provide further advice to governors, headteachers and associated groups regarding duties and regulations within the Act; and,
- maintain up to date information about the number of children and young people with disabilities of different types through the Council's existing information gathering systems.

Schools will be expected to:

- ensure that any new building work planned, via consultation with officers from Inclusion and Technical Services Section, takes account of the needs of pupils with disabilities;
- on a planned, strategic basis, continue to progressively embed good practice within the school developing the inclusive ethos;
- continue to provide specialist aids/equipment and to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of the individuals;
- access training and advice for governors, teaching staff and non-teaching staff;
- continue to maintain up to date information about the number of pupils with disabilities in the school,
- anticipate the types of issues / barriers that could arise; and,
- review school organisation and accommodation usage to maximise accessibility and opportunities.

### **Improving Access to the Curriculum**

The aim is to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged, through disability alone, in terms of access or entitlement to an appropriate curriculum, within the National Curriculum Framework.

Guidance from Welsh Government indicates that the term 'curriculum' covers not only teaching and learning but also the wider curriculum of the school such as participation in after school clubs, leisure, sporting and cultural activities. Where there is a potential barrier to access to a school visit the Head Teacher needs to undertake an assessment to identify reasonable adjustment to enable access. The guidance goes on to suggest that curriculum access should be seen at a 'whole school' level, the rationale being that many barriers of access to the curriculum will be similar for many groups of pupils and therefore a strategic approach should be adopted to removing those barriers.

As an important element of its strategy in increasing the accessibility of the curriculum to disabled pupils, the Council would wish to secure appropriate training for governors, teaching and non-teaching staff and encourage the sharing of good practice and also to ensure that all schools are aware of support services which can provide advice to teachers on teaching techniques and strategies, classroom management, and curriculum materials. Specialist support services can also provide support for curriculum differentiation, direct teaching or practical advice for school staff. The Authority must remove obstacles to accessibility to the curriculum.

The Council will continue to:

- provide a mechanism, as appropriate, for Pen y Cwm Special School to perform an outreach service function to mainstream schools to support the individual planning of curriculum provision for pupils with disabilities;
- include detailed information in the Council's 'Policy' document for pupils with special educational needs, of appropriate external specialist agencies and support contacts, who can offer advice on supporting pupils with disabilities;
- continue to provide specialist educational services which can offer advice and support to schools on meeting the needs of pupils with disabilities and additional learning needs;
- take account of decisions made by the SEN Tribunal Wales (SENTW) on issues of access to the curriculum and discrimination;
- ensure access to appropriate curriculum advice on disability access issues through collaborative arrangements across Councils within the region;
- encourage schools to work together to share good practice, particularly via a cluster based approach.

The School will:

- have in place a School Accessibility Plan that will demonstrate its commitment to promote Disability Equality and to ensure that this commitment is reflected in school organisation and development planning;
- provide an annual report to the School Governing Body on progress made and evidence of good practice;
- ensure that parents and other visitors to the school with disabilities, can engage effectively in activities, such as participating in parent meetings, careers talks, etc;
- seek professional advice and in-service training on issues relating to the delivery of an accessible curriculum;
- include details of good practice in the school's ALN policy;
- include curriculum planning and accessibility within the school development plan and report annually (Governors Report to Parents) on the developments in this plan on disability access issues;
- link with specialist advisory services that can offer advice and support to the school;

- take account of decisions made by the SENTW on issues of access to the curriculum and discrimination;
- consider providing reasonable alternative methods to ensure access;
- promote an inclusive ethos to learning needs;
- review differentiation with a focus on teaching and learning styles;
- ensure, within the guidance offered, that pupils with disabilities can participate in the full range of activities provided for all pupils;
- continue to provide access when required to information in Braille and large print formats for children and young people via the Gwent Visually Impaired Service;
- continue to provide children and young people with access when required to British Sign Language (BSL) support for school information and communication via the Gwent Hearing Impaired Service;
- review behaviour policy so that all involved are aware of content;
- link with appropriate Council services regarding fixed term and permanent exclusion procedures;
- link with other schools to share good practice.

### **Improving the Delivery of Information for Pupils with Disabilities**

The aim is to increase awareness within schools of the importance of accessible information for pupils with disabilities through the provision of appropriate advice, guidance and resource facilities.

The planning duty requires written information normally provided by a school to be made available to disabled pupils. The information should take account of their disabilities; the pupil's preferred formats to be made available within a reasonable time frame. The guidance to be offered to schools with regard to access to information will be commensurate with the Council's corporate strategy for delivering quality customer services and information. Although the planning duty refers primarily to written information, schools will be advised to give some thought to the provision of spoken information for pupils and parents who have visual and hearing impairments.

The Council will:

- liaise with statutory and voluntary agencies and national organisations which may be able to assist in the provision of information in alternative formats;
- ensure the Family Information Service and other service areas make appropriate provision of information for children, young people, parents and carers with additional needs;
- continue to provide access to information in Braille and large print formats for children and young people via the Educational Service for the Visually Impaired;

- make all staff aware of the requirements of Special Educational; Needs Disability Act (SENDA and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA);
- review all existing and new policies and documentation made publicly available to ensure they meet the requirements of Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), Equalities Act and Education Acts;
- consult with, and seek the advice of children and young people, parents and parent support groups, including SNAP Cymru;
- ensure that good practice is shared across schools and Council departments with regard to accessible information;
- continue to provide children and young people with access to BSL (British Sign Language) support for school information and communication via the Gwent Hearing Impaired Service; and,
- provide schools and Council departments with information and advice through the Council's Intranet site.

Schools will be expected to:

- ensure all pupils are treated equally;
- consider changing certain school practices, policies and procedures so as not to discriminate against and to include pupils with disabilities;
- review the range of centrally provided services and other resources;
- liaise with statutory and voluntary agencies and national organisations, which may be able to assist in the provision of information in alternative formats;
- make all staff aware of the requirements of SENDA & DDA;
- review all existing and new policies and documentation made publicly available to ensure they meet the requirements of SENDA & DDA;
- seek opportunities to consult with, and seek the advice of parent and associated support groups;
- review Annual Report to parents/carers and the school prospectus;
- ensure that good practice is shared across the school; and
- provide an Annual Report to the Governing Body regarding the Schools Accessibility Plan and review.

## **Monitoring Arrangements**

The Act provides for ESTYN inspections of the Council to cover the discharge of the Council's responsibilities to prepare, revise, review and implement their Accessibility Strategy. The School Accessibility Plan will also be subject to ESTYN inspections.

The Council will need to monitor progress of the Accessibility Plan through:

- analysis of take-up of in-service training on ALN and disability issues
- the Asset Management Plan process;
- evaluation of the Accessibility Strategy by the Senior Leadership Group in accordance with the Action Plan set out in appendix 2;
- review claims, appeals and appeal decisions by parents or carers to SENTW (Special educational needs and or to the admissions and exclusions appeals panels on disability discrimination grounds);
- reports to key groups (such as the Executive, Scrutiny Committee, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership);
- review of related plans and policies;
- annual report from headteachers and school governors on accessibility plans; and
- EAS challenge advisors to evaluate and monitor progress during regular school visits;

Schools will need to monitor progress of the Accessibility Plan through:

- annual review of the School Accessibility Plan;
- review of related plans and policies by the School Governing Body
- review of claims by parents or carers to SENTW or to the admissions and exclusions appeal panels;
- through established school self-evaluation and monitoring procedures; and
- review of claims and appeals by parents and carers to SENTW or to the admissions and exclusions appeal panels on disability discrimination grounds.

## **Appendices**

|            |   |  |
|------------|---|--|
| Appendix 1 | - | Audit of Current Council Activity          |
| Appendix 2 | - | Accessibility Strategy Action Plan 2017-20 |
| Appendix 3 | - | Glossary of Terms                          |
| Appendix 4 | - | Related Documents                          |
| Appendix 5 | - | Consultation Process                       |

## APPENDIX 1

### AUDIT OF CURRENT LA ACTIVITY IN SUPPORT OF ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

| Policies & Plans Information  | Primary | Secondary | Comments   |
|---|---------|-----------|--|
| Local Service Board   | ✓       | ✓         | All policies & plans refer to the removal of barriers to learning, providing opportunities for inclusion, raising achievement & equal opportunities in reference to ALN & Disability.<br><br>Need for continued consultation, monitoring and evaluation of provision and quality assurance standards being reviewed to ensure needs are being fully met. |
| Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership   | ✓       | ✓         |  |
| Inclusion Strategy  | ✓       | ✓         |  |
| Council Central Support Services Plans (Gwent Hearing / Visually Impaired Service, Educational Psychology Service)  | ✓       | ✓         | Need to ensure that future service plans link to Council's Accessibility Strategy Plans across respective Council areas  |
| The Council supports its schools in making written information available to disabled pupils via its specialist services and to parents or governors via the Communication Unit and GEMS | ✓       | ✓         | The Council in most circumstances, can provide a wide range of information on request.   |
| Information on a range of ALN issues is provided to schools on a regular basis  | ✓       | ✓         | The Council needs to update the information annually, to ensure accurate information is provided to service users  |
| Professional Development  | Primary | Secondary | Comments   |
| Education Directorate provide training for ALNCO, other teaching personnel, school governors, and the voluntary sector  | ✓       | ✓         | The training framework will be monitored and developed on an on-going basis.   |
| Council supports teaching personnel on specialised training courses when required   | ✓       | ✓         | Monitoring and evaluation of training will continue as part of an established process.   |
| Training is conducted with SNAP and the Parent Network  | ✓       | ✓         | Links need to be developed further within the existing framework   |
| Joint training with Trust and Local Health Board/SSD on low incidence disorders/disabilities (e.g ADHD)   | ✓       | ✓         | There needs to be a continued programme of inter-agency training   |
| Inter-agency working and training initiatives with CAMHS, EPS and PPP   | ✓       | ✓         | Continued training and awareness raising across the Council  |

| School Support  | Primary | Secondary | Comments   |
|---|---------|-----------|--|
| Council supports schools via co-ordinated support services  | ✓       | ✓         | Services liaise with the host Authority where issues exist over access and placements  |
| Council has established working practices with YOS, Youth Access, and Youth Access Plus   | ✓       | ✓         | Vocational programme and alternative awards are now established in all secondary schools, such as Bridge courses   |
| Resource bases are located in certain primary and secondary schools across the Council. Some children and young people attend their local schools with support from the HI Services. Provision for Visual Impairment and ADHD pupils are not based around units but via mainstream or special school placements | ✓       | ✓         | Provision for certain groups of disabled pupils are based on best practice, pragmatic factors, economies of scale and actual use of provision. Provision needs to be kept under review within an inclusion agenda for all disabilities including the 'new wave' disabilities e.g autism, ADHD, central auditory processing problems. Review Currently being carried out. |
| Schools are expected to take account of the needs of disabled children and SEN pupils, other members of the school community and other site users in their building works   | ✓       | ✓         | Schools need to be aware of accessibility issues to include all types of disability; this needs to be considered in their own building and maintenance programmes<br><br>Advice is available from the Authority's Access Officer   |
| Joint working initiative with SALT, GELP  | ✓       | ✓         | Continued development of training of teachers and LSA in mainstream schools to provide effective teaching strategies.  |
| ALN Inclusive Initiatives   | ✓       | ✓         | Continued training to schools to raise the profile of SEN inclusion  |

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **EDUCATION DIRECTORATE ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY**

#### **ACTION PLAN 2017 – 2020**

| <b>Action Area</b>   | <b>Timescale</b>                       | <b>Responsible Persons</b>   | <b>Progress</b>  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>1. <u>Action Plan Monitoring</u></b>  |  |  |  |
| a. Monitoring of Action Plan progress and review of Action Plan by DMT and Service Teams.  | Annual                                 | DMT / Service Heads  | Next review April 2017   |
| <b>2. <u>Training Requirements</u></b>   |  |  |  |
| a. Rolling Programme of Disability Awareness Training for Departmental staff.  | 2015 and ongoing                       | Inclusion Officer in liaison with Equalities Officer                             | Programme developed and rolled-out Updates from summer term 2017 |
| b. Provision of Disability Awareness Training for School Governors (particularly Special Needs Governors)  | 2015-2018 academic session and ongoing | Head of Inclusion Service, in liaison with Equalities Officer and Access Officer | Programmed in the EAS Governor Training Programme for 2017-18    |
| c. Extension of in-service training provision for school staff across key stages   | 2015-2018 academic session and ongoing | Head of Inclusion Services/EAS   | EAS in-service training programme in place.                      |
| <b>3. <u>Communication</u></b>   |  |  |  |
| a. All Departmental policy and information documents should state “available in Braille format, large print and in other formats on request”, and should fully comply with Disability legislation. | 2015 and ongoing                       | DMT / All Service Heads, in liaison with Equalities Officer and Access Officer   | Complete.  |



| Action Area                                |   | Timescale        | Responsible Persons    | Progress  |
|--|---|------------------|------------------------|---|
| <b>3. <u>Communication (continued)</u></b> |   |                  |                        |   |
| b.   | Prominent notices to be displayed in all public areas stating “we will be happy to provide any information available in Braille format, large print or other formats on request. We can also provide information through alternative formats for people with hearing impairment”. | 2015 and ongoing | DMT/ All Service Heads | Completed and all new notices will comply   |
| c.   | Information to be provided on the Authority’s web-site on accessibility issues related to these service areas. .  | 2015 and ongoing | DMT                    | Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan on Council’s web-site.   |
| d.   | Improved information for schools on the range of support services which can be provided through the Local Authority and other providers. Task Group to be established by DMT.   | 2015 and ongoing | DMT                    | Education has reviewed the ALN model and appointed a Lead Officer for Inclusion. The ALN core group has established effective information sharing with schools  |
| e.   | Ensure that good practice is shared between Council Departments and with schools with regard to accessible information.   | 2015 and ongoing | DMT / Heads of Service | Access for All Forum established. Accessibility is managed under the corporate landlord model and Education liaise directly with Technical Services. Corporate Asset Management Working Group (CAMWG) will review the strategy in 2017-18 |

|  |  |                  |   |   |
|--|--|------------------|---|---|
| <b><u>School and Early Years Provision</u></b> |  |                  |   |   |
| <b>4.</b>                                      |  |                  |   |   |
| a.   | Review of current position in relation to requirement for schools to have Access Plans in place and to review these annually, relating this to School Development Planning. Further support and guidance to be provided, where required. | 2015 and ongoing | 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools Officer  | Secondary schools have access plans and are fully compliant. Primary?   |
| b.   | Introduction of Access Plans to Children’s Centre and related venues, and review of access provision with private providers  | 2015 and ongoing | Integrated Services Manager for Children and Families/Transformation Manager              | Education Transformation team have linked with Social Services. The Integrated Children’s Centre is fully access compliant.     |
| c.   | Access issues to be integrated into new play and learning opportunities, including the external environment (as far as is reasonably practicable).   | 2015 and ongoing | Integrated Services Manager for Children and Families/Transformation Manager              | New play provision is fully compliant with DDA requirements.  |
| <b>5. <u>Buildings and Facilities</u></b>      |  |                  |   |   |
| a.   | Disability Access requirements identified in Schools Asset Management Plan based on independent assessment.  | 2015 and ongoing | Technical Services/Mike Price, Property Services Manager/Education Transformation Manager | Ongoing. Health and Safety inspections also request adjustments where required Annual facilities Review in place.               |
| b.   | Establish specific budget for a rolling programme of accessibility adaptations, having regard to highest levels of need and broader school development issues.   | 2015 and ongoing | Education Transformation Manager/Property Services Manager                                | Council has a capital sum for DDA compliancyand accesswhich is accessed by Education when required eg. Deighton Primary School. |

|    |   |                  |   |   |
|----|---|------------------|---|---|
| c. | Continue programme of replacement of premises which cannot provide adequate access owing to building and site constraints | 2015 and ongoing | Head of Education Transformation and ET Manager                       | Since 2011, approaching £100m invested into the school estate and all new builds are DDA compliant. This work is on-going and will continue with 21 <sup>st</sup> Century schools Band B funding from 2019 onwards. BG now has no schools in the 'poor' WG suitability/condition category |
| 6. | <b><u>Specialist Services</u></b>   |                  |   |   |
| a. | Continue to provide specialist services through collaborative arrangements with EAS.                                      | 2015 and ongoing | Director of Education / Head of Inclusion/Transformation Manager/EAS. | EAS involvement with the Facilities' Review planning process.   |

|    |  |                  |   |  |
|----|--|------------------|---|--|
| b. | Work with other partners across the region to develop access and provision in other areas of 'need'. (For example project work planned on ASD.)  | 2015 and ongoing | Director of Education / Head of Inclusion/Transformation Manager/EAS. | Delivery model to improve provision for pupils with SEBD and ASD has been agreed and by September 2017 the Council will establish a community maintained English medium 3-16 learning community for children and young people presenting SEBD. |
| 7. | <b><u>Collaborative/Partnership Working</u></b>  |                  |   |  |
| a. | Extend access and inclusion opportunities through Education Directorate. Collaboration (Children's Social Services, Education, Children's Entitlement, Leisure, Sport and Culture) (Specific actions to be identified) | 2015 and ongoing | DMT / Service Heads   | Early Years 'pilot' Participation Officer?   |
| 8. | <b><u>Pupil/Student Transport</u></b>  |                  |   |  |

|           |   |                      |   |   |
|-----------|---|----------------------|---|---|
| a.        | Accessibility issues to be considered in future school mainstream transport procurement, in collaboration with transport contractors. | January – March 2016 | Transport Officer   | Access issues are managed effectively, in line with the Home to School Transport Policy, including transport to Pen-y-Cwm Special School.   |
| b.        | Extend collaborative arrangements with Social Services and Leisure Trust to build on existing good practice.                          | 2015 and ongoing     | Transport Officer / Head of Inclusion / Social Services / Head of Leisure Trust | Leisure Trust created in 2015/16 and management agreement between the Trust and the Council ensures that accessibility issues are addressed in line with corporate landlord model.. |
| <b>9.</b> | <b><u>“Access for All” Conference – Specific Issues</u></b>   |                      |   |   |
| a.        | Ongoing monitoring of progress in relation to issues identified via the Council’s Access for all Forum                                |                      | DMT / CMT / Head of Service   | Since, 2015-16 the work of the Access for All Forum is now mainstreamed into Council as business as usual.  |

## APPENDIX 3

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

#### Departments/Services

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>ALN</b>        | <b>Additional Learning Needs</b>                       |
| <b>ALNCO</b>      | <b>Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator</b>          |
| <b>CAMHS</b>      | <b>Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service</b>   |
| <b>CCET</b>       | <b>Community Consortium for Education and Training</b> |
| <b>CMT</b>        | <b>Corporate Management Team</b>                       |
| <b>CYPP</b>       | <b>Children's and Young Peoples Plan</b>               |
| <b>DDA</b>        | <b>Disability Discrimination Act</b>                   |
| <b>EP</b>         | <b>Education Psychology</b>                            |
| <b>EWO</b>        | <b>Education Welfare Officer</b>                       |
| <b>GELP</b>       | <b>Gwent Early Language Project</b>                    |
| <b>GHIS</b>       | <b>Gwent Hearing Impaired Service</b>                  |
| <b>GVIS</b>       | <b>Gwent Visual Impaired Service</b>                   |
| <b>ICT</b>        | <b>Information and Communication Technology</b>        |
| <b>LA</b>         | <b>Local Authority</b>                                 |
| <b>LAC</b>        | <b>Looked After Children</b>                           |
| <b>LSA</b>        | <b>Learning Support Assistant</b>                      |
| <b>SALT</b>       | <b>Speech and Language Therapy</b>                     |
| <b>SENTW</b>      | <b>Special Educational Needs Tribunal Wales</b>        |
| <b>SLT</b>        | <b>Senior Leadership Team</b>                          |
| <b>SNAP Cymru</b> | <b>Special Needs Advisory Project</b>                  |
| <b>SSD</b>        | <b>Social Service Department</b>                       |
| <b>YA</b>         | <b>Youth Access</b>                                    |
| <b>YAP</b>        | <b>Youth Access Plus</b>                               |
| <b>YOS</b>        | <b>Youth Offending Service</b>                         |

#### Types of Disabilities

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>ADHD</b> | <b>Attention Deficit and Hypertension Disorder</b> |
| <b>ASD</b>  | <b>Autistic Spectrum Disorder</b>                  |
| <b>BESD</b> | <b>Behavioural, Emotional and Social Disorder</b>  |
| <b>HI</b>   | <b>Hearing Impairment</b>                          |

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>MLD</b>  | <b>Moderate Learning Difficulties</b>                  |
| <b>MSI</b>  | <b>Multi Sensory Impairment</b>                        |
| <b>PD</b>   | <b>Physical Disability</b>                             |
| <b>PMED</b> | <b>Physical and/or Medical Difficulties</b>            |
| <b>PMLD</b> | <b>Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties</b>     |
| <b>SLCD</b> | <b>Speech Language and Communications Difficulties</b> |
| <b>SLD</b>  | <b>Severe Learning Difficulties</b>                    |
| <b>SPLD</b> | <b>Specific Learning Difficulties</b>                  |
| <b>VI</b>   | <b>Visual Impairment</b>                               |

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

SEN Code of Practice for Wales 2002 - National Assembly for Wales

Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils – National Assembly for Wales

Disability Rights Commission: DDA part 4 – Code of Practice for Schools

What the Disability Discrimination Act Means for Schools and LEAs – Welsh Office Circular 20/97

Pupil Support and Social Inclusion – National Assembly for Wales Circular 34/97

Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs – National Assembly for Wales Circular 34/97

Education Act 1996

Guidance on the Education of Looked After Children – National Assembly for Wales Circular 02/01

Shaping the Future for Special Educational Needs: An Action Programme for Wales 1999 – National Assembly for Wales

Building Excellent Schools Together : The BEST for Special Educational Needs 1997 – Welsh Office

Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education: Index for Inclusion 2000 – National Assembly for Wales

Inclusion and Pupil Support (November 2006) Welsh Assembly Government

Inclusion: Support for Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Strategic Overview 2008-2012 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

The Learning Country: A Paving Document: A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales – National Assembly for Wales

Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils – National Assembly for Wales Circular 15/2004

The Schools Asset Management Plan





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## BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

| Action Area  | Actions  | Timescale             | Action Owner(s) | Update  | BRAG Rating/ Status |
|--|--|-----------------------|-----------------|---|---------------------|
| <b>School Accessibility Audits, School Policy and LA Strategy Review</b> | I. Plan accessibility audit priorities in line with school age, condition and suitability (over a 3-5-year period)                                       | I. September 2021     | CG/BE           | Work has been completed with Legacy in the Community, to develop an audit brief for education facilities and associated policies, along with the strategy. This will be used in order to plan and resource the required work from September 2021. |                     |
|  | II. Develop a brief in order to programme and inform a full review of education facilities and accessibility policies, along with the Council's strategy | II. September 2021    |                 | Work has commenced on the fundamental review of the Accessibility Strategy, which is programmed for completion during spring-term 2022.   |                     |
|  | III. Secure sufficient resources in line with the brief to audit all education facilities and associated policies and strategy                           | III. Autumn-term 2021 |                 |   |                     |
|  | IV. Establish an audit action plan   | IV. Spring-term 2022  |                 |   |                     |
|  | V. Undertake a fundamental   | V. Autumn through to  |                 |   |                     |

## BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

|   |  |   |                    |   |  |
|---|--|---|--------------------|---|--|
|   | review of the Accessibility Strategy with relevant partners  | the Spring-term 2022  |                    |   |  |
| <b>Consultation Processes</b>                   | VI. Stakeholder management, engagement and consultation plan to be developed.<br>VII. Draft strategy consultation document<br>VIII. Initiate Consultation (4-6 weeks)<br>IX. Approval and publication<br>X. Implementation | VI. Early spring-term 2022<br>VII. Early spring-term 2022<br>VIII. Spring through to the summer-term 2022<br>IX. Summer 2022<br>X. September 2022 | BE/CG<br><br>BE/CG |   |  |
| <b>Accessibility Action Plan Review Process</b> | I. Review and monitoring   | I. Monthly  | BE                 | Updated August 2021   |  |
| <b>Forum and Sub-groups</b>                     | I. Forum meetings to be scheduled and a standard agenda agreed for the 2021/22 academic session.   | I. September 2021 onwards   | BE                 | Forum meetings have been programmed for the 2021/22 academic session, along with a meeting action plan. |  |

## BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

|                 |   |   |  |  |  |
|-----------------|---|---|--|--|--|
|                 | <p>Forum to meet bi-monthly and membership to be reviewed at each meeting.</p> <p>II. Strategy Review Sub-group to be established (Comprised of: Education, Health and Safety, Policy, Property Services). Monthly meetings to be established from October 2021</p> | <p>II. September 2021 onwards</p>   | BE   |  |  |
| <b>Training</b> | <p>I. Training review to be undertaken</p> <p>II. 2021/22 Programme to be developed in consultation with the Forum</p> <p>III. Governor Information pack</p> <p>IV. Disability Awareness Training for Heads</p>   | <p>I. Autumn-term 2021</p> <p>II. Autumn-term 2021</p> <p>III. Annually – (Spring-term 2022)</p> <p>IV. Annually (Spring-term 2022)</p> | Coordinated by BE/CG in partnership with the Forum |  |  |

## BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

|                                      |   |                                 |       |   |  |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|-------|---|--|
|                                      | V. ALNCo Training   | V. Annually (Spring-term 2022)  |       |   |  |
|                                      | VI. Member awareness and briefing session                     | VI. Annually (Autumn-term 2022) |       |   |  |
| <b>Communication</b>                 | I. Establish a Communication Plan                             | I. Autumn-term 2021             | LB/BE |   |  |
| <b>Young People and Young Adults</b> | I. Review of facilities and services for young people (11-25) | I. Annually                     | BE/CG |   |  |
| <b>Early Years and Children</b>      | I. Review of facilities and services children (0-11)          | I. Annually                     | CS/BE |   |  |
| <b>Buildings and Facilities</b>      | I. Review of all Education Buildings/Facilities               | I. Monthly                      | EJ    | Facilities Review / School Action Plans are all up to date as at the end of the summer-term 2021. |  |
| <b>Transport</b>                     | I. Review of the transport policy and associated processes    | I. Annually                     | CG/PB | Policy review complete August 2021. In addition, a significant number of contracts have           |  |

## BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

|                               |  |             |          |   |  |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------|----------|---|--|
|                               | II. Implementation of the policy and associated procedures | II. Ongoing | PB/CG    | been reviewed and re-tendered e.g. Pen y Cwm. |  |
| <b>Wider Council Strategy</b> | I. Ensure alignment with the Strategic Equality Plan       | I. Ongoing  | CG/BE/ES | Ongoing                                       |  |

Key:

| Status         | Colour |
|----------------|--------|
| Not started    |        |
| In development |        |
| Ongoing        |        |
| Complete       |        |

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# Agenda Item 10

*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: **Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Report Subject: **Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy Review 2022 - 2023**

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

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education – Lynn Phillips  
Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change – Claire Gardner**

| Reporting Pathway           |                           |                          |                 |                               |                    |                     |         |                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| 23.8.21                     | 26.8.21                   | 21.09.21                 |                 |                               | 14.9.21            | 22.9.21             |         |                      |

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 Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy for the 2022/23 academic session. The Council is required to adopt and publish the policy document by October 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 Councils have a duty to publish their home to school and post 16 transport policies in accordance with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”). The Council’s policy must be made available by the 1st October proceeding the academic year to which the policy relates. Under the Regulations and the Welsh Government’s Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 (the “Guidance”) the information must be made available:
    - a. on the Council’s website;
    - b. to parents on request;
    - c. public libraries; and,
    - d. distributed to parents of pupils who are in the final year of school and may transfer to another school or educational establishment.
  - 2.2
  - 2.3 The current policy was published on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, for implementation from September 2021 for the 2021/22 academic session. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is more generous in respect of home to school transport entitlement than the Welsh Government statutory limits. The Council also offer a non-statutory travel grant for post 16 learners of £150.
  - 2.4 In December 2020, Welsh Government communicated with Councils throughout Wales, asking for them to participate in a review of the Learner

Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. The purpose of the review is to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose. Welsh Government indicated that correspondence from members of the public and engagement with stakeholders (including the Children's Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner), highlighted a number of issues with how the Measure currently enables home to school travel across Wales. These include:

- 2.5
  - Concerns regarding child welfare relating to the 2 and 3 mile eligibility thresholds.
  - A lack of direct transport for Post 16 learners.
  - The socio-economic impact of learners having to pay for their transport which was linked to the distance policy contained within the current Measure.
  - The consideration of travel to Faith schools.
  - Ensuring home to school transport provision meets the requirements of learners with Additional Learning Needs.
  - Issues with travel to Welsh-medium schools for all ages within the Measure.
- 2.6 Council responses will be used to build an evidence base that will inform decisions on any recommendations to change the measure. The initial review process concluded in the early spring 2021. No decisions or changes - regulatory or otherwise, have been made by Welsh Government to date. However, should any changes to the Measure will be recommended or taken forward as a result of the review process, these will be subject to further scrutiny and detailed impact analysis before binding changes to the legislation can be made. Please refer to **Appendix 1** for a BGCBC response.
- 2.7 The Welsh Government review is yet to conclude, therefore, the revised policy has been prepared in line with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. Any changes – dependent on the associated timeframes, will be dealt with either via an addendum to the proposed policy, or as part of the annual policy review process.
- 2.8 The policy has been reviewed by the Education Transformation, Inclusion and Transport teams, along with Children's Services (please refer to **Appendix 2** for the revised draft document). The changes and additions are detailed in red within the appended policy document. A summary of the changes/additions is as follows:
- 2.9
  - The date has been amended to reflect the academic year to which the policy applies (the academic year proceeding the year within which the policy is published).
  - Section 4.0 'Additional Learning Needs' - has been updated in line with the latest ALN reform developments and learning from the current policy year.
  - Section 8.3 'Permanently Excluded and Managed Move Pupils', along with section 8.9. 'Pupil Attendance' – both have been updated, as per

learning from this policy year, and in order to improve the processing of transport requests.

- Section 9.1 'Transport Entitlement' – has been updated in line with the updates to section 4.0.
- Section 10.2 'Extreme Weather' – has been updated to include 'COVID-19 Emergency Response', and is reflective of the need to follow separate guidance in line with alert level specific changes.
- Section 10.4 'ALN Transport issues and Exclusions' – has been updated in line with the latest ALN reform developments, along with learning from the current policy year.
- Section 10.5 'Safeguarding' – has been strengthened in line with practice and learning from the current policy year.

•

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

3.1 **Option 1:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy 2022/23 (**Appendix 2**), and recommends it to Executive Committee for approval.

3.2 **Option 2:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy 2022/23 (**Appendix 2**) and provides any comments or amendments prior recommending it to Executive Committee for approval.

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

4.1 Education is a strategic priority for the Council and key to achieving the outcomes within the Council's Corporate Plan. Home to School Post 16 Transport Policy is an essential component of Education, and seeks to ensuring equality of access to education settings throughout the borough. In addition, implementation of the policy will contribute to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

4.2 The revised policy is fully compliant with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 ("the Measure"), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the "Regulations").

4.3 The Welsh Government's Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 (the "Guidance") requires that the Council's policy must be made available by the 1st October, the year proceeding the academic year to which the policy applies.

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

5.0.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to determine and publish the Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy by 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, for the 2022/23 academic session. Any changes made to the policy should take account of the following:

- 5.0.2
  - Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”)
  - Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”)
  - Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 (the “Guidance”)
  - Welsh Government School Admissions and Admissions Appeal Code’s (2013)
  - Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (2017-20)
  - School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act (2013)

5.0.3 Therefore, if the policy does not progress within the programmed timeframe, the Council will not be compliant with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”). In addition, the Council would fail to take account of the most recent developments relating to key areas of dependency on a local, regional and national basis; i.e. developments aligned to the draft Welsh Government Additional Learning Needs Act, Code and associated regulations, along with the Blaenau Gwent admission policy developments. The results of which may negatively impact upon both service users in terms of service and satisfaction, and services in terms of operational issues and budgetary constraints.

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

5.1.1 The Home to School Transport budget is approximately £2.1m, and the Post 16 budget is approximately £133,290 per annum. Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy was last reviewed in September 2020 and adopted in October 2020 for implementation in 2020/21 academic session.

5.1.2 The provisional out-turn for home to school transport in 2020/21 is £1.97m (inclusive of staff salaries) and £62,313 for home to college transport. The underspend primarily relates to transport contractors receiving only 75% of the contractual costs during periods of COVID-19 response and school closures. The policy seeks to ensure that there is an appropriate framework to aid delivery; therefore, reducing the risk of overspend relating to issue management etc.

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

5.2.1 If the policy is not taken forward within the specified timeframe, there is a risk that the Council will not be compliant with their statutory duty in respect of home to school transport. Therefore, the policy has been reviewed and is being taken via the Council’s political processes within the required timeframe, to ensure that the publication date of 1.10.21 can be met.

#### 5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 The Council have a statutory duty to comply with Welsh Government legislation in line with the administration and review of statutory home to school transport policy arrangements.

- 5.3.2 Following approval, the policy will be translated into Welsh to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards from the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

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

- 5.4.1 The policy document and associated procedures have been developed by the Education and Environment Directorates, in partnership with the Social Services. The Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change and Transport Officer monitor implementation of the policy, and undertake annual reviews in order to inform future policy development.
- 5.4.2 Transport service operations are undertaken by a dedicated team who sit within Community Services - Highways and Development. The team work closely with Education who hold budgetary responsibility for the service and manage policy development and review processes, along with Social Services who review and determine transport arrangements for their clients and families – particularly Children Looked After (CLA) in consultation with the aforementioned Directorates.
- 5.4.3 The Education Directorate Management Team along with Wider Corporate Leadership Team, have a key role to play in ensuring that the policy is effectively implemented and reviewed in accordance with relevant strategy, policy and regulatory frameworks.

#### 6. ***Supporting Evidence***

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

- 6.1.1 The Council currently provide free Home to School Transport for approximately 1,330 mainstream pupils each day, via more than 30 established routes. Transport is also provided for approximately 160 pupils via season tickets for public service vehicles. The Council also provides transport for approximately 250 Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils on a daily basis. In addition, Council also provides approximately 800 students (Post 16) with assisted transport in the form of a travel grant.

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

- 6.2.1 The policy has been reviewed in order to ensure that there is service user clarity in relation to roles, responsibilities, expectations and awareness. The review process also takes account of key local, regional and national policy and legislative developments. It is therefore anticipated that the existing high levels of client and customer satisfaction will continue, along with improved operational delivery.

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

- 6.3.1 The policy underwent extensive consultation throughout the summer period 2018, the outcome of which has aided the annual review process in subsequent years, with the distance limits set to remain for the period of the current political administration

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

- 6.4.1 The policy will cover home to school and post 16 transport provision for the 2022/23 academic session. The document takes account of key policy and legislative requirements, and annual reviews will continue to be programmed for the foreseeable future taking on learning from previous years.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

- 6.5.1 The policy will support the Council to carry out effective home to school and post 16 transport arrangements; whilst mitigating the risk of service and service user conflict, along with complaints and appeals relating to policy gaps and issues.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

- 6.6.1 Key management and operational staff across the Council are involved in a detailed review of the document on an annual basis i.e. Education, Social Services and Procurement, along with Community Services - Highways and Development. The review process seeks to ensure compliance with Welsh Government legislation, and ensure that key local, regional, and national policy developments are accounted for, whilst also taking on board learning from the previous academic session.

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

- 6.7.1 The policy is cross-cutting in the sense that it impacts upon Education, Community Services - Highways and Development, Procurement and Children's Services; therefore, service area involvement is key to effective policy implementation.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

- 6.8.1 Home to school and post 16 transport will be considered in line with the readiness assessment process, in order to inform development and delivery of the BGCBC Decarbonisation Plan 2020 – 2030.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

- 6.9.1 Please refer to **Appendix 3** for the completed impact assessment. The policy aims to secure equality of access based upon distance, and need in respect of pupils and students with ALN. Therefore, the impact overall is neutral.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

- 6.9.2 A full EqIA was undertaken and presented in line with the statutory consultation in 2018. Subsequently, annual screening assessments are carried out, which determine that there is no adverse impact upon any of the protected characteristics, and a positive impact upon disability, with specialist and bespoke transport arrangements in place for learners whose needs warrant it. In addition, EqIA screening is undertaken on a case by case basis as required. The policy seeks to ensure equality of access to education for Blaenau Gwent learners.

**7. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy is reviewed on an annual basis in line with lessons learned, key policy, strategy and legislative reviews/developments.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- **Appendix 1 – Learner Travel Measure Review – BG Response**
- **Appendix 2 – Revised Policy 2022/23**
- **Appendix 3 – Socio-economic Duty Impact Assessment**

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The Welsh Government is reviewing the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose. Correspondence from members of the public and engagement with stakeholders (including the Children's' Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner) have highlighted a number of issues with how the Measure currently enables home to school travel across Wales. These are:

- Concerns regarding child welfare relating to the 2 and 3 mile eligibility thresholds.
- The lack of direct Transport for Post 16 learners;
- The socio-economic impact of learners having to pay for their transport which was linked to the distance policy contained within the current Measure
- The consideration of travel to Faith schools
- Ensuring home to school transport provision meets the requirements of learners with Additional Learning Needs.
- Issues with travel to Welsh medium schools for all ages within the Measure.

In addition to reviewing these issues, due to the success of our [support for parents returning to work](#), learners about to enter statutory education will also fall within the scope of the review.

We are writing to you to gather your views and any data you hold in relation to the options for changes under consideration in the review of the Learner Travel (Wales) 2008 Measure. Your responses will be instrumental in informing the outcome of this review. Possible changes to the Measure may include:

- A. Mandating provision of free school transport for learners aged between 16 and 19
- B. Reducing the mileage thresholds for some or all learners
- C. Redefining nearest school to include nearest Welsh-medium school
- D. Redefining nearest school to include nearest faith school.
- E. Changes to National Guidance to introduce consistency of delivery across Local Authorities
- F. Requiring provision of school transport for pre-school-age learners

## Questions for Local Authorities

### Questions relating to costs and practical feasibility of potential changes A, B and F

1. Assuming that all age groups are eligible for free travel, what would be the **predicted** numbers of learners which would be eligible for free school transport under the following potential changes to the mileage threshold? Assume no other changes to the measure.

- Nursery (eligible from 4 years)

| Year        | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | 47     | 114      | 497    |
| 2021 - 2022 | 47     | 114      | 497    |
| 2022 – 2023 | 47     | 114      | 497    |

- Primary School

| Year        | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | 349    | 815      | 3178   |
| 2021 - 2022 | 335    | 822      | 3214   |
| 2022 – 2023 | 291    | 698      | 2766   |

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | 1467   | 337    | 359      | 868    |
| 2021 - 2022 | 1341   | 352    | 407      | 1166   |
| 2022 – 2023 | 1172   | 321    | 465      | 1430   |

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | NA     | NA     | NA       | NA     |
| 2021 - 2022 | NA     | NA     | NA       | NA     |
| 2022 – 2023 | NA     | NA     | NA       | NA     |

- Further Education settings (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | 800    | 800    | 870      | 940    |
| 2021 - 2022 | 800    | 800    | 870      | 940    |
| 2022 – 2023 | 800    | 800    | 870      | 940    |

**\*NB: This is difficult to ascertain as Coleg Gwent who provide Post 16 education within Blaenau Gwent do not have the software capabilities to undertake the required level of analysis. Learners choose their preferred campus based on courses as opposed to distance.**

2. What would be the likely **additional** costs, excluding costs associated with free travel which is already provided, associated with mandating free travel for learners in the 16-19 age group in your LA area in the following categories:

Answer:

If the pass is being issued to a Blaenau Gwent (BG) learner the split is:  
Per term - £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner – contribution passed to Stagecoach is £90, shortfall to £196.86 made up via the £1 per journey income

If the BG learner qualifies for additional financial support via the college Financial Contingency Fund, the split is:  
Per term: £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner; £106.86 FCF fund – learner travels free on the bus. Anticipated additional costs = **£460k**

- Secondary school (16-19 only)
  - Further education settings
3. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc.) of delivering free travel for learners in the 16-19 age group?

Answer:

Given the scale and scope (geographical spread) of the required transport service, along with the differential in course start and finish times, the number of operators which could deliver this service is likely to be restricted. Therefore, it is highly likely that the provision would be accommodated by public transport providers. In addition, the number of students with special and specific needs/requirements vary significantly year on year, and may require bespoke arrangements i.e. wheelchair accessible transport, which is in short supply.

4. What would be the likely **additional** costs associated with mandating free travel to nurseries for learners aged 4 and above.

Answer:

At present we provide free home to school transport for nursery age pupils to access Welsh-medium education. Presently, there is no demand for nursery transport within the English-medium and faith schools at present. However, the broad cost estimate based upon the (497) figure detailed above would be: £500,000. It is important to note that these figures are likely to fluctuate in line with in-year transfer requests and delayed/late nursery applications.

5. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of delivering free travel to nurseries for learners aged 4 and above.

Answer:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport and age groups accessing provision alongside nursery-aged pupils. The availability of vehicles would be further restricted due to the requirement for lap belts to accommodate those pupils aged 4 years. It is highly unlikely that the authority would be able to procure the required number of vehicles to facilitate this provision.

6. What would be the likely **additional** costs, excluding costs associated with free travel for learners within the 2 and 3 mile thresholds which is already provided, of reducing the mileage thresholds for the below age groups in line with the below scenarios:

- Nursery (eligible from 4 years of age)

| Year        | 1.5 mile | 1 mile   |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| 2020 – 2021 | £400,000 | £700,000 |
| 2021 - 2022 | £400,000 | £700,000 |
| 2022 – 2023 | £400,000 | £700,000 |

- Primary School

| Year        | 1.5 mile   | 1 mile     |
|-------------|------------|------------|
| 2020 – 2021 | £1,400,000 | £1,400,000 |
| 2021 - 2022 | £1,400,000 | £1,400,000 |
| 2022 – 2023 | £1,400,000 | £1,400,000 |

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

| Year        | 2 mile   | 1.5 mile   | 1 mile     |
|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| 2020 – 2021 | £900,000 | £1,500,000 | £2,000,000 |
| 2021 - 2022 | £900,000 | £1,500,000 | £2,000,000 |
| 2022 – 2023 | £900,000 | £1,500,000 | £2,000,000 |

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |
| 2021 - 2022 | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |
| 2022 – 2023 | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |

- Further Education settings (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 2 mile   | 1.5 mile | 1 mile   |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 2020 – 2021 | £500,000 | £560,000 | £610,000 |
| 2021 - 2022 | £500,000 | £560,000 | £610,000 |
| 2022 – 2023 | £500,000 | £560,000 | £610,000 |

**\*NB: Learners choose their preferred campus based on courses as opposed to distance.**

7. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and

Answer:

Nursery/Primary:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport and age groups accessing provision alongside nursery-aged pupils. The availability of vehicles would be further restricted due to the requirement for lap belts to accommodate those pupils aged 4 years. It is highly unlikely that the authority would be able to procure the required number of vehicles to facilitate this provision.

Secondary:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport in line with the learners needs.

Post 16:

Given the scale and scope (geographical spread) of the required transport service, along with the differential in course start and finish times, the number of operators which could deliver this service is likely to be restricted. Therefore, it is highly likely that the provision would be accommodated by public transport providers. In addition, the number of students with special and specific needs/requirements vary significantly year on year, and may require bespoke arrangements i.e. wheelchair accessible transport, which is in short supply.

\*Increased competition between neighboring authorities is likely to further reduce the pool of operators on which the LA's are able to draw. It could also impact upon the cost of the provision in line with the competitive tendering process.

vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of reducing the mileage thresholds in line with each of scenarios above (e.g. reducing to 2, 1.5 or 1 mile for 11-19 and reducing to 1.5 or 1 mile for nursery and primary)?

Questions relating to travel for learners in the 16-19 age group

8. What are your Authority's current arrangements for providing transport for learners in 16-19 age group? For example, is free travel provided or is there a cost levied per term or academic year per learner?

Answer:

If the pass is being issued to a forward Blaenau Gwent (BG) learner the split is:

Per term - £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner – contribution passed to Stagecoach is £90, shortfall to £196.86 made up via the £1 per journey income

If the BG learner qualifies for additional financial support via the college Financial Contingency Fund, the split is:

Per-term: £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner; £106.86 FCF fund – learner travels free on the bus.

9. If learners are expected to contribute towards the cost, what is the annual cost for each learner?

Answer:

Annual cost per learner is £30 + £1 each way if they are NOT eligible for FCF support (Financial Contingency Fund). If they are eligible they pay only the £30.

10. What is the attendance rate (as a percentage of eligible learners) at further education for learners in the 16-19 age bracket in your LA area?

Answer:

We are presently awaiting this information from Coleg Gwent and Torfaen CBC for WM 16-19 provision.

11. Do you hold information on the impact of your 16-19 learner travel policy on education attendance for 16-19 year olds in your LA area?

Answer:

We are presently awaiting this information.

### Questions relating to mileage thresholds

12. Do you provide any free travel for learners which live within the current 2 and 3 mile thresholds?

a. If so, on what basis (e.g. unsafe walking route, advanced learning needs, medical need, historic non statutory arrangements etc.) do you provide this travel and how is this assessed? **Please provide detail on assessment methodologies for each basis.**

b. Please provide a breakdown of numbers of learners for whom travel within the mileage thresholds is provided against the reason for providing travel as per tables below:

- Primary school

| Basis for free travel within 2 mile threshold | Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold |
|---|---|
| ALN   | 63  |
| Unsafe walking route                          | 70  |

- Secondary school (11-16)

| Basis for free travel within 3 mile threshold | Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold |
|---|---|
| ALN   | 44  |

- Secondary school (16-19)

| Basis for free travel within 3 mile threshold | Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold |
|---|---|
| N/A   | N/A   |

- Further education (16-19)

| Basis for free travel within 3 mile threshold | Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold |
|---|---|
| ALN   | 18  |

- c. What is the current cost of providing free travel for learners within the current 2 and 3 mile thresholds?

Answer: £150,000 for primary and £120,000 for secondary

- d. In your view, are there any instances where you believe that travel should be provided but where the authority is unable to provide this? If so, why is this?

Answer: No

- e. Do you have an appeals process following results of assessment to determine whether or not free travel is provided within the current mileage thresholds? (E.g. appeals process following risk assessment for an unsafe route). **Where an appeals process exists, please provide a description of this process**

Answer:

Yes, the process is detailed within the LA policy which can be found via the following link: [https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Schools\\_and\\_Learning/Admissions\\_20\\_21/HTSPSTP\\_FV\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Schools_and_Learning/Admissions_20_21/HTSPSTP_FV_Eng.pdf)

- f. Can you provide any data on the number of successful and unsuccessful appeals?

Answer:

1 appeal was submitted in the last academic session – the appeal was upheld in favor of the appellant.

- g. What are your criteria for 'home' designation?

Answer:

The child or young person's permanent address/place of residence associated with the parent/parents with responsibility. This must not be of a family member of another adult who looks after the child.



13. Do you hold data on the number of non-statutory learners using dedicated statutory service or local bus services on a concessionary basis? If possible, please provide a summary of this as an average % across all services in your authority's network.

Answer:  
N/A

14. Are there any privately operated contracts or commercial services operated in your area solely for the purpose of carrying non-statutory learners? If so, how many? And can you provide an estimate of the numbers of learners carried.

Answer:  
This information is not requested nor is it held by the LA.

#### Questions relating to travel to Faith schools

15. What are your Authority's current arrangements for providing transport to faith schools? For example is any free travel provided?

Answer:  
Transport is provided to all Faith Schools free of charge in line with the LA's current policy.

16. Assuming that the definition of 'nearest school' is amended to include the nearest relevant faith school, and assuming that all age groups are eligible, based on the below potential changes to the mileage thresholds what would be the **additional likely costs** of providing free travel to faith schools for learners living in your LA area. Please use current attendance at faith schools and student travel distances to develop these figures (i.e. we do not expect you to predict behavioural change as a result of changes to the measure).

- Primary School (eligible from 4 years of age)

| Year        | 2 mile   | 1.5 mile | 1 mile   |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 2020 – 2021 | £110,000 | £140,000 | £160,000 |

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

| Year        | 3 mile   | 2 mile   | 1.5 mile | 1 mile   |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 2020 – 2021 | £120,000 | £120,000 | £120,000 | £120,000 |

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | N/A    | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |

17. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of providing free travel to faith schools in line with each of the mileage thresholds given above?

Answer:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport in line with the learners needs.

18. Do you hold any data on the number of learners that were unable to attend a faith school due to issues with transport? Please provide examples.

Answer:

N/A

19. In your view, what changes to the measure might better facilitate access to faith schools?

Answer:

N/A – we currently facilitate access to faith education based upon preference in line with the specified mileage criteria.

20. In your view, how will the potential changes outlined at the very start of the questionnaire (points A-F) impact access to faith school education (positive or negative)?

Answer:

No impact, as our policy currently provides the required access as specified above.

Questions relating to travel to Welsh medium schools

21. What are you Authority's current arrangements for providing transport to Welsh-medium schools? For example is any free travel provided?

Answer:

Transport is provided to all Welsh-medium free of charge in line with the LA's current policy.

22. How do you define Welsh-medium school in your LA area?

Answer:

A school which educates solely via the medium of Welsh.

23. Assuming that definition of 'nearest school' is amended to include the nearest relevant Welsh medium school, based on the following scenarios and mileage thresholds, what would be the **additional costs** of providing free travel to Welsh medium schools for learners living in your LA area. Please use current attendance at Welsh medium schools and student travel distances to develop

these figures (i.e. we do not expect you to predict behavioural change as a result of changes to the measure).

- Primary School (eligible from 4 years of age)

| Year        | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile   |
|-------------|--------|----------|----------|
| 2020 – 2021 | N/A    | N/A      | £290,000 |

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | N/A    | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | N/A    | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |

- Further Education settings (eligible from 16 – 19)

| Year        | 3 mile | 2 mile | 1.5 mile | 1 mile |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| 2020 – 2021 | N/A    | N/A    | N/A      | N/A    |

24. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of providing free travel to Welsh medium schools in line with each of the mileage thresholds given above?

Answer:

Currently, we only have one Welsh-medium Primary School which services the whole of Blaenau Gwent, with secondary pupils accessing places and transport to Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw – situated within Torfaen.

25. Do you hold any data on the number of learners that were unable to attend a Welsh-medium school due to issues with transport? Please provide examples.

Answer:

N/A

26. How is transport provision being considered within your Authorities' Welsh in Education Strategic Plan?

Answer:

We view transport aligned to improved access on an annual basis, hence the decision to offer free nursery transport. In addition, all statutory proposals consider associated transport costs and requirements.

27. In your view, what changes to the measure might better facilitate access to welsh medium education?

Answer:

Free nursery transport – which we already implement locally.

28. In your view, how will the other potential changes outlined at the very start of this questionnaire (points A-F) impact access to welsh medium education (positive or negative)?

Answer:

Consistency in approach is vital to ensure that choice is based upon preference in line with equality of access, as opposed to be focused on transport and access only.

#### Questions relating to accessibility

29. What proportion of vehicles used for dedicated home to school transport comply with PSVAR 2000 regulations?

Answer:

The LA procures this provision in line with the pupil's needs. Therefore, all transport required to facilitate children and young people with specific needs are compliant.

Other additional questions

30. What would be the likely practical feasibility of implementing multiple changes outlined above (For example, reducing mileage thresholds **and** providing free travel to post 16 learners **and** providing free travel to welsh medium and faith schools).

Answer:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport in line with the learners needs. Consistency in approach is required to ensure equality of access for all learners in line with their preference.

31. Do you utilise and integrate local bus services in your area when providing school transport? What do you perceive to be the opportunities, benefits, barriers or risks associated with this practice?

Answer:

The LA utilises local bus services as and when required in line with both suitability and availability. There are, however, issues associated with timing of the journey's and vehicle capacity.

32. How many FTE staff work on learner travel within your LA. What would be the implications of applying potential changes to the measure, outlined in the opening paragraphs of this questionnaire, on LA resource required to deliver learner travel?

Answer:

There is 1 one FTE and 1 part-time Officer who oversee planning and delivery aspects of home to school and post 16 transport provision. Along with 2 managers overseeing the delivery of this function in line with the policy and associated budget. There would be a requirement for additional staffing to assist the already stretched implementation team. The Council would need to appraise the situation should the changes be agreed, however, as a minimum requirement another FTE Officer would be required.

33. In your view, are there any issues that exist with the current Learner Travel Wales) Measure 2008 which require review?

Answer:

- Exploration and development of a dedicated appeals policy to ensure clarity and consistency in approach, whilst managing the expectations of parents.
- A review of the behavior code
- A more consistent approach and framework to support home to school and post 16 transport policy development throughout Wales
- 

34. Is there anything else that is relevant you would like to add or comment in relation to the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure or the review that is not already captured within your response to the questions asked?

Answer:

Many students reliant on public transport note that there are extremely limited direct transport links to college. As a result, students often have a longer commute with multiple changes. This can affect arrival times and departure should lessons etc. run over. The College runs courses into the evening and students often rely on service buses for their journeys. A more coordinated approach in relation to public transport bus and college timetables would be beneficial to students needing to use public transport to get to college.

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Information received will be collated and made available on the Welsh Government website as part of supporting information to inform any recommendations made to Ministers.

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# **Home to School & Post 16 Transport Policy 2022/23**

Reviewed: **August 2021**  
Adopted:

**Should you have any queries relating to this policy please contact:**

**Education Transformation Team  
Anvil Court  
Abertillery  
NP13 1DB**

**Email: [21stcenturyschools@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:21stcenturyschools@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)**

**Telephone Number: 01495 357704 / 01495 35470**

**Should you have any queries relating to the provision of your child's transport or require support in making an application please contact:**

**Transport Team  
Civic Centre  
Ebbw Vale  
NP23 6XB**

**Email: [hometoschooltransport@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:hometoschooltransport@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)**

**Telephone Number: 01495 311556**

**Blaenau Gwent has introduced an on-line application system for parents to apply for Home to School or Post 16 transport for their child(ren). Please visit the link below via the webpage:**

**<http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/resident/schools-learning/school-transport/>**

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## 1.0 Introduction

This policy document has been produced by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in compliance with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure, 2008.

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that relevant information around home-to-school and post 16 transport arrangements is available to parents/ carers, pupils and partners. The Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Council has developed a code of practice, to support safe travel arrangements. The code of practice forms part of the application process and ensures that both learners and operators are aware of the expectations upon them, whilst accessing/ providing transport.

## 2.0 Background

The Council has a duty to provide transport in accordance with Learner Travel (Wales) Measure, 2008.

The distance by which entitlement to transport is calculated is defined as the walking distance of the shortest available route, that is deemed to be safe. Route designation is carried out in accordance with the risk assessment procedure as detailed in the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance (2014).

Under section 32 of the Education Act 2002 (which was amended by section 21 of the Measure), Councils have the power to change school session times, **if the change is considered necessary or expedient to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel, or to make travel arrangements more effective or efficient.**

## 3.0 Who Qualifies: The Main Criteria

Blaenau Gwent Council will provide free transport for children attending their nearest suitable school, where the distance from home to school is over the specified walking distance detailed below:

- more than 1.5 miles from home for children aged under 8 years but of statutory school age; and,
- more than 2 miles from home for children aged 8 years and over.

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

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

more away from the school for pupils under the age of 8 years, or 2 miles for pupils aged 8 and over.

The provision of free school transport will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day and shall be provided during the school term time. Home to School transport is not provided for breakfast clubs, after school clubs or summer schools.

Transport will be provided from pick-up points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner's home, where possible.

\*All awarded transport will be reviewed periodically in line with changes to circumstances relating to the pupil(s) transport requirements.

## **4.0 Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**

The Council believes and promotes independence for all learners. This encourages independent living as well as health and well-being.

**The Council will provide transport assistance for pupils with ALN in line with the following eligibility criteria:**

- if the pupil qualifies on distance grounds;
- if transport is identified by the ALN team as being a requirement irrespective of distance, due to the nature of the pupil's medical need, additional learning need and/or disability; or,
- if it is determined by ALN team that there is no suitable education provision within the Borough which meets the needs of the pupil. In such circumstances, the Council would seek to source a suitable out of county placement.

\*The above arrangements will be subject to review in line with any changes to the pupil's circumstances which may affect their transport entitlement or requirement.

If parents choose a school other than the school named by the Council's ALN team, it is the parent/carers responsibility to secure transport arrangements for their child and cover the associated costs.

### **4.1 Requests for Transport: ALN Provision**

Pupils requiring ALN transport who live more than 1.5 miles (for those under 8 years of age) or more than 2 miles (for those aged between 8-16 years of age) from their nearest agreed ALN provision, will automatically qualify for free home to school transport.

\*Please note - in instances where the school is a parental choice and not the provision determined by the ALN Panel, **no transport will be provided**.

The Council has established a process in order to assess the travel needs of children who may require ALN transport, as follows:

- All requests to ALN Panel for consideration of change of placement will firstly be considered by the Transport team to determine their eligibility for transport on distance grounds.
- The Council's ALN Panel will then consider the request for change of placement, and if agreed, determine the appropriate placement and identify if transport is required to access the agreed placement.
- If it is identified that transport is required, a Pupil Transport Application Form will be completed and assessed by the ALN team in collaboration with the school and/or relevant partners, in line with the eligibility criteria set out in section 4.0 above. The form will be returned to the Transport Officer within 5 working days of a decision being made. The Transport Officer will then make the necessary arrangements and complete a journey risk assessment.
- Individual pupil risk assessment forms will only be completed if requested by a parent/carer, or if the pupil has needs that warrant completion of this form, e.g. profound and multiple learning difficulties. The ALN team will coordinate completion of the form. The form will identify the pupil's transportation needs, along with the type of transport required.
- The Transport Team require 15 school days upon receipt of the Pupil Transport Request Form, in order to arrange transport. Where the transportation needs of the pupil requires the Council to tender and/or source specialist training, the timeline will be in excess of 15 days and determined on a case by case basis.

Where transport has been agreed, the Transport Officer will contact the parent and inform them of the arrangements. In cases where transport requests are refused, parents/carers will receive notification from the ALN team, also indicating their right of appeal.

#### **4.2 Residential School Placements not in the County Borough**

Pupils with complex additional learning needs may require residential school placements. Residential placements are determined by the Social Services Complex Case Panel, with associated requirements considered on a case by case basis. When considering placement, the cost of transport will be taken into account.

Transport can be provided for residential placements as follows:

- Weekly or fortnightly boarding – transport for the pupil to return home weekly or fortnightly during term time.
- 38-week termly boarding – transport at the beginning and end of each half term and one additional return journey per half term.
- 51/52 week residential placements – one return journey per term.

## **5.0 Transportation of Children Looked After (CLA)**

Children's Services will determine if it is considered appropriate for a child looked after (CLA) to attend a school other than the nearest suitable school to their residence, due to:

- the need to maintain continuity in education; and,
- or maintain contact with siblings and friends.

Transport for children who are looked after will be funded and coordinated by Children's Services with the exception of those cases, whereby placement is agreed by Education with a clear rationale, based on the educational needs of the pupil.

Requests for transport for CLA with ALN will be co-ordinated by the CLA Education Coordinator; however, where placement requests are agreed by the ALN Panel based on meeting the pupils needs, these requests will be funded by Education and administered by the Transport Officer in accordance with the Belongings Regulations. The transport application will be made by the CLA Education Coordinator along with a completed pro-forma, which will be submitted to the Transport Officer and copied to the ALN team, detailing the associated requirements.

In cases where children looked after reside and are educated outside of Blaenau Gwent; transport arrangements will be the responsibility of the Local Authority within which the pupil resides.

Transport is not routinely provided in circumstances where a child or children looked after are in respite accommodation. If it is possible for existing school transport to accommodate the pupil(s) to and from the respite provision without delay or deviation from the route, this can be considered, subject to regular review. Requests must be made to the Transport Officer in advance (where appropriate) and not drivers/escorts/operators directly.

## **6.0 How to Apply for Home to School Transport**

Application forms for transport assistance can be obtained via the following one of two methods:

- You can apply online by accessing the Blaenau Gwent Website: [www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) and selecting "My Services" register, Schools and Learning and completing the Home to School or Post 16 transport application form.
- If you do not have internet access, then you can still apply by contacting the Councils Contact Centre on 01495 311556 who will complete an application form on your behalf over the telephone.

The Council aims to process all applications received within 10 school days, unless specialist provision is required which may exceed the 10 days' dependent on the pupil's need.

## 7.0 Discretionary Welsh- medium Nursery Transport

In line with the Council's desire to promote access to Welsh-medium education, provided that there is capacity within the current transport arrangements, the Council will offer free transport for nursery pupils who reside over 1.5 miles from their home address to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.

This discretionary nursery provision may be withdrawn on the basis that it reduces availability of transport places for statutory aged learners.

## 8.0 Transport Considerations

### 8.1 Change of Address - Transport Arrangements

Pupils studying for their GCSE exams in years 10 or 11 who change address after the autumn half-term in year 10 will be entitled to free school transport - **usually a bus pass, the Council does not have a duty to provide a separate taxi**; providing that the new address is **over 2 miles walking distance** from their current school. Transport can also be provided on an existing contract. The entitlement to free transport is provided in this instance, if the pupil attended their catchment area school prior to the move. It is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that the pupil is able to access the designated pickup and drop off points if using existing transport, and the pupil is able to access designated bus stops for season ticket holders.

### 8.2 Schools with Multiple Campuses/Sites

For multi-site/campus schools, if the campus nearest to the pupil's home is unable to offer a place and an alternative campus or site is offered which is over the distance criteria, then free home to school transport will be provided.

### 8.3 Permanently Excluded & Managed Move Pupils

If a secondary age pupil has been permanently excluded from school, the Council will provide a bus pass to support change of placement as agreed / necessary. If a primary age child has been permanently excluded from school, the Council will provide appropriate transport as agreed/ necessary. Transport and/or bus passes will only be provided for pupils that enrol at an alternative mainstream setting within Blaenau Gwent.

Where a secondary aged pupil has moved schools as agreed via the managed move process, bus passes will be provided to enable the pupil to attend the newly agreed setting. However, where a primary age pupil has moved schools as agreed via the managed move process, the Council will provide appropriate transport as agreed/ necessary.

\*The above will not be applicable in instances whereby parents have elected for their child to change schools.



## **8.4 Before & After School Activities**

If a pupil attends breakfast club or after school activity/club, then it becomes the responsibility of the parent/carer to transport their children to and from activities outside of the normal the school day.

## **8.5 School Trips**

On occasions when school trips fall outside the normal school day, pupils in receipt of free home to school transport will need to be collected from the school as per the arrangements in 8.4 above.

## **8.6 Escorts**

All drivers of home to school transport provision and accompanying escorts are required to have enhanced Disclosure Barring Scheme (DBS) checks. The Council may provide more than one escort on transport should the need arise to do so. All arrangements will be reviewed on a regular basis.

The transport provider may change throughout the time a pupil receives Council transport – meaning that drivers and escorts may change; however, where possible, continuity of drivers and escorts will be provided by contracted providers of transport.

## **8.7 Travel Assistance Reimbursement**

Fuel expenses can be claimed in circumstances where appropriate transport cannot be provided, and the need of the pupil is such that the parent/carer may be required to transport their child. This will be assessed via the ALN team in partnership with the Transport Officer and agreed in writing in advance of finalising arrangements.

## **8.8 Pupils on Exchange Visits**

The Council does not provide transport assistance to pupils on exchange visits.

## **8.9 Pupil Attendance**

In circumstances where a pupil is in receipt of free home to school transport and is not attending school regularly, the Council can withdraw the travel offer. This will be determined on a case by case basis. Parents/carers of those found to be in breach of the travel offer due to attendance issues; will resume responsibility for ensuring the travel arrangements of pupils to and from school. This process will be overseen by the Education Welfare Service.

At the end of each term, the transport team will provide the Education Welfare Service with a list of pupils that fall into the above category and attendance will be reviewed against the pupil's records. Where pupils are identified the following process will be followed:

- Contact made with parents to discuss transport issues
- Warning issued to parents of the intention to withdraw transport if no improvement
- Attendance reviewed at the end of the following half term.

- If there has been improvement transport continues but if not transport offer withdrawn

## **8.10 Preferred Schools/Parental Choice**

Parents/carers who choose a school other than the nearest suitable catchment school are responsible for getting their child to and from the school throughout the time that their child attends the school. This is also applicable for pupils with additional learning needs; please refer to section 4.3 for more information.

## **8.11 Pupils Under 16 years Attending Vocational Training Provision**

Blaenau Gwent Council does not provide transport for pupils of compulsory school age attending training provision.

## **8.12 Dual Residency**

Where parents have shared responsibility for a child and the child is permanently resident at more than one address, the Council will provide transport from both addresses, as long as they are both in the catchment area for the school concerned and are located over the required qualifying walking distance.

## **8.13 Rural Areas/Transport Links**

Where appropriate, the Council will use its discretion in determining whether or not a taxi link will need to be provided to an existing bus service for those pupils living in rural locations.

## **8.14 Temporary Medical Conditions**

The Council understands that in some circumstances the health of a mainstream pupil may restrict use of mainstream transport, due to a temporary medical condition. In these instances, individual assessments will be undertaken to determine associated transportation need and risk.

If an ALN pupil has a temporary medical condition, transport may be provided on request from either the ALN team or the Education Welfare team. Transport arrangements provided on medical grounds will be reviewed regularly.

Requests for long-term transport due to a medical condition must be made to the Council's ALN team and accompanied by a letter from the pupil's consultant. The request must outline the pupil's medical condition and health risks encountered should they be required to walk to and from school.

The Council will not accept requests directly from GPs.

## **8.15 School Organisation Proposals**

The Council will provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age, where the closure of a school results in a learner being transferred to another school. Learners already on the register of the closed school will be provided with free transport to the new catchment school or the nearest school, subject to

meeting the policy's distance criteria - until the learner finishes education at that school. If the learner leaves this school, entitlement to this discretionary provision will end.

## **9.0 Post 16 Travel**

### **9.1 Transport Entitlement**

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

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

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

All transport for Post 16 pupils including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), is agreed on a case by case basis by the ALN team in consultation with the Transport Officer. The Council may provide transport up to a maximum of three years.

The criteria for Post 16 ALN transport is as follows:

- if the student qualifies on distance grounds;
- if transport is identified by the ALN team as being a requirement irrespective of distance, due to the nature of the student's medical need, additional learning need and/or disability; or,
- if it is determined by ALN team that there is no suitable college provision within the Borough which meets the needs of the pupil. In such circumstances, the Council would seek to source a suitable out of county placement.

\*The above arrangements will be subject to review in line with any changes to the student(s) circumstances which may affect their transport entitlement or requirement.

### **9.2 Travel Grant**

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

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

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

### **9.4 How to Apply**

Applications for transport assistance are available on Blaenau Gwent's website. Parents/Students can submit an application for transport assistance at any time, however, there is always an increase in demand prior to the start of an academic year and parents are advised to allow additional time. The Council sets a target to process all applications received within 10 school/college days, unless specialised provision is required.

Further information can be found on the following website [www.coleggwent.gov.uk](http://www.coleggwent.gov.uk) and <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/resident/schools-learning/school-transport/>

## **10.0 Procedures**

### **10.1 Safe Routes to School/Learner Travel Arrangements**

Safe Routes to school are assessed individually by the Transport Division in line with Welsh Government Learner Travel Measure (2014). A route is considered to be available if it is safe for a child/young person to walk alone or with an accompanying adult, where appropriate. It is recognised that occasions may arise when routes may become hazardous. In these circumstances, the Council reserves the right to provide free home to school transport for distances below the discretionary limits in the interests of the safety of the relevant learners. The Council will assess route safety through using clear Council criteria and a determination will be made on a risk assessment basis, where necessary.

### **10.2 Extreme Weather and COVID-19 Emergency Response**

Severe weather may impact on Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's ability to provide Home to School Transport safely. In such circumstances, the safety and wellbeing of the children and transport providers remains our key priority. Where severe weather results in the requirement to cancel transportation, the school will always notify parents at the earliest point to avoid unnecessary disruption.

Up to date weather information is posted on the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's website during periods of severe weather conditions.

If the Home to School Transport provision is cancelled, the Education Transformation team and Transport Officer will advise schools, as best they can, when transport services are likely to resume. During these periods, the school will aim to keep parents/carers informed of developments.

If transport is cancelled due to extreme weather, the following is applicable:

- where a route is cancelled and a parent/carer takes the decision to transport the child themselves, the parent/carer remains responsible for the return journey or any subsequent costs should a return journey not be possible;
- if a child is unable to attend school due to severe weather, the parent/carer remains responsible for their child; and,
- out of hours' emergency contact can be made with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council through the main contact centre – 01495 311556

In line with the COVID-19 Pandemic, any changes to the provision of home to school and post 16 transport will be communicated with schools, colleges and families of pupils/students accessing transport provision. Changes will be reflective of the latest Welsh Government Guidance.

### 10.3 Exclusions from Home to School Transport

The Council has an approved travel behaviour code that covers all home to school transport provision. All parties will be required to sign the Blaenau Gwent Transport Behaviour Contract prior to approval of transport provision.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council reserves the right to refuse travel assistance where a child/young person's behaviour is such that, it is unacceptable in line with the travel code and/or presents a significant health and safety risk, or whereby excessive and purposeful damage to vehicles has been identified. In these instances, the Transport team will issue warning letters and parents will receive no more than four letters. The behaviour management process is as follows:

- **Stage 1** - Initially raising the concerns/issues
- **Stage 2** - Informal warning indicating the remedial steps taken and the potential of transport removal
- **Stage 3** - Final warning indicating that transport will be removed.
- **Stage 4** - The school jointly with the Transport team will issue the final letter confirming the removal of transport, citing the reasons for the removal, the date of the proposed removal and the parental route of appeal.

If a pupil is refused/ excluded from transport due to behavioural issues, parents/carers then become responsible for their child's attendance at school and any transport required.

Any wilful damage that incurs cost to the transport provider for either repair or cleaning remains the responsibility of the parent/carer of the pupil concerned. Continued or repeat behaviour that result in wilful damage can result in exclusion from home to school transport.

Please note should a situation arise in during transportation, which constitutes a health and safety hazard, pupils can be removed from the vehicle with a police presence, and further transport provision withdrawn with immediate effect pending investigation.

## 10.4 ALN Transport Issues & Exclusions

The Transport team will monitor and review issues and incidents relating to ALN transport, and determine with relevant professionals i.e. the school and ALN team, any reasonable adjustments required to accommodate the pupil(s).

In cases whereby there are recurrent issues behavioural or other, which mean that:

- the planned transport arrangements no longer meet the needs of the pupil; and/or,
- there are health and safety risks to both the pupil and contractor

The Transport team will look to work with the school in first instance. Where there are behavioural issues which present health and safety concerns, letters will be issued parents informing them of the issues concerns and Council's intention regarding the management or removal of transport, and/or employing suitable alternative solutions. No more than four letters will be issued prior to the removal/refusal of transport. The behaviour management process is as follows:

- **Stage 1** - Initially raising the concerns/issues
- **Stage 2** - Informal warning indicating the remedial steps taken and the potential of transport review/removal
- **Stage 3** - Final warning indicating that transport will be removed.
- **Stage 4** - Transport will be suspended and parents notified in writing, pending detailed assessment of the risks and transportation needs of the pupil. A Review Group will then be coordinated by the Transport Officer, with representation from relevant services and professionals, in order to determine a suitable solution.

If a pupil is refused or excluded from transport due to behavioural and/or other issues, parents/carers then become responsible for their child's home to school transport requirements, until a suitable solution has been found.

Any wilful damage that incurs cost to the transport provider for either repair or cleaning remains the responsibility of the parent/carer of the pupil concerned. Continued or repeat behaviour that result in wilful damage can result in exclusion from home to school transport.

## 10.5 Safeguarding

The safety of children and young people on home to school and/or post 16 transport is Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's first priority. In particular, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will ensure that:

- all providers are contracted for the provision and must ensure to comply with the terms and conditions set out within their contract
- should the Council identify any safeguarding concerns relating to a particular provider or associated member of staff, the process will be managed in accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures;
- all drivers and escorts have been checked and cleared by the DBS;



- all drivers and escorts will have access to safeguarding training and **must** report any concerns that they may identify to the Transport team, the school and where appropriate, the Police and/ or Social Services **without delay**;
- all drivers and escorts carry a form of identity;
- lap and diagonal seat belts are provided on all contract vehicles;
- car seats/booster seats are provided in accordance with current Government legislation - **this is the responsibility of the parent/carer**;
- **the Council will provide specialist equipment only when pre-agreed upon or as identified as part of a review**;
- **parents/carers of primary pupils are responsible for ensuring that there is a responsible adult to collect their child/children upon drop-off each day**;
- **parents/carers of pupils in receipt of ALN transport, are responsible for ensuring that there is a responsible adult within the home at pick-up and upon drop-off each day**;
- drivers and escorts receive appropriate training and are familiar with safety and emergency equipment;
- drivers, escorts and operators are aware of their duties, particularly in emergency situations; and,
- wheelchair occupants must be correctly restrained. Wheelchairs will need to meet specific authorised crash test requirements (this specification can be confirmed directly by the user in conjunction with our Transport team).

## 10.6 Home to School/College Transport - Code of Good Practice

Across all of home to school transport provision and post 16 learning, the Council operates a **Code of Practice** for pupils, students, parents, schools and transport operators. The code of practice can be found on the link below;

[http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Schools\\_and\\_Learning/SchoolTransport\\_CodeofGoodPractice.pdf](http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Schools_and_Learning/SchoolTransport_CodeofGoodPractice.pdf)

## 10.7 Free Transport - Right to Withdraw

The Council reserve the right to withdraw awarded transport, if an error is made or where legislation has changed which affects the entitlement of a pupil or pupils using school transport. The Council will honour the transport provision for that pupil(s) for the remainder of the academic half-term, during which the awarding error was identified, or that legislation became effective.

All awarded transport is reviewed periodically.

## 10.8 Appeals Procedure

Where the one of the following circumstances apply:

- a child or young person is not eligible for travel assistance;
- a change in transport arrangements has been made and the parent/carer notified; and,
- transport has not been agreed.

Parents/carers may ask for the decision to be reconsidered whereby an appeals form will then be issued. Parents/carers may then highlight exceptional circumstances they wish to be considered in relation to their entitlement.

Appeals should be made in writing to the Education Transformation team, and wherever possible forwarded by recorded post to ensure delivery/tracking. All appeal related correspondence should be addressed to:

Education Transformation Manager  
Anvil Court  
Abertillery  
Blaenau Gwent  
NP13 1DB

Appeals will then be considered by the Appeals Panel, who look to determine the level of prejudice to the child should they not be granted transport. The prejudice will be considered in relation to the impact in terms of:

- distance
- disability; and/ or,
- medical considerations on the advice of a consultant.

Parents will have 10 working days to submit an appeal from the date that the refusal letter was issued. Their appeal will then be heard within 30 working days from the specific closing date indicated within the refusal letter.

### **10.9 Monitoring Procedure**

All vehicles will be made available for random checks by Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) and/ or another appropriate body, when required. Any complaints received by the Council concerning services or vehicles will be investigated in line with the Council's complaints policy. In the event of the complaint being upheld, the necessary and appropriate steps will be taken in accordance with the contract or as a matter of urgency and will be reported in a timely manner to the Education Directorate's Management Team (DMT).

The Council will undertake random checks to contracts, to ensure that they are being operated in accordance with the Council's terms and conditions. As part of this monitoring exercise, the following checks will also be made:

- punctuality;
- adherence to route;
- size of vehicle;
- licences; and,
- staff DBS checks are in place.

All of the above are designed to ensure safe and stress free travel.



## 11.0 Glossary of Terms

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Additional Learning Needs (ALN)</b>                    | A pupil who has an identified additional learning need   |
| <b>Catchment Area</b>                                     | A marked out geographical area made up of the streets around a school.   |
| <b>Catchment Area School</b>                              | A school within the catchment area   |
| <b>Children Looked After</b>                              | Children who are in the care of, or 'accommodated by', a Local Authority.  |
| <b>Child Protection</b>                                   | Child protection is a part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity which is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect.                   |
| <b>Designated Area</b>                                    | A geographical area, which is usually made up of Parishes served by a voluntary aided school (see section 2.2 for Faith/voluntary aided schools).  |
| <b>Nearest Suitable School</b>                            | For transport purposes, the nearest suitable school may not be the catchment area school.  |
| <b>Officer Review</b>                                     | The process of someone within the Council looking again at an application for transport assistance.  |
| <b>Parent/Carer</b>                                       | Anyone who is responsible for the care of a child. We use the same definition as stated in the Education Act 1996.   |
| <b>Preferred School</b>                                   | Parents have a right to say they prefer a school other than the catchment area school. This is known as 'a preferred school'. This school will remain a preferred school when parents apply for help with transport, throughout the pupil's attendance.          |
| <b>Pupil</b>  | A young person who is of compulsory school age, which is the term after the child's fifth birth day and before the last Friday in June in Year 11. For transport purposes the term pupil will also include those in Foundation Stage 2.                          |
| <b>Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children</b> | Protecting children from abuse and neglect, preventing impairment of their health or development and ensuring that they receive safe and effective care to enable them to have optimum life chances.   |
| <b>Shortest Walking Distance</b>                          | The shortest safe walkable route between the main access to and from your private property, such as your front gate or the top of your drive and the nearest school gate.  |
| <b>Special Transport Needs</b>                            | Some pupils may have special transport needs that come from a disability or a special educational need.  |
| <b>Statutory Walking Distance</b>                         | As set out in section 2, in accordance with the definition provided in the Education Act 1996.   |
| <b>Student</b>  | A young person who attends a sixth form or college beyond the statutory school age, which is the last Friday in June in Year 11.   |
| <b>Suitable Walkable Route</b>                            | A route where a child can walk to and from school safe from traffic – with the parent or another 'responsible adult' if the parent decides this is needed. If a parent cannot do this, the Council is <b>not</b> responsible for escorting your child to school. |

## 11.1 Blaenau Gwent Schools

Blaenau Gwent has the following schools and provision for pupils:

- **Community Maintained Schools** – schools managed by the headteacher and governors, in partnership with the Council. The Council arranges admissions.
- **Voluntary-aided Schools** – schools supported by the relevant Religious Board and the Council jointly. The governors will normally employ all staff and manage admissions. These schools are sometimes called ‘faith’ or ‘denominational’ schools.
- **Foundation Schools** – schools maintained by the Council but the governors are responsible for admissions. For transport assistance purposes, all pupils attending Foundation schools are treated in the same way as pupils attending community schools.
- **Resource Bases** – some mainstream schools have Resource Bases which are Council funded provisions that meet the additional learning needs of pupils whose needs cannot be met in mainstream classes. Resource Bases have a higher level of staffing providing more specialist support to meet pupil need. Pupils access mainstream classes where appropriate and placement into a Resource Base is determined by the Council’s ALN Panel
- **Special School** – a school which caters for pupils with additional learning needs whose needs cannot be appropriately met in a mainstream or Resource Base setting. Special schools receive pupils with a degree of disability and placement is agreed through the Council’s ALN Panel. The Council arranges admissions for all special schools.
- **Pupil Referral Units** - cater for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural Difficulties and provides short term, as well as longer term placements. The Council arranges admission through the Council’s ALN Panel.
- **All Through School 3-16 model** – where there are more than one campus or site associated with the school. The school is responsible for admissions for all site allocation.
- **Welsh Medium School** – caters for children who are being taught through the medium of Welsh as their first language.

For more information on Blaenau Gwent Schools, please refer to the Blaenau Gwent Starting Schools Booklet, which can be found on the Councils website, via School Admissions.

## Socio-economic Duty (Strategic Decisions Only)

Welsh Government's [Socio-economic Duty](#) provides a framework to ensure tackling inequality of outcome is at the forefront of decision making.

**Please consider how your proposal could affect the following groups:**

- Single parents and vulnerable families
- People with low literacy/numeracy
- Pensioners
- Looked after children
- Homeless people
- Carers
- Armed Forces Community
- Students
- Single adult households
- People who have experienced the asylum system
- People of all ages leaving a care setting
- People living in the most deprived areas in Wales (WIMD)
- People involved in the criminal justice system
- People misusing substances

| Socio Economic Disadvantages  | Will the proposal have a positive, negative, or neutral impact? | How could you mitigate the negative impacts outlined? | Please highlight any evidence that has been considered (quantitative or qualitative) |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Low Income / Income Poverty</b><br>(cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.)  | Neutral   | N/A   |  |
| <b>Low and/or No Wealth</b> (enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provisions for the future)           | Neutral   | N/A   |  |
| <b>Material Deprivation</b> (unable to access basic goods and services i.e., financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, hobbies etc.) | Neutral   | N/A   |  |
| <b>Area Deprivation</b><br>(where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?)  | Neutral   | N/A   |  |
| <b>Socio-economic Background</b><br>(social class i.e., parents' education, employment and income)  | Neutral   | N/A   |  |

|  |                |            |  |
|--|----------------|------------|--|
| <b>Socio-economic Disadvantage</b><br><i>(What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged)</i> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>N/A</b> |  |
|--|----------------|------------|--|

# Agenda Item 11

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**  
Date of meeting: **14<sup>th</sup> September 2021**  
Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member Education**  
Report Submitted by: **Cllr Haydn Trollope, Chair of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

| Reporting Pathway           |                           |                          |                 |                               |                    |                     |         |                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| x                           | x                         |                          |                 |                               | 14.09.21           |                     |         |                      |

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To present to Members the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021 for discussion and agreement.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
  - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's revised Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
  - 2.3 Effective work programmes are essential to ensure that the work of scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
  - 2.4 The Committee's Forward Work Programme was agreed in June 2021, recognising the fluidity of the document to enable the Committee to respond to urgent and emerging issues, and included timescales when reports will be considered by the Committee. The work programme is managed and implemented by the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer under the direction of the Chair and Committee.
  - 2.5 The forward work programme for the forthcoming meeting will be presented to Committee on a 6 weekly cycle in order that Members can consider the programme of work; request information is included within the reports, as appropriate and / or make amendments to the work programme.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
  - 3.1 **Option 1:** The Scrutiny Committee consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021, and
    - Make any amendments to the topics scheduled for the meetings;

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

3.2 **Option 2:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021, as presented.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021

## Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

| Date  | Scrutiny Topic                                     | Purpose   | Lead Officer   | Executive / Council   |
|---|--|---|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Tuesday<br/>19<sup>th</sup> October<br/>2021</b><br><br><b>Deadline:<br/>Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup><br/>October 2021</b> | 1. Provisional KS4 School Performance              | <b>Performance Monitoring</b><br>To provide a summary of performance in line with accountability changes to ensure that children and young people achieve in line with expectations, particularly at KS4.               | Luisa Munro-Morris/Michelle Jones                        | Executive<br>10.11.21 |
|   | 2. Helping Elected Members Get to Know Our Schools | <b>Working Group</b><br>To seek nominations in order to re-establish the Working Group.   | Michelle Jones   |                       |
|   | 3. Recovery and Renewal                            | <b>Performance Monitoring</b><br>To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support schools and learners to recovery from the pandemic and to monitor progress (Summer term 2021 progress on an agreed theme). | Luisa Munro-Morris / Claire Gardner/<br>Michelle Jones   | Executive<br>10.11.21 |
|   | 4. Improving Schools and School Inspections        | <b>Performance Monitoring</b><br>To provide Members with an update on any inspection report findings (when available) and progress within schools which a school causing concern or subject to Council intervention.    | Lynn Phillips/<br>Luisa Munro Morris /<br>Michelle Jones | Executive<br>10.11.21 |
|   | 5. Section 106                                     | To provide members with an overview of Education's Planning Obligations and associated processes, including Section 106 developer contribution assessment and implementation.   | Claire Gardner   |                       |

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