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MAE HWN YN GYFARFOD Y MAE GAN Y CYHOEDD HAWL EI FYNYCHU

Dydd Llun, 6 Tachwedd 2023

Annwyl Syr/Madam

PWYLLGOR CRAFFU POBL

Cynhelir cyfarfod o'r Pwyllgor Craffu Pobl yn Cyfarfod hybrid i'w gynnal yn rhithiol ar MS Teams yn Ystafell Syr William Firth, Swyddfeydd Cyffredinol, Glynwby on Dydd Llun, 13eg Tachwedd, 2023 am 9.30 am.

Yn gywir

Damien McCann
Prif Weithredwr Interim

AGENDA

1. CYFIEITHU AR Y PRYD

Mae croeso i chi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg yn y cyfarfod, mae angen o leiaf 3 diwrnod gwaith o rybudd os dymunwch wneud hynny. Darperir gwasanaeth cyfieithu ar y pryd os gwneir cais am hynny.

2. YMDDIHEURIADAU

Derbyn ymddiheuriadau.

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg a byddwn yn cyfathrebu gyda chi yn eich dewis iaith, dim ond i chi rhoi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn creu unrhyw oedi.

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English and we will communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to any delay.

3. DATGANIADAU BUDDIANT A GODDEFEBAU

Derbyn datganiadau buddiant a goddefebau.

4. PWYLLGOR CRAFFU POBL

Derbyn penderfyniadau'r Pwyllgor Craffu Pobl a gynhaliwyd ar 19 Medi 2023.

(Dylid nodi y cyflwynir y penderfyniadau er pwyntiau cywirdeb yn unig).

5. DALEN WEITHREDU

5 - 16

Derbyn dalen weithredu.

**6. PENDERFYNIADAU'R CABINET – STRATEGAETH /
POLISIŌAU / CANLLAWIAU CYNHWYSIANT AC ADY
(ADOLYGU A DIWYGIADAU)**

Aelod Cabinet i ymateb i unrhyw gwestiynau a ofynnir gan y Pwyllgor yn dilyn penderfyniad y Cabinet.

**7. ADRODDIAD CYNNYDD: CARTREFI PRESWYL
PLANT**

17 - 24

Ystyried adroddiad y Rheolwr Gwasanaeth, Gwasanaethau Plant.

**8. DIWEDDARIAD AR GYNNYDD AR ARGYMHELLION
ESTYN**

25 - 54

Ystyried adroddiad Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Interim Addysg.

9. RHAGLEN GWELLA YSGOLION

55 - 74

Ystyried adroddiad y Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Interim Addysg.

10. BLAENRAGLEN GWAITH: 19 RHAGFYR 2023

75 - 78

Derbyn y Flaenraglen Gwaith.

At: Cynghorwyr T. Smith (Cadeirydd)
J. Morgan, J.P. (Is-gadeirydd)
C. Bainton
D. Bevan
J. Gardner
G. Humphreys
J. P. Morgan
G. Thomas
D. Wilkshire
T. Pritchard
Lines

Pob Aelod arall (er gwybodaeth)
Rheolwr Gyfarwyddwr
Prif Swyddogion

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Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Action Sheet

People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
19.09.23	Item 7: Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2022/23 'Open house' session to be arranged for Members to visit the SMART flat at Six Bells.	Alyson Hoskins	Open house session – 2 nd November 2023 – 10.00am-12.30pm Action Complete: 29.09.23
19.09.23 Eval Session	Item 7: Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2022/23 Members requested some examples of 'compliments' to the work of the Directorate be provided to Members.	Tanya Evans	Information attached. Action Complete: 18.10.23

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Action:

Item 7: Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2022/23

Members requested some examples of 'compliments' to the work of the Directorate be provided to Members.

Adult Services – Compliments

From: Baulch, Hannah <Hannah.Baulch@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk>

Sent: Monday, September 18, 2023 12:00 PM

Subject: SK thanks

Hi All,

Just wanted to make you aware of the wonderful feedback that SK's family have shared with Sophie since SK was admitted last weekend on an urgent placement.

The family have said how welcoming and compassionate all the staff are, they feel SK is well cared for and feel reassured that she is safe and cared for during this very difficult period that the family are going through.

Please pass on the thanks to all the team and congratulate them on always going over and above for our residents and their families.

Well done Team Cwrt Mytton.

Cofion / Regards

Hannah Baulch
Service Manager

Children's Services - Compliments

Comments from DJE in court for CWDT

"orders to follow but I just wanted to let you know the comments from DJE. He commended all those present but particularly wanted to thank the social worker who conducted herself in an exemplary fashion in his judgment. He said this was an example of how cases should work in the family courts."

Flying Start Feedback



Professional feedback from Communication Manager of Citizens Advice to FS FSW – Sarra Williams after being invited to the Coronation Events

"I really enjoyed my first event of the year, especially with the little ones. The rapport you all hold with the families was wonderful to observe. You also introduced me to Steve and gained consent for use of the photos. I am so grateful.

We cannot thank you enough for the support you show us and if I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me".

a better place to live and work

Quotes for a father who was supported by Steve Lewis –
Dads Support Worker

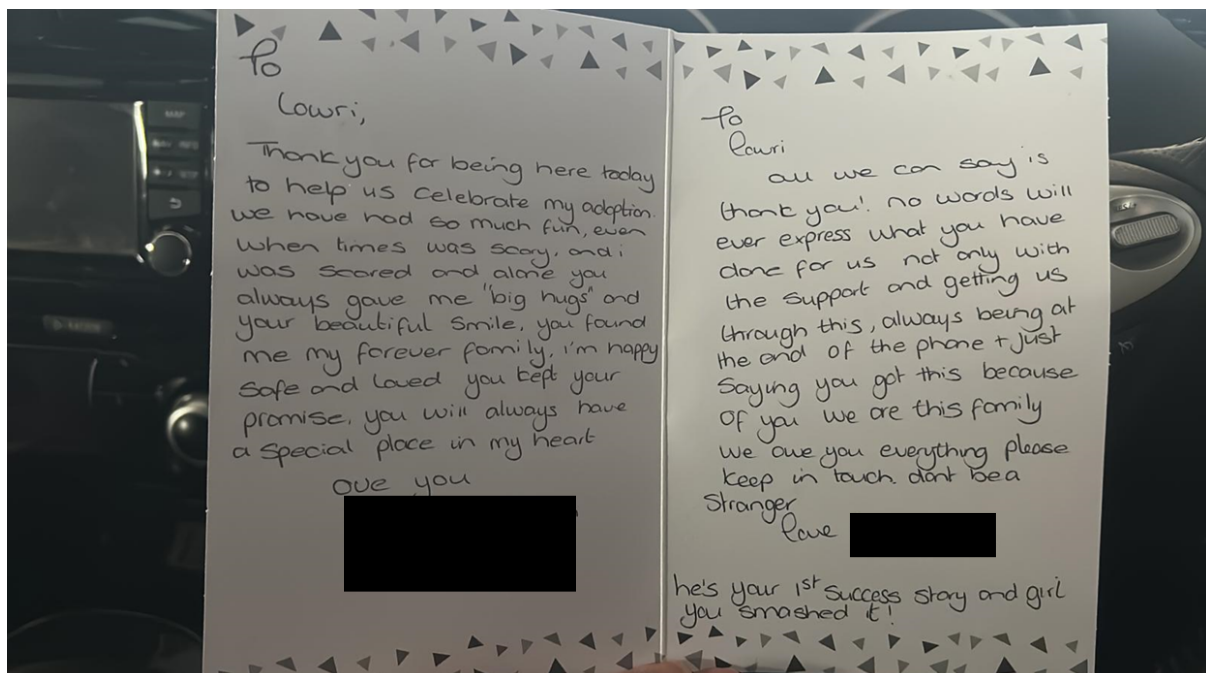
“I was struggling with life in general, I felt everything was coming down on top of me, everything I gained I lost, I thought at times I didn’t want to be here”

After intervention - what made the difference?

“You made the difference, having you has helped me massively, being able to have you listen to me, helping me and my family, you have been an absolute godsend to us”.

a better place to live and work

East Locality Team – from Adopters for Lowri Moore social worker



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Adult Services - Compliments

Dear Sir,

Beaufort
16th August

Having contacted Social Services about a fault with my newly acquired toilet seat, I was immediately put in touch with the appropriate department. Within half an hour I was informed to expect someone to arrive within the hour to replace it with a new one!

Where do you expect to receive treatment so excellent as that?

Please pass my thanks to those responsible and to the helpful and extremely polite lady who answered the phone - Marianne, I believe

Very well done!

The toilet seat was re-adjusted so the new one was not needed. I cannot thank social services for this prompt action

Very well done!

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To everyone at Curt Mytton.

You've been so very thoughtful
and shown such kindness too,
That's why this wish
is bringing many
special thanks to you.

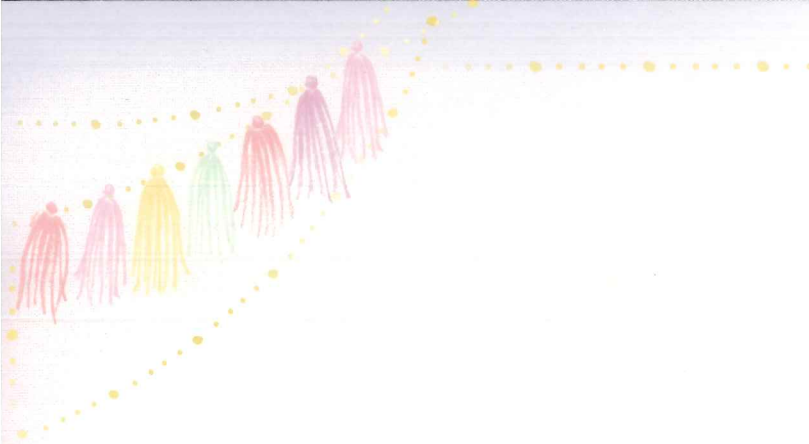
Warmest Wishes

Thank you all so very
much for the kindness
and ease you gave our
Dad,

[Redacted signature]

^





With
Love

Thankyou For Taking
Good care of Allan

Carol, Donna,

Tracy ~ Kristy

X X X



To the Manager & Staff of
Curt Mylton

...and all the kindness

you have shown, too

fills hearts with gratitude

just to know you all

Thank you

We cannot thank you enough for all the care,
support and kindness you have given to my
Mam. She always seemed to be happy and
content living at Curt Mylton and it was a
great comfort to us to know that she was so
well looked after. We were always made to feel
welcome. You are all a great team & we will
miss you all, we were truly blessed

Thank you

have Keni, and families of
Marion Bryanke

Hi Team,

Just a huge thank you to everyone of you for all the love and care you provided for Dad over the last 2 years. You are all amazing people and I love you all.

...for being so lovely.

Thanks to everyone for the messages calls and coffees and for generally keeping me going.

I'll see you all soon

love you all

Kristy + family

xxx

Agenda Item 7

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **13th November 2023**
Report Subject: **Progress Report: Children's Residential Homes**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member People and Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Beth Thomas, Service Manager, Children's Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
17.10.23	19.10.23	30.10.23			13.11.23	29.11.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update on the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes. The development of Blaenau Gwent's own children's homes has been agreed by all necessary decision makers within the Council and evidenced within the Business Case Report which has been previously submitted for Council's approval.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 As reported within the business case, the plan for Blaenau Gwent establishing its own children's residential home is supportive of the Welsh Government's policy initiative to '*eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after by the end of the Senedd term*'.

2.2 Agreement was sought as part of the business case to purchase 2 properties to meet the requirement of being redeveloped into children's residential homes in the Tredegar area. On 9th March 2023, following necessary planning applications being submitted, the Planning Committee agreed to the change of use application to enable the Local Authority to move forward with redeveloping the properties to ensure they are fit for use and Care Inspectorate Wales compliant.

2.3 The first property (Mons Calpe) will provide residential care for a maximum of 4 children. The second property (Madison House) will provide emergency accommodation on a short-term basis for up to 2 children at any time. The second property will also provide move on accommodation for 2 young people aged 16+, acting as a steppingstone from residential care into independence.

2.4 Following the costs associated with property purchases, the Local Authority has remaining Regional Integration Capital Grant Funding for refurbishment of the properties equating to £865,500.

2.5 The business case presented previously offered an anticipated opening date of 1st January 2024. This is no longer an achievable target for this project.

2.6 **Progress Update**

- 2.7 Regional support has been accessed via the Regional Eliminate Team who has assigned a specific project officer to Blaenau Gwent to advise and support with the development of the residential homes. This support has proven invaluable to date as the regional team have access to a wealth of knowledge and experience from neighbouring authorities who are experienced in developing and managing their own residential homes as a council.
- 2.8 Since acquiring the properties, work has been ongoing in partnership with the Council's Community Services Division to develop the vision for the properties and reach the point where we are ready to commence the procurement process to undertake the work on both properties to ensure they meet the regulatory requirements of the Care Inspectorate Wales
- 2.9 The estimated completion date for the tender drawings is currently 20th October 2023 which will include the architectural designs, electrical designs and specifications as well as the mechanical designs.
- 2.10 Upon completion, the tender drawings will be reviewed by the Local Authority's Quantity Surveyor to evaluate and provide an estimated total project cost as well as drawing up the project contracts in preparation for the procurement process. It is estimated that this will be completed by 6th November 2023.
- 2.11 It is anticipated that the procurement process will take up to 8 weeks which provides an estimated end date of 1st January 2024.
- 2.12 Providing the contract is awarded to a suitable contractor within the week following the 1st January 2024, it is anticipated that the current estimated 12 – 15 week construction time will be completed by 22nd April 2024.
- 2.13 The Care Inspectorate Wales registration process can take up to 14 weeks thereafter before the residential provision can become operational and for children to move in. Should the full 14-week timescale be required for registration then the anticipated opening date for the provision is estimated to be **w/c 29th July 2024**. It is considered that this is an appropriate time to consider moves for children from other provisions given the natural ending of their academic school year and having time to settle into a new home prior to the new academic year, which for some children may be in a completely new school.
- 2.14 In tandem with the refurbishment work, there has also been significant activity being undertaken in relation to the operational needs of this project.

- 2.15 This workstream includes the following:
- Liaising with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) around the reconfiguration plans (**complete**)
 - Liaising with Pan-Gwent Authorities regarding their journey of developing new residential provisions (**ongoing**)
 - Developing Job Descriptions and Person Specifications for the Residential Children's Home staffing team (**ongoing**)
 - Agreeing preferred working patterns and rotas (**ongoing**)
 - Commencing Job Evaluations for the new staff roles (**ongoing**)
 - Developing Blaenau Gwent Policies and Procedures for Residential Children's Home Operation (**ongoing**)
 - Establishing a Residential Children's Home workforce training framework (**ongoing**)
 - Identifying a Responsible Individual (**This role will be assumed by Beth Thomas, Service Manager – Children's Services**)
 - Commencing Responsible Individual registration (**to be completed**)
 - Developing Statement of Purposes for both properties (**complete**)
 - Commencing CIW registration process for both properties (**ongoing**)
 - Housing Capital Fund Reporting monthly (**ongoing**)

2.16 The task for prioritising in coming weeks is for the Job Evaluation processes to be completed for the Home Manager, Assistant Manager, Children's Residential Workers and Night Officers. Followed by developing a recruitment plan for staff which is in-keeping with the estimated operational date for the residential homes.

2.17 Engagement with colleagues in Organisational Development is required around the desired shift patterns for the provision which would be reflective of neighbouring authorities.

2.18 Fortnightly project review meetings are being held and will continue for the foreseeable future to closely monitor progress and to identify any unanticipated delays in project completion at the earliest opportunity.

2.19 There is currently an Eliminate Task and Finish group being led by a Children's Service Manager to proactively identify the cohort of children who can transfer to our property once operational in 2024, thus reducing our reliance on for-profit private providers and meeting the WG initiative of eliminating use of these providers.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

That Member support this report as an accurate representation of the progress to date in respect of the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes.

Option 2:

That Members consider the progress to date in respect of the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes and make specific recommendations to Cabinet.

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

4.1 As evidenced within the previous reports regarding the residential children's homes development, the development of such a project within these reports support the achievement of the priorities contained within the Corporate Plan 2022-2027, including:

- Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent,
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place,
- Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent, and resilient.

4.2 It will also support the priorities set out for the social services directorate which are:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater,
- To work with our communities and partners including Aneurin Bevan Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support,
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm,
- To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience,
- Ensure long-term sustainability is at the forefront of our thinking and decision-making, enabling us to work better with people, communities, and each other, looking to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

4.3 It is also supportive of Objective 3 of the Strategy to Safely Reduce the numbers of Children Looked After - to provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality placements.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

5.1.1 The remaining Capital funding for refurbishment is healthy and is anticipated to fully meet the costs associated with the plans to refurbish the properties to an excellent standard and which is CIW regulation compliant.

5.1.2 As noted in paragraph 2.18, the anticipated operational date of the children's homes is later than originally planned which will likely have an impact on projected forecasting for the 23/24 Q4 budget and the 24/25 budget.

5.1.3 The Business Case identified a cost pressure of £94,330 for 2023/2024 due to the need to employ staff prior to opening and a financial efficiency of around £63,000 in 2024/2025. The delayed implementation will mitigate the cost pressure for 2023/2024.

5.1.4 Using the financial costings for the original business case and assuming staff are employed from April and the home is operational from 29 July 2024, there would be a potential cost pressure of £123,000 in 2024/2025 based on an occupancy of 3 Children Looked After. However, should there be full occupancy from opening, this cost pressure will be mitigated.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 As noted in paragraph 2.18, the anticipated operational date of the children's homes is later than originally desired which will likely have an impact on projected forecasting for the 2023/24 Q4 budget and the 2024/25 budget.

5.2.2 Whilst there is an anticipated opening date based on current project planning, there may be unforeseen issues which could arise that could further extend the operational date of the residential provisions. This may be associated with:

5.2.3

- Delay with refurbishment work – fortnightly project management meetings will continue to be held to closely review the refurbishment work with colleagues from Community Services Division to identify any issues as early as possible and consider any mitigating actions which may support keeping the estimated completion date realistic.

5.2.4

- Recruitment Challenges - The difficulties in recruiting to social care staff has been widely reported so there could be difficulties recruiting to the posts required to manage the children's home. To mitigate against this we are hoping to be consistent with neighbouring authorities with salaries for the posts to ensure we remain competitive within the social care recruitment market. We will ensure there is a robust recruitment process in place considering a range of recruitment options such as traditional applications and recruitment open days in the local area. Thorough inductions and training are planned for the staffing team when identified to promote the likelihood of staff retention. We are aware of a number of private residential home providers in Blaenau Gwent who have staff who may be interested in working for the Local Authority particularly given the drive to eliminate for-profit care settings in Wales.

5.2.5

- Registration issues – Whilst the refurbishment may complete within estimated timeframes there may be unforeseen challenges with the registration of the provisions which may delay opening date. To mitigate against this, we will maintain dialogue with our appointed CIW inspector throughout the refurbishment and action any advice or guidance offered.

5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 There will be a legal requirement to register the home with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and ensure compliance with all associated registration regulations including Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 Organisational Development (OD) colleagues have suitably advised on the Job Evaluation process which must be followed for all posts in the proposed children's residential staffing structure.

5.4.2 Engagement with OD colleagues will be required regarding the proposal to adopt a 15-hour shift operating model akin to neighbouring authorities to enable the Local Authority to be competitive within the recruitment market to secure and retain staff. A report relating to this proposal will be completed upon further advice being sought from OD colleagues in coming weeks.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

5.5.1 All refurbishment work will adhere to Health and Safety standards and will be quality assured by colleagues in Technical Services who will oversee the project management of the works.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 The business case found at Appendix 1 has already outlined the performance information and data relevant to the development of Blaenau Gwent's own children's home/s.

6.1.2 Further progress reporting will be provided to offer updated information on anticipated operational date.

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

6.2.1 The impact of having Blaenau Gwent residential provision will improve outcomes for children looked after, and in turn provide the public with reassurances that the children in the care of the local authority are having their needs met.

6.2.2 The establishment of the residential home in Blaenau Gwent, will provide employment opportunities to local residents and businesses and provide opportunity to improve their socio-economic circumstances.

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

During this process consultations have taken place with various directorates within the Council.

As part of the acquisition process and through the change of use policy the Council planning department have undertaken a statutory consultation process

In addition, a meeting was held with local residents the Interim Head of Children's Services and Council members.

- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
Blaenau Gwent has never had its own children's residential provision. However, at a time when the needs of children are becoming more complex and Blaenau Gwent children are increasingly being looked after in independent for-profit organisations, with the quality of care being afforded to our children not being what is expected, it is imperative that Blaenau Gwent moves forward with these plans and in the long term the LA will make savings alongside children's needs being met in their local community.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
- 6.5.1 Preventing children from being placed outside of Blaenau Gwent who need care is a positive outcome in itself and will prevent the breakdown of important relationships.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
- 6.6.1 The establishment of the pan-Gwent Regional Eliminate Team has been an invaluable source of support to the Local authority in driving forward the development of its own residential provision. The allocated project officer for Blaenau Gwent and the Team Manager are key members of the fortnightly progress meetings to offer advice and guidance to the Local Authority.
- 6.6.2 Following the submission of the Business Case earlier this year, a Residents Committee has been established to provide residents with key updates on the development of the project. The next meeting is due the end of October 2023.
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
As part of the development of the residential children's home in Blaenau Gwent it will be vital that we build on existing relationships with our statutory and voluntary partners whose involvement and support to our children will be integral to the success of the home.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
- 6.8.1 Refurbishment works will take into consideration opportunities for decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions. An example to date relates to the installation of electric charging points for vehicles to be utilised at the provision.
- 6.8.2 Early engagement with partners in Ecology have commenced to consider to the opportunities available to us to promote the landscapes being biodiversity friendly.
- 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***
An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for non-decisioning making reports. However, an IIA was undertaken for the report presented to People Scrutiny Committee on 28th February 2023.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Progress of the project development will continue to be reviewed by the Social Services Senior Leadership Team and formal reporting on progress is next suggested to be presented at year end (March 2024), when building work is well underway to offer a meaningful estimation on the homes becoming operational, identification of children to access the provision and the anticipated cost saving this will achieve.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A

Agenda Item 8

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **13th November, 2023**
Report Subject: **Update on Progress Against Estyn Recommendations**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**
Report Submitted by: **Luisa Munro-Morris, Interim Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
19.10.23	19.10.23	30.10.23			13.11.23	29.11.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members on the Education Directorate's progress against the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection; the full report is attached as (Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The provision of Education is regulated under the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. The Local Authority was inspected between 28th November and 2nd December and the report was published February 2023. The outcome of the Inspection is positive overall, progress since the last inspection has been made and there is no requirement for follow-up activity. The inspectorate identified 3 recommendations for improvement, and the local authority will use these recommendations to update its improvement plans.

2.2 The recommendations are:

R1. Improve the corporate leadership of education services,

R2. Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management; and,

R3. Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern.

2.3 In addition to the three recommendations, key areas for improvement have been identified within the body of the Estyn Report. These will be addressed alongside the 3 recommendations.

2.4 This report is the second update reporting on progress against the 3 recommendations to Members.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The report has been considered by Education's DMT and CLT.

3.2 **Option 1**

For Members to scrutinise the action plan in response to Estyn's recommendations and the structure of the revised Self-evaluation Report and make any specific recommendations to Cabinet.

3.3 **Option 2**

Accept the report as provided.

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

It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and regular monitoring reports will be produced, in line with the Scrutiny and Cabinet Forward Work Programmes.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial considerations associated with this report, however, it is pleasing to note the findings from the Inspectorate on resource management. There was acknowledgement that the LA has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget. The financial outlook, however, for the public sector will be challenging over the period of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and close financial management will be essential to achieve value for money.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is one corporate risk for the Education service in the Corporate Risk Register relating to the 2 Schools Causing Concern. Education also maintains a Directorate Risk Register, which is aligned to both service level and corporate risks. One of the Estyn recommendations relates to the slow pace of change in one of these schools causing concern. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business planning process and included within the performance reporting for the service. The inspection findings are to be included in the risk registers.

5.3 ***Legal***

Estyn were established under the Education Act 1992. They are independent of the Welsh Parliament but funded by the Welsh Government (under Section 104 of the Government of Wales Act 1998). Under the Education Act 2005 the Chief Inspector has a duty to keep the Welsh Parliament informed about the quality of the education in schools. Inspections of LGES are carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 which provides that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (HMCI) 'may, and, if requested to do so by the Secretary of State, shall, arrange for any local authority to be inspected'. Such an inspection 'shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are

performing any function which relates to the provision of education for (a) persons of compulsory school age (whether at school or otherwise) or (b) for persons of any age above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools maintained by the authority'. Other aspects of local authority provision are subject to inspection under a range of legislation, including the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services (within the meaning of section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000).

The Children Act 2004 introduces a duty on local authorities and their partners to co-operate to improve the well-being of children. As far as local authorities are concerned, the inspectorate is given the powers to review a local authority's functions relating to Section 51 of the Act, namely in co-operating to improve well-being and producing children and young people's plans where these functions relate to education, training or youth support services. Section 51 of The Children Act 2004 changes the Education Act 1997 so that 'An inspection of a local education authority in Wales under this section shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing any function conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority; and the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support service

5.4 **Human Resources**

The Education Directorate are currently undertaking a review of the directorate to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver on the Estyn recommendations.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

The updated Business Plans include key actions from improving safeguarding procedures and policies across schools.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 **Local Authority Link Inspection Visits**

Estyn have confirmed that there is no requirement for the LA to prepare a Post Inspection Action plan following the inspection. Instead, as part of the termly Local Authority Link Inspection Visits (LALI), the LA will be required to provide evidence to the inspectorate that shows improvements are being made both corporately and operationally in relation to the 3 recommendations.

There have been two LALI visit post inspection, and in each visit a range of evidence was presented to demonstrate progress towards the 3 recommendations.

6.1.2 **Business Planning**

The Education Directorate has revised its business plans (improvement plan) to incorporate the 3 recommendations at both a strategic and an operational level. The Education Directorate has 3 levels of planning and the priorities

and actions at each level have been reviewed to ensure that they address both Corporate Priorities and priorities identified through self-evaluation.

The new Priorities are attached as (Appendix 2).

Progress on relevant actions within the business plan are reviewed on a quarterly basis, in line with other actions, and progress is also reported to Estyn via the LALI meetings on a termly basis.

6.1.3 Self-evaluation Report

Estyn identified in their report that overall the quality of self-evaluation is not strong enough. In response to this, the Education Directorate have revised the self-evaluation cycle (Appendix 3).

The structure of the self-evaluation report has also been restructured so that it reports directly against each of the 5 Corporate Education Priorities. There is a clear focus on progress against the priority, impact and next steps. There is also a section to identify and evidence progress against the 3 recommendations.

6.1.4 Performance Management

Estyn identified that the LA has suitable performance management processes in place where officers have access to monthly support sessions and regularly review progress against targets. However, they also identified that targets are not consistently precise enough and do not always identify the specific aspects of practice that officers need to improve which means that performance management processes are not aligned consistently with evaluation and improvement work. As a consequence, a review of performance management processes in the Education Directorate has been undertaken and the following changes/actions are in place:

- Performance management targets now link to the Business Plan priorities that the member of staff is working towards
- Performance management focuses on both support and accountability, as previously there was too much of a focus on support
- All members of the Education leadership team are undertaking a coaching and mentoring qualification. This will be used to further develop performance management processes.

6.1.5 Education Directorate Vision

Estyn commented that the vision was not clear enough and therefore was not widely understood by key stakeholders. Consequently, a review of the Education Directorate vision is currently underway. As part of this review it was identified that the current vision does not capture all aspects of the Education Directorate portfolio and consequently when the vision was reviewed ensuring all areas of the Education Directorate were reflected was a key consideration.

The Education Directorate have developed a draft vision and 'How Statements' to explain how the Education Directorate will achieve the vision (Appendix 4).

A consultation process with key stakeholders has now commenced.

6.1.6 Progress against Recommendation 3

Estyn's third recommendation require the LA to accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern. The LA currently has two schools who are formally categorised as causing concern, Brynmawr Foundation School and the River Centre. The Improving School Report details progress against this recommendation.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

It is essential that the Education Directorate address the 3 recommendations to ensure that they can provide services for the children, young people and the community, that are fit for purpose.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

The LA has shared the inspection findings with stakeholders, including Headteachers and partners. Pupil voice is a key area for the Education Directorate and examples of this are included within the inspection findings, it should also be noted that a member of the Youth Forum contributes to the work of the People Scrutiny Committee.

A consultation exercise on the draft vision and 'how statements' has also started.

6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

The report enables the Education Directorate to plan as resourcing, risk and performance is continuously reported. The Estyn findings provide a baseline of where the services are currently placed, and most importantly, where we need to be in the future.

6.5 Preventative focus

If the Education Directorate does not act on the recommendations in the Estyn report in an appropriate way, and can not feedback progress in the termly Local Inspection meetings, there is a risk that the Local Authority will be placed in a category.

6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

The LA is working in collaboration with the EAS commissioned service to support the two schools who are in a category.

6.7 Integration (across service areas)

The LA commissions its school improvement function on a regional basis.

6.8 Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions

There are no implications arising from this report.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

There are no implications arising from this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The performance of the Education Directorate is monitored through the democratic process via various reporting mechanisms including the Finance and Performance Report, the Assessment of Performance and various performance monitoring reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

[Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent LGES Inspection](#)

[Appendix 2 – Overview of Education Directorate Business Plans](#)

[Appendix 3 – New self-evaluation cycle](#)

[Appendix 4 – Draft vision and how to statements](#)



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

A report on education services in

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

**The General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 6DN**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent has a total population of around 67,000 people, and a school population of around 9,400 pupils. There are 25 schools in the local authority, including one that provides Welsh-medium education.

The local authority works in partnership with four other local authorities in South East Wales for some of its education services, including a regional school improvement services (the EAS), a regional ethnic minority support service (GEMS) and a regional support service for learners with sensory and communication needs (SENCOM).

The Council Leader and Executive Member People & Education were both elected to their roles in May 2022. The interim Chief Executive took up post in April 2022, and the Corporate Director for Education took up post in November 2020.

In 2022-2023, the local authority's education budget is around £66,637,000. The delegated school budget per pupil in 2022-2023 is £5,697, slightly higher than the Wales average of £5,032.

The local authority's last inspection was in January 2013. Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people in Blaenau Gwent is noted below:

- Over a three-year average, 31.2% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are eligible for free school meals, higher than the Wales average of 23%
- 6.1% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are from ethnic minorities, lower than the Wales average of 13.3%
- 1.8% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have English as an additional language
- 1.1% of pupils aged 5 or over are fluent in Welsh, lower than the Wales average of 15.6%
- 15.5% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have additional learning or special educational needs

Summary

The local authority has made good progress with its education services since it was last inspected around ten years ago as important areas for improvement have largely been addressed. One of the local authority's four priorities in its current corporate plan for 2022-2027 is to 'maximise learning and skills for all learners to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'. Senior officers and elected members have a strong commitment to education and this is reflected in the funding given to schools and education services.

The local authority generally plans well to make sure that it has suitable education provision to meet the needs of every child and young person. Over the past decade, the local authority has successfully reduced surplus places in schools and improved the conditions of its school buildings. The local authority is suitably developing its Welsh-medium education provision. Whilst there have been some positive developments in provision for pupils with additional learning needs, the quality of planning for future provision is variable.

There are many strengths in the local authority's work to reduce the impact of deprivation on education outcomes and its support for families in low-income households. There are also many strengths in the services to support children and young people's well-being and promote positive relationships.

The authority has worked with its regional school improvement service to strengthen the challenge and support it provides to schools. This work has greater impact for children in non-maintained and primary age settings than for young people in secondary age settings. Provision for young people was too slow to improve in two schools placed in statutory categories.

Despite strengths in education services, corporate leaders have not ensured that their vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood by other officers, elected members, school staff and external partners. Also, corporate leaders have not ensured that the corporate plan is supported by coherent delivery plans for education that include related actions and measurable success criteria. Overall, the quality of self-evaluation, planning for improvement, and performance management is not strong enough.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the corporate leadership of education services
- R2 Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management
- R3 Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern

What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of the publication of the inspection report.

Main findings

Outcomes

We are unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes. This is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers between March 2020 and February 2022. It is also due to the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that we consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations. Any evaluations that follow provide a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or relate to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

Between September 2017 and March 2020, we inspected eight primary schools, one all-age school and one secondary school. Overall, inspection outcomes during this period were in line with the national average. We judged that standards were good in all but one of the primary schools. However, standards in the all-age school and the secondary school were judged to be adequate and unsatisfactory respectively, and both schools were placed in a statutory follow-up category. Although one of these schools has been removed from its category, both of these schools were slow to improve standards following their inspection. Since inspections resumed in February 2022, we have inspected two primary schools and a special school. We asked both primary schools to provide case studies of good practice, but the special school requires special measures.

In the three years before the start of the pandemic, the proportion of pupils who achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or above including English or Welsh and mathematics varied considerably across the authority's schools. One school performed consistently well, one school performed consistently satisfactorily, one school had a worsening trend and one school performed consistently poorly.

In the school inspections between September 2017 and March 2020, pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning were judged to be good in many schools. For the three years from 2017 to 2019, overall school attendance was consistently lower than the national average. However, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was higher than that of their peers nationally and rates of persistent absenteeism and unauthorised absence were broadly in line with national averages, which are positive given the socio-economic context of the authority. The rate of fixed-term school exclusions of five days or less was well above the national average, although the rate of fixed-term exclusions of more than five days was broadly in line with the national average.

After Year 11, almost all young people progress to further education, employment or training. This is a particular strength given the historically high levels of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and given the challenging socio-economic context of the authority. Young people continue to benefit from support from dedicated officers beyond their initial destination after Year 11 that helps them to move to an alternative education, employment or training destination if their initial destination does not work out.

Children and young people currently benefit from a wide range of services to support their well-being. Children and young people aged 10 to 25 are well supported by the authority's counselling service in schools and communities which, on average, leads to considerable reductions in emotional distress. Young carers have identity cards that help to reduce barriers that can prevent them from participating fully in and benefiting from activities that their peers enjoy. Vulnerable children and young people benefit from free after school and holiday activities that develop their literacy and numeracy skills and support their personal and social development, physical health and well-being.

When given the opportunity, children and young people in the authority influence decisions that affect them. A young person is elected from the Youth Forum to be a member of the scrutiny committee that considers education matters. The voice of secondary age pupils has supported the development of helpful LGBTQ+ support groups in all their schools.

Education services

How well does the local authority challenge and support non-maintained settings and schools to improve?

Officers in Blaenau Gwent generally know their schools well and have developed a good understanding of the contexts of different schools. Following a review of the education service structure, the local authority created a dedicated senior leadership role for school improvement and inclusion. This has increased the capacity of the local authority to work more closely with schools and to link more effectively with the regional school improvement service, the Educational Achievement Service (EAS).

Officers have strengthened and improved their relationships with senior leaders in most schools. Most headteachers feel that officers listen to their views and take account of their opinions. For example, headteachers identified that pupils' reading skills are weaker following the pandemic and the local authority has commissioned the EAS to support schools to improve these skills.

The local authority and the EAS work well together to support schools. School improvement partners have a well-structured plan of work with school leaders across the academic year, starting with sessions that focus on school self-evaluation and professional discussions with key staff from the school, the local authority and the EAS. These sessions help to identify the level and nature of the support that schools will benefit from to enable them to address their improvement priorities successfully. A single plan for each school outlines the support that the school will receive, details of grant spending, school improvement priorities and termly evaluations of the progress against these. Officers implement a tiered approach to providing support to schools. When schools need additional support, officers implement the Team around the School approach to ensure a holistic approach that meets the bespoke needs of the school.

There are currently no primary schools or non-maintained settings requiring follow-up activity after inspection. Over the past two years officers have identified a few primary schools that require improvement. The local authority and the EAS have provided good support for these schools to help them to improve. This support includes

strengthening the governing body and commissioning curriculum support through the 'local network of schools' process. Where the local authority uses its statutory powers to appoint governors, it takes care to match governors' skills and expertise closely to the needs of the school.

The local authority early years team and the advisory teacher from the EAS provide the three non-maintained settings with effective advice and guidance. This includes support for evaluation and improvement planning as well as guidance on how to create a stimulating environment for young children. This support is helping the settings to deliver good quality provision for their children.

Two schools in the local authority require special measures currently, one secondary school and one special school, and one all-age school was removed from the category of needing significant improvement in February 2022. In two of these three schools, officers did not recognise important shortcomings or the need for school leaders to make significant improvements prior to these being identified by inspectors. The pace of improvement in these two schools has been too slow. Reviews of progress in these schools show that issues identified at the time of the inspections, particularly around the quality of teaching, are not being addressed quickly enough and impact on learners' progress for too long a period of time. Officers do not monitor progress closely enough or ensure that school improvement partners set sufficiently precise and focused success criteria against which progress can be measured. In a few instances where improvement partners lacked the relevant specialist knowledge and skills to be able to support and challenge schools, the local authority challenged the EAS and ensured that suitable improvement partners were put in place.

The EAS and the local authority provide a range of appropriate professional learning opportunities for staff at all levels in schools. These include national leadership programmes and training to support teaching and learning. In addition, the local authority delivers its own useful complementary programmes for aspiring and new headteachers, which helps to mitigate the challenge of recruiting experienced senior leaders to schools in the county. Recent changes to the programme to support governors means that they now access training matched better to their needs.

How well does the local authority tackle inequalities in education experiences and outcomes for children living in poverty?

The local authority has a clear commitment to reducing the impact of poverty on education outcomes. Officers know their communities well and use information they gather locally, national surveys and reports to identify needs and prioritise resources. Heads of service across the local authority have established an anti-poverty council and elected members have recently set up a cost-of-living crisis group. Elected members are committed to addressing this issue, and a new member 'poverty champion' brings knowledge and expertise to help support this aspect of their work. Members look beyond their authority to see what they can learn from others to help improve Blaenau Gwent for its citizens.

Officers collaborate well across directorates on issues relating to poverty to enable resources to be targeted towards those most in need. This is helping vulnerable families to access services where they can get suitable advice, support and practical

help. Officers work well with local charitable groups to provide support for families who are struggling financially, as well as ensuring that period poverty does not lead to educational disadvantage.

The local authority uses a wide range of approaches to help mitigate the effects of poverty in pre-school and children's early years in education. This begins before birth with support for mothers-to-be by, for example, encouraging healthy eating and developing budgeting skills. There are groups for new mothers to help with parenting, for example the 'Lap not App' programme that promotes the development of bonds and relationships. Flying Start hubs are largely within local communities to make them as accessible as possible. Within these hubs, there is holistic support for parents, including opportunities for education and training to access employment.

Officers ensure that schools spend their pupil development grants appropriately, supporting them to make well-considered decisions and challenging them on the impact of their spending. Headteachers value the support the authority provided during the pandemic. School holiday enrichment programmes provide structured childcare for children to have access to sport, craft and environmental activities. Children taking part in these programmes have a daily meal provided for them, learn to cook simple, healthy recipes and have opportunities to prepare meals for their families to dine together.

From September 2022, the local authority increased catering capacity to provide universal free school meals for all pupils up to Year 2, going beyond the Welsh Government's minimum requirements for the roll-out of free school meals at this stage. The authority works with a specialist dietician to ensure that meals are healthy and nutritious, and that they cater appropriately for an increasing number of pupils with special dietary requirements. Additionally, healthy schools co-ordinators work with schools and settings to promote healthy lifestyles, for example by promoting healthy snacks in the early years.

The authority identifies vulnerable children and young people of all ages using a range of suitable risk measures. The needs of the more vulnerable are considered by multi-agency panels. Professionals track, monitor and support vulnerable children and young people through a named support worker. These children and young people have support during important milestones, such as transition from primary to secondary schools and on to post-16 education, training or employment.

Families First funds four social workers to work with schools across clusters. This enables schools to access appropriate support quickly for pupils and families to reduce the risk of disengagement from school and learning. Recently, the authority has restarted its family engagement work following the pandemic, for example supporting pupils returning to school and those with examination anxiety.

The authority acknowledges the work of young carers in the authority and the challenges they can face. Local authority and health professionals proactively identify young carers so that can offer them suitable support. Over the past three years, young carers have been provided with a National Young Carers ID card, which gives access to a range of helpful benefits and incentives to help them and their families, such as free access to leisure facilities and permission to collect prescriptions for

those they care for. Elected members recognise and celebrate the contribution of young carers at an annual awards ceremony.

How well does the local authority support schools to promote respectful relationships and address negative behaviour effectively?

Through the education psychology service and an 'inclusive practice service', all schools have access to a range of suitable support to promote positive, respectful relationships and address negative behaviour effectively. These two services work closely together.

Officers in the education psychology service provide helpful training for school staff, including Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training for teaching assistants. They provide valuable guidance for additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCos) that helps them to consider how to best meet pupils' additional learning needs.

The local authority commissions one of its special schools to provide the 'inclusive practice service' for other schools. This service provides beneficial support for staff to understand behaviours in schools and respond appropriately. It has recently modified its approach from directly supporting individual pupils to providing professional learning to school staff so that they can support pupils themselves.

The local authority has recently developed new 'positive relationships and behaviour' guidance and a 'relationships (anti-bullying)' policy, although there was limited involvement of schools and learners in developing these. The anti-bullying policy sets out the expectation that schools will record all alleged incidents of bullying, outlining the specific types of bullying, including bullying involving pupils with protected characteristics. Previously the local authority had not been collecting information about incidents from schools in a way that would enable it to identify potential issues and act upon them. The local authority has improved its work in this area by purchasing a safeguarding information management system for every school that is being used to record and report incidents and related pupil demographics at school level and collate this information centrally. It is too early to evaluate how well the local authority and its schools are using this system.

The local authority has developed an effective early identification tool, which identifies children and young people aged 7 to 25 years who may be at risk of exclusion or disengaging with education, employment or training, or becoming homeless. Through Families First and a multi-agency approach, the local authority provides helpful early support for these children and young people. Blaenau Gwent's youth service provides strong support for young people aged 11-25 who are at risk of being excluded or being not in education, employment or training (NEET). Working closely with other support services, youth workers support young people on a one-to-one basis and in groups, both in schools and in their communities. This co-ordinated approach has helped young people to remain engaged in their education and has supported a reduction in school exclusions. The proportion of young people who are NEET has reduced considerably over the last decade and young people are supported positively beyond their initial destination after Year 11.

The youth service co-ordinates a counselling service for children and young people from age 10 to age 25 that is provided in schools and community locations. This service provides helpful support for children's and young people's emotional well-being and mental health. A community psychologist provides young people with more specialist support, if necessary, where they are unable to access this through traditional routes. More recently, the local authority has established play therapy for children in Year 2 to Year 6. These services help children and young people to better understand behaviours and manage their relationships with others as well as reducing their emotional distress.

A dedicated detached youth team is used effectively to address anti-social behaviour in local communities. For example, following concerns about the behaviour of some young people in a car park outside of school hours, detached youth workers used their skills to divert young people to more suitable activities. Incidents of anti-social behaviour have reduced wherever this team has worked, and this work supports the work of schools in promoting good relationships.

The authority has very recently established a vulnerable learners panel, which involves senior leaders from secondary and all-age schools. It was established in collaboration with schools to improve the well-being of vulnerable pupils and help decrease exclusions. Early signs suggest that this panel is adding value to the existing range of services.

The range of useful support services to promote positive relationships in schools and communities means that exclusions are low in many schools, although a few schools still have high exclusion rates.

How well does the local authority ensure that the interests of learners are above all others in its planning for schools and other education provision?

Over the past ten years, or so, the local authority has been successful in both reducing surplus places in schools and improving the conditions of its school estate. The local authority has been prepared to make difficult decisions in relation to closing schools and replacing them with mergers and new builds. Where appropriate the local authority has modernised school buildings, for example through refurbishments and extensions.

The local authority has kept its school organisation policy under review and recently amended it to reflect recent developments, including the impact of the pandemic. The policy appropriately considers and incorporates national and local priorities such as its Welsh in Education strategic plan and information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. However, the engagement of headteachers in this strategy was variable and the strategy is generally not well understood. In addition, despite many appropriate actions to improve connectivity and developments in relation to ICT, there is no clear ICT strategy.

The south-east Wales regional sustainable communities for learning group was established by the local authority around five years ago and has recently been extended and includes local authorities from outside the region. The group's work currently focuses on sharing information on processes regarding the planning of

school places, standardising costs, and issues regarding sustainability and carbon neutral designs.

The key focus of the local authority's Welsh in education strategic plan (WESP) is to ensure that Welsh-medium provision is available and accessible in all three of the county's valleys. This is a sensible and pragmatic approach and is supported well by plans to increase access to pre-school and nursery Welsh-medium provision. The Welsh in education forum (WEF) comprises a broad range of partners and provides an effective steer for this work. Officers are aware of the risks in not being able to deliver the WESP's priorities and are considering appropriate steps to mitigate against these risks. The WESP's focus on improving Welsh skills of pupils in English-medium schools and expanding Welsh-medium provision in post-16 is underdeveloped. The local authority is considering working with Merthyr Tydfil and Powys local authorities to scope out the possibility of establishing a Welsh-medium secondary school to cater for the expected rise in demand during the next 10 years.

The local authority has a well-established Welsh-medium primary school in Blaina. An immersion provision is being developed at the school, which will provide additional opportunities for pupils to access Welsh-medium education. There are well-developed plans to open a seedling Welsh-medium primary school in Tredegar in September 2023. This school will also offer childcare provision and a resource base for pupils with autism.

Despite recent closer working between colleagues in education regarding the planning of provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), data is not always used effectively enough to inform long-term planning. This is illustrated by the recent decision to increase capacity at a special school by nearly 40%. The needs of children with complex special education and medical needs, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, are generally known from a very young age, so the demand for additional capacity should have been foreseen and planned for in a more timely way.

The local authority has established useful resource bases in several mainstream schools for pupils with additional learning needs. In some cases, these resource bases helped to address surplus places in the mainstream schools, but as the number of pupils in mainstream classes in these schools has increased, a few schools are now struggling for space. In 2017, the local authority undertook a very useful review of resource base provisions. This identified strengths and areas for improvement across the provisions. However, the ongoing monitoring of these provisions is inconsistent. There are very few references to these provisions in notes of visit from school improvement partners. Where they are referenced, comments made are too limited to be of any value to the local authority and rarely evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' progress.

Senior leaders have a suitable vision for inclusion and pupils with ALN. However, this is not yet supported by a clear strategy. A range of very useful policy and guidance materials have recently been shared with schools.

The local authority makes provision for pupils in out-of-county settings. Half of the pupils currently placed in out-of-county provision have additional learning needs related to their social, emotional and behavioural needs. The local authority does not

analyse its use of out-of-county settings well enough in order to understand the implications for its capacity to meet the needs of pupils locally.

Leadership and management

Leaders in Blaenau Gwent place a high priority on improving outcomes for children and young people across the local authority. The local authority has high aspirations for regeneration and education to enable all children and young people in the local area to thrive and succeed. Lead elected members and senior officers are committed to improving conditions for their community so that deprivation is not a barrier to long term success. Elected members and officers demonstrate a strong commitment to 'maximise learning and skills for all learners to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent', one of the four priorities set out in the corporate plan 2022-2027. Corporate leaders and the education directorate are beginning to refine their approaches to ensure that this commitment is translated into specific and measurable actions.

Senior leaders in the education directorate have worked with elected members and other senior officers across the council to establish a suitable vision for education. This aims to create a 'school-led, self-improving system that develops 'better schools, better citizens and better communities'. However, this vision is not communicated clearly or consistently enough by the corporate leadership team. As a result, the strategic direction for education is not sufficiently understood by all elected members, officers, or staff in schools.

Corporate leaders have not ensured that the corporate priority and directorate vision for education are coherently reflected in education plans. The corporate plan sets out how the local authority will know how well it is doing in relation to its priority for education, but the range of broad indicators in the corporate plan are not developed sufficiently into specific success criteria against relevant actions in education plans. This disconnect between corporate and education plans tempers senior leaders' ability to hold officers to account for their work and ensure an appropriate pace of improvement in identified areas. Nevertheless, the executive board, which includes senior elected members and senior officers from across the local authority, is used appropriately to hold education officers to account for progress against planned actions. In the board meetings, members challenge officers suitably.

Despite the weakness in corporate leadership, the education senior management team has developed strong working relationships with officers across the directorate and places a high level of trust in staff at all levels to deliver high quality services. Senior education managers have good oversight of most education services covered by our local inspection questions. These services have strengthened over time to better meet the needs of children and young people, and are having a positive impact on their outcomes.

The education senior management team meetings provide suitable opportunities for education leaders to monitor progress against planned activity. However, the quality of improvement planning and evaluation within the education directorate is too variable. Plans do not always include suitable success criteria, and evaluations therefore focus too often on whether actions have been completed rather than the impact they have had on improving provision and outcomes for learners. In

mitigation, senior managers have a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their services areas than is reflected in planning and self-evaluation documentation.

Performance management processes in the local authority are suitably established and used to support officers and hold them to account. Officers have access to monthly support sessions and regularly review progress against targets set. Despite this, performance management targets are not consistently precise enough and do not always identify the specific aspects of practice that officers need to improve. As a result, performance management processes are not aligned consistently with evaluation and improvement work, and accountability does not always focus on the most important aspects of officers' work.

There are suitable examples of officers accessing useful professional learning to improve aspects of their work, such as managing staff and supporting their well-being. However, the local authority does not have a strategic enough approach to planning or evaluating the impact of professional learning across the directorate.

The local authority has strengthened working relationships with its regional school improvement service (EAS). As a result, officers in inclusion services are working more closely with school improvement partners to provide a holistic approach to supporting schools. The local authority has recently improved the way it holds EAS to account for operational aspects of their work, for example when considering the usefulness of notes from school visits by school improvement partners.

Leaders make appropriate decisions when they are concerned about the progress of schools. For example, the authority has issued warning notices to a few schools that were causing concern and used its powers to appoint additional governors. In a few cases, the progress that schools causing concern make is too slow and the local authority is not sufficiently challenging school leaders, the work of EAS or holding its own officers to account for the impact of actions in these schools.

Elected members, through scrutiny, carry out their duties diligently. They regularly challenge and scrutinise decisions and officers respond promptly to their requests. They have a good working knowledge of the local authority and the members briefings have provided them with suitable professional learning, which has improved the way in which they hold the local authority to account for its work. However, due to the weaknesses in evaluation across the directorate, members are not always provided with a clear enough picture of the strengths and areas for improvement across the directorate. This limits their ability to hold the local authority and the EAS to account for all aspects of their work.

Officers and elected members are committed to safeguarding young people in their local authority. There is an appropriate safeguarding culture within the local authority. All officers and elected members receive suitable safeguarding training. The way in which education and children's services work together has contributed well to improving multi-agency working and the support schools receive to manage the needs of pupils and their families more effectively. The advice and guidance provided to schools by officers is valued by school leaders and helps them to respond to safeguarding concerns appropriately. Elected members are beginning to develop

their understanding of safeguarding in education and challenge appropriately the content of reports they receive.

The authority's prioritisation of education is reflected in its allocation funding for education further above its Indicator Based Assessment than most local authorities in Wales. It also increased funding to schools this year by a higher percentage than the Welsh average. The authority also budgeted for the highest spend per pupil of all authorities in Wales this year. The authority delegates a higher percentage of its education budget to schools than many other Welsh local authorities. To support the improvement of school buildings, the authority has also allocated nearly £7million of its capital funding over 2019-2025 for Band B of its 21st Century Schools programme.

The authority has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget. The authority is projecting a small overspend this year and understands its key current and future budget pressures for education that include energy costs and home-to-school transport.

Overall, schools' balances increased in the three years prior to the pandemic. None of the authority's schools were in deficit at the end of last year. In common with other local authorities, total schools' balances have increased significantly during the pandemic due to additional grant funding but the authority anticipates that schools' balances will reduce by the end of this year, and in future years. The authority has applied its scheme for schools' financing where schools were in deficit prior to the pandemic. In previous years, deficit reduction plans were in place for a very few schools, although some actions were appropriately not taken during the pandemic.

The authority provides a comprehensive range of service level agreements (SLAs) for a range of services it provides for schools, such as catering and cleaning. Feedback from headteachers on some SLAs was mixed when the authority surveyed schools as part of a review of SLAs last year. SLAs were revised to take account of feedback and there is subsequently a high level of take-up for 2022-2025.

The School Budget Forum is generally well attended by headteachers and engaged in helpful activity such as reviewing the schools' funding formula and SLAs. The authority makes use of comparative data to inform reviews of its school funding formula, for example the re-allocation of some funding from primary to secondary schools. The funding formula was reviewed for each of the last two years.

Many headteachers agree that the authority provides good support for schools with their financial planning and nearly all agree that the authority provides schools with good human resources support.

The authority monitors appropriately the delivery of commissioned services, and key commissioned services, including the EAS and Aneurin Leisure Trust, have been discussed at scrutiny committee.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- consult the local authority on the local inspection questions to be used during the inspection, based on the authority's self-evaluation, strategic plans and relevant data held by Estyn
- analyse the outcomes from open questionnaires, including the views of learners, parents, school staff and governors, local authority staff, regional consortium staff, elected members and general public
- carry out a preliminary visit to the local authority to meet with a range of relevant partners to education services, such as learner representatives, headteachers and governors, and leaders from statutory and third sector agencies working with children and young people

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet with the leader of the council, elected members responsible for education services, elected members responsible for the scrutiny of education services, the chief executive, the director of education, other leaders and managers in education services, other relevant staff in the local authority, the managing director of the regional consortium for school improvement and other relevant staff from the regional consortium
- look closely at the local authority's self-evaluation processes
- consider the local authority's strategic and operational plans for improvement
- scrutinise a variety of documents, including information on learner outcomes, information on the performance of schools and other education settings, including information from the regional consortium for school improvement, minutes from a range of meetings, reports presented to council or scrutiny, information relating to the safeguarding of learners and any other information relevant to the local authority's education services held by Estyn

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection
- provide a draft copy of the report for the local authority to note any concerns with factual accuracy, and made amendments where necessary

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Publication date: 10/02/2023

Education Directorate Business Plan Priorities

Tier 3 Corporate Director of Education

Priority 1 - Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services

Priority 2 - Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community in Blaenau Gwent

Priority 3 - Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management

Priority 4 - Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services

Priority 5 - Maximise partnership working to meet community need

Tier 2 Head of School Improvement and Inclusion

Priority 1 - Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children and young people in schools

Priority 2 - Accelerate Improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern

Priority 3 - Ensure effective governance and delivery of school improvement and inclusion commissioned services

Priority 4 - Ensure effective ALN and inclusion provision

Priority 5 - Inclusion & Improvement contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles

Tier 1 Service Manager for Young People and Partnerships

Priority 1 - Create and maintain sustainability of the youth service by securing funding and spaces to deliver effective youth services

Priority 2 - Deliver a wide range of support and provision to young people aged 11-25

Priority 3 - Implement the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPPF) across the Borough, to ensure young people remain in or enter education, employment or training (reducing NEET figures) and provide early intervention to prevent youth homelessness

Priority 4 - Ensure consistency and quality in service delivery across the youth service and wider youth support services

Priority 5 - Ensure the Youth Service and Inclusion Services work collaboratively

Priority 6 - Manage the Young People and Partnerships service area effectively in terms of staff and financial resources available (both internal and external)

Priority 7 - Post 16 – Ensure Effective Post 16 Partnership arrangements are in place and embedded.

Priority 8 - ALT/Awen/Head 4 Arts: - Ensure Effective Partnership and Commissioning arrangements are in place for Sports and Leisure, Arts and Culture, Adult Community Learning and Libraries

Priority 9 - Young People and Partnerships to support delivery of the Sustainable Development Principles

Tier 1 Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change

Priority 1 - To ensure an effective Admissions and the Planning of Pupil places process to secure effective access to education, whilst also fulfilling the team's statutory responsibilities and ensuring regulatory compliance

Priority 2 - To ensure an effective Home to School transport provision is in place statutory responsibilities and ensuring regulatory compliance

Priority 3 - Delivery of projects to transform the ICT and digitalisation education provision and to ensure strategies and sustainability plans are in place

Priority 4 - Managing and improving the existing school estate provision – Facilities management, Health & Safety, emergency planning

Priority 5 - Effective delivery of transformation projects to ensure an informed approach to school organisation and the school estate is fit for the future -The Sustainable Community for Learning agenda (21st Century Schools), capacity reviews

Priority 6 - Development & delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and associated projects

Priority 7 - Education Transformation to support delivery of the Sustainable Development Principles

Priority 8 - Deliver Strong human, financial, risk and performance management within the Education Transformation Team

Tier 1 Service Manager for Inclusion

Priority 1 - Support schools to enable learners with ALN and those who are vulnerable are supported to make good progress

Priority 2 - Ensure the ALN and Inclusion service have policies and procedures in place in order to meet statutory requirements

Priority 3 - Ensure the commissioned services remain responsive to learners' and schools' needs while providing impact and value for money

Priority 4 - Development and management of workforce capacity and capability whilst delivering effective services within financial resources available

Tier 1 School Improvement (Vacancy)

Priority 1 - Ensure safeguarding processes in school are robust and that data is used effectively to inform Education Directorate improvement planning

Priority 2 - Develop and lead on a school improvement matrix, in partnership with the EAS

Priority 3 - Review and develop school governor processes and support

Priority 4 - Develop and lead on an Education Directorate Poverty Strategy

Priority 5 - Develop and lead on a Community Focused Schools Strategy

Priority 6 - Develop and lead on a Reducing School's Carbon Footprint Strategy

Priority 7 - Develop and lead on a Children and Young People's Consultation Strategy

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Education Directorate Self-evaluation Cycle 2023 – 2024

31 st October 2023	Annual Fade from each service area submitted to service managers
November 2023	Data from FADES used to inform Corporate Reporting
1 st November 2023	New Service Area FADES start (Nov 23 – Oct 24) – to be updated on at least half-termly basis
December 2023	Quarter 3 updates to Business Plans
December 2023	Annual Self-evaluation report produced for October 22 – October 23
March 2024	Quarter 4 updates to Business Plans
June 2024	Quarter 1 updates to Business Plans
September 2024	Quarter 2 updates to Business Plans

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Education Directorate draft vision:

‘Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-informed life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives.’

Draft 'How Statements':

- Ensure that children and young people's voice are at the heart of all we do
- Ensure our workforce and communities are consulted with, well informed and that we communicate with clarity
- Deliver school improvement services that support our schools to provide relevant, inspirational and aspirational learning opportunities for all learners
- Provide effective and responsive school support services
- Provide a school estate that is fit for the 21st Century
- Prioritise people’s physical, mental health and well-being
- Ensure effective collaboration with key stakeholders
- Ensure all services are inclusive
- Maximise opportunities for our communities
- Provide effective and supportive youth and community services

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Agenda Item 9

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **13th November, 2023**
Report Subject: **Improving Schools Programme**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**
Report Submitted by: **Luisa Munro-Morris, Interim Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
23.10.23	26.10.23	30.10.23			13.11.23	29.11.23		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme.

2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The report covers all schools and settings within the County Borough that have been identified by the Education Directorate, supported by the Education Achievement Service (EAS), and/or Estyn as needing to improve. The Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme operates within the regional arrangements for supporting schools across South-East Wales.
 - 2.2 Since February 2023, many of our headteachers and senior leaders have been engaging with Action Short of Strike (ASOS). This has led to the majority of our primary headteachers not engaging with Professional Discussions with the Local Authority (LA) since this time. Professional Discussions are an important way for the LA to engage with schools on their priorities for improvement, progress with implementing national reform, and to offer appropriate support where relevant.
 - 2.3 Presently, there are two schools formally within the Schools Causing Concern category – Brynmawr Foundation School and the River Centre. Following an inspection in the summer term, Bryn Bach Primary requires Estyn follow up. This does not place the school in an Estyn category.

3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 **Option 1**
Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.
 - 3.2 **Option 2**
Accept the report as provided.

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

4.1 Education remains a priority in the Corporate Plan. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 consolidates, clarifies, and reforms the law in relation to intervention in schools causing concern. The Welsh Government's statutory guidance for schools causing concern (February, 2014) details a local authorities' powers of intervention in schools causing concern, the grounds on which those powers can be invoked and the procedures governing the intervention process.

4.2 Through our education provision 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 ambitious and raises aspirations levels.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

The Council allocates approximately £50.4 million to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. In addition, Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements of approximately £350,000 from the core Education Directorate Budget. Processes such as monthly LA/EAS Partnership meetings are in place to ensure the LA can hold the EAS to account for the support and challenge they provide to schools and ensure value for money for the Local Authority.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Risk is associated with ineffective processes to ensure progress against priorities in identified schools. Failure to raise standards features in the corporate risk register of the Council in relation to schools causing concern. This risk is also reflected in the Education Directorate and EAS risk registers. A graduated response is in place to mitigate these risks; this approach is based on an early identification and support model:

5.2.1 **Universal support:** areas for improvement in relation to individual schools may be raised by a School Improvement Partner (SIP) or an LA Officer, and these are discussed in weekly LA/EAS meetings and more formally in monthly LA/EAS Partnership meetings, and appropriate courses of action agreed.

NB. Professional Discussions are held with all schools once per year. These are timetabled for the whole year. In schools where there are emerging risks they are prioritised early in the academic year. However, due to ASOS these discussions are not currently taking place in the majority of our primary schools.

5.2.2 **Targeted support/provision:** If a school is identified as needing more support by the LA, a 'Team Around the School' approach will be adopted.

Key partners are brought together on a half-termly basis, to support and challenge a school with specific areas for improvement.

- 5.2.3 **Specialist support/provision:** A school that has been issued with a statutory warning notice by the LA or has been placed in an Estyn category will receive further bespoke support, in addition to half-termly meetings. For example, a school will be supported with creating and delivering against a Post Inspection Action Plan.

KS4 data will be reported for the first time since 2019 again for the 2022/23 cohort. The Welsh Government are reintroducing All Wales Core Data Sets, and KS4 results will be published on 'My Local School'. Schools will be placed in Core Data Set families in the Autumn term 2023.

School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored by DLT on a fortnightly basis. School's safeguarding processes are also closely monitored. The quality assurance arrangements that are in place include the safeguarding matrix, keeping learners safe audit tool and the quality assurance visits which the Safeguarding in Education Manager completes and reports findings through a FADE approach to Education DLT. Holistic support packages are devised via regular intra Council services meetings between OD, finance, health and safety, education, and school governor support services. The quality of provision in schools and leadership is monitored and evaluated in conjunction with the EAS and is in addition to the work the LA undertakes directly with its schools.

5.3 **Legal**

The Improving Schools Programme operates within the legal framework of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are implications arising from the actions created to support those schools identified as a school causing concern and/or in an Estyn category. This information is held within each school's single plan.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

As part of their inspection, Estyn will comment on any health and safety concerns that they identify. The River Centre was issued with a health and safety letter. All of the recommendations in the letter have been actioned.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.2 **Schools in an Estyn Category**

6.2.1 **Brynmawr Foundation School**

The school was inspected in October 2019 and placed within the category of schools requiring Special Measures. Estyn made 4 recommendations:

- Improve pupils' standards across the school, including their literacy and numeracy skills.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching to motivate, engage and challenge pupils to make good progress in lessons.
- Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders' ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement.
- The school has been subject to an LA statutory warning notice to improve.
- Governance and the work of the Governing Body has significantly improved.
- The school now has an established Senior Leadership Team in place.
- The school continues to access support through the EAS Learning Network School model, working closely with Cardiff High School, with the Headteacher of Cardiff High School undertaking the role of School Improvement Partner.
- Until July 2023, the school was a part of the Welsh Government's national pilot for multi-agency support for schools in special measures, which involves a range of partners supporting the school and monitoring its progress in a systematic and responsive way. This pilot has now come to an end and the Welsh Government have decided that the arrangement will not continue past July 2023.
- Estyn completed a re-visit in the Spring and Summer term 2023. In the Spring visit they looked at the recommendations linked to pupil behaviour and leadership. Estyn recognised that the school had strengthened its approaches to supporting pupils' behaviour and wellbeing and further strengthened its work to improve leadership and plan for school improvement. It also commented that 'governors support the school with commitment and energy' and 'They have a sound understanding of the work of the school and provide appropriate challenge and support.'

In the summer term Estyn looked at the recommendations on pupil standards and teaching. They identified a number of strengths, including:

- 'The majority of pupils at Brynmawr Foundation School make sound progress, and a few make strong progress in their learning.'
- 'A majority of pupils write for an appropriate range of purposes across the curriculum.'

However, Estyn also identified some areas for further improvement. In both visits, Estyn concluded that 'Brynmawr Foundation School is judged to have made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.

- The school received preliminary KS4 data in August 2023 which showed good progress when compared to 2019 data, particularly in the core subjects.
- As a consequence of the KS4 data and 2 Estyn re-visits which indicate progress in the school, the LA made the decision to lift the statutory warning notice in September 2023. The school will continue to be a

Team Around the School when they are removed from an Estyn category, in order to ensure that appropriate support is still in place.

6.2.2 **The River Centre**

- The Governing Body of the school remains under statutory intervention because of the Statutory Warning Notice to improve dated November 2021.
- Staffing - The Headteacher remains absent from work. The school was previously supported by an Executive Headteacher arrangement. Since November 2022 a dedicated Acting Headteacher has been in post to provide consistent support for the school.
- The senior leadership team has been further strengthened through a secondment to the post of Head of Secondary Campus since spring, 2023.
- Following an Estyn inspection July 2022, the school was placed in Special Measures. Estyn made a number of recommendations:
 - Address those issues identified in the health and safety letter.
 - Establish a clear purpose and vision for the school and implement a staffing structure that is fit for purpose and adequately reflects roles and responsibilities.
 - Ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently engaging, broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for their next stage in life and learning.
 - Improve the behaviour of pupils, particularly on the secondary campus.
 - Improve the quality of the learning environment and culture, particularly on the secondary campus.
 - Improve the outcomes for pupils, particularly those on the secondary campus.
 - Establish systems, procedures and routines across the school that are clearly understood by staff and relevant partners.
- A Post Inspection Plan to address the recommendations was created by the school, with the support of the EAS, and the LA. Significant progress has been made against the actions within this plan, including:
 - Remodelling of the secondary site
 - A new vision for the school
 - New safeguarding procedures in place
 - New curriculum offer for pupils introduced September 2023
 - New behaviour policy in place
 - Home to school transport being provided by the LA since September 2023
- The school was subject to an Estyn re-visit in May 2023. Estyn recognised that good progress had been made and that the school is focusing on the right things to develop first. However, it also identified that the school was very early in its improvement journey.

6.2.3 **School Inspections**

6.2.4 **Bryn Bach Primary School (Appendix 1)**

Bryn Bach Primary School was Inspected in July 2023. Estyn commented in their report that ‘Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and participate in school life enthusiastically. They feel safe and secure and know who to talk to if they need help or support.’ However, they also commented that ‘While teachers are beginning to develop an overview of how well pupils are progressing in their learning over time, they do not always use on going assessment effectively enough to ensure that teaching provides sufficient challenge for all pupils’.

The report outlines 4 recommendations:

- Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement processes so that they impact more positively on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve standards of writing.
- Improve pupils’ Welsh oracy skills.
- Ensure that learning experiences meet all pupils’ needs and develop their skills systematically.

Due to Estyn’s findings the school has been placed under Estyn Review. This is the lightest touch of follow-up, as it is not statutory. It involves reviewing the progress the school has made towards addressing the recommendations highlighted in the report about 12-18 months after the publication of the inspection report.

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

Brynmawr Foundation School, The River Centre and Brynbach Primary are all participating in a Team Around the School approach. This is a multi-agency meeting where the school is both supported and appropriately challenged. The School Improvement or the Principal School Improvement Partner from the EAS attends this meeting to consult on ideas for supporting the school and to discuss engagement with opportunities such as EAS Reviews.

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

Monitoring school progress against priorities facilitates support for schools to ensure that they achieve and maintain high quality outcomes in the long term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Through effective monitoring and evaluation of school performance, early identification of emerging areas for improvement can be achieved with consequent early intervention to secure improvement. The effectiveness of the LA’s monitoring, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The LA collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of School Improvement services through the Education Achievement Service (EAS). The LA also works closely with colleagues in the SEWC region.

The LA also secures a range of pupil support services such as Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired, Speech and Language, and Ethnic Minority support services through regional collaboration. Within the LA, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to supporting schools within the Education Directorate and across the Council corporately as a whole.

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

The LA commissions its school improvement function on a regional basis.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

There are no implications arising from this report.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

There are no implications arising from this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Monitoring of improvement pathways is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members of the People Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet are sufficiently informed to enable them to hold the Authority to account effectively for the quality of education provision and hence pupil progress and outcomes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Inspection Report – Bryn Bach Primary School

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Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Bryn Bach County Primary School

**Merthyr Road
Tredegar
NP22 3RX**

Date of inspection: July 2023

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

About Bryn Bach County Primary School

Name of provider	Bryn Bach County Primary School
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	N/A
Number of pupils on roll	233
Pupils of statutory school age	171
Number in nursery classes	32
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%)	23.5%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	18.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	15/05/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/01/2015
Start date of inspection	03/07/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection. Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Bryn Bach County Primary School is a caring and welcoming environment for all its staff, pupils and families. Nearly all pupils enjoy school and feel happy and safe. Staff ensure that the well-being of pupils is a high priority for all and, as a result, pupils feel valued and proud to be part of the school community.

Members of the new senior leadership team have begun to make improvements to the provision for pupils. They have a clear vision for the future of the school. In a short time, they have improved arrangements for the teaching of reading and strategies for supporting pupils' well-being.

Relationships between staff and pupils, and between each other, are positive and supportive. Most pupils have positive attitudes to school life. They behave well during lessons and when moving around the school. The school provides extra-curricular activities that develop and enhance a wide range of skills effectively and inspire pupils to take up new interests. These experiences develop pupils' life skills and well-being positively.

Overall, the teaching and the learning experiences provided for pupils are appropriate. Staff provide pupils with numerous opportunities to build on their knowledge and understanding. However, staff do not ensure that pupils develop their skills systematically or apply them purposefully, for example in writing.

Self-evaluation processes are appropriate and inform leaders of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders regularly review the school's work against its improvement priorities and use a wide range of information appropriately including data from pupil assessments, carrying out learning walks and scrutinising pupils' standards within their books. However, leaders' monitoring activity does not always pick up on important areas of teaching and learning that need improving. Examples include the way teachers plan for writing, Welsh and how feedback helps pupils to improve their work as they move through the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement processes so that they impact more positively on the quality of teaching and learning
- R2 Improve standards of writing
- R3 Improve pupils' Welsh oracy skills
- R4 Ensure that learning experiences meet all pupils needs and develop their skills systematically

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

A majority of pupils enter school with skills around those expected for their age. However, a minority of pupils often begin school demonstrating weaker social skills, such as sharing and co-operating. Many pupils make effective progress in the development of their skills over time, such as with their reading and mathematics. However, their progress in writing, Welsh and their digital skills, is not strong enough. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress towards their personal goals and targets. Pupils eligible for free school meals make progress in line with their peers.

In nursery, a majority of pupils speak simply and share a few opinions, such as their favourite ice-cream flavours. By Year 2, a majority of pupils listen to adults well, but still speak hesitantly and often respond to questions with short answers. By Year 6, many pupils are confident when speaking to each other and to adults. For example, they discuss in thoughtful detail how they will design a device to ensure an egg will not break when dropped from a height.

By Year 1, a majority of pupils read simple texts with confidence and understanding. They talk about their favourite books and demonstrate a love of reading. By Year 2, many pupils read a range of age-appropriate texts with increasing accuracy and use features, such as pictures, to understand the story. In Year 4, most pupils read fluently and accurately for their age and recall well what they have read. Many pupils in Year 6 read a range of texts, including information texts and online resources, confidently and accurately. They discuss what they read maturely, referring to key points in the text thoughtfully.

The youngest pupils start to show an understanding of different forms of writing, for example making marks to write in a card. Many Year 2 pupils begin to write at a suitable length and for different purposes, such as to express their thoughts on the NHS. In Year 4, many pupils explain their ideas in writing suitably. They develop a series of sentences to tell a story or explain an idea logically and begin to organise their writing using paragraphs. By Year 6, many pupils create a few engaging pieces of writing, such as sonnets. However, many older pupils use only basic sentences and simple punctuation accurately and do not use descriptive language confidently enough. Their spelling is generally weak, and work is too often poorly presented. Pupils write to a similar standard across the curriculum but have too few opportunities to write at length.

In reception, many pupils use a few simple Welsh words and phrases suitably, such as to greet others in the morning. By Year 2, many pupils use and respond to simple questions, such as those asking how they are. In Year 4, most pupils use a few simple sentences competently. However, their recall of most sentences they have practised in class is poor. By Year 6, many pupils answer the same simple questions in Welsh. However, throughout the school, most pupils' Welsh language skills are weak.

In reception, many pupils count well in their play activities, and recognise and continue repeating patterns correctly, for example using two colours on a peg board. By Year 2 many pupils use their number skills confidently. They recognise and identify the properties of simple shapes well and use mathematical language correctly. In Year 4, many pupils have useful number skills. They represent data using charts, and many transfer their mathematical skills to a variety of contexts. By Year 6, many pupils have a useful understanding of place value. They create simple charts and graphs and use these to evaluate information. However, pupils do not always apply their skills to a wide enough range of purposeful activities well enough.

As they progress through the school, most pupils develop strong digital skills. They regularly use tablet computers to support their wider learning, and this leads to most pupils being confident and fluent in their use. For instance, pupils in Year 1 independently log on and access apps that support their letter recognition and formation. In the older classes, they access a suitable range of programs to support and share their work across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 3 use online forms well to design questionnaires and pupils in Year 6 create engaging presentations to share their research about modern slavery. However, their understanding of spreadsheets, databases and coding is underdeveloped.

Many pupils demonstrate effective creative skills. In Year 6 many pupils use their creative and observational skills well to craft a painting of an area of the school in the style of Renoir. In Year 4 many pupils construct high quality 'Green Man' sculptures in the forest school area using a range of natural resources.

Many pupils have strong physical skills. For example, in reception, pupils build a large cage for a giraffe from plastic building apparatus skilfully. They demonstrate good physical skills when balancing carefully on logs or creating bridges to cross gaps. In physical education sessions, many pupils balance on body parts skilfully.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and participate in school life enthusiastically. They feel safe and secure and know who to talk to if they need help or support.

Most pupils show compassion and understand each other's needs. They explain how they help others in lessons and around the school. Most pupils know the purpose of class rules and sanctions. They speak positively about the house point system and the rewards given at the end of each week. Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and at lunch and break times. However, a few younger pupils are still developing appropriate social skills when interacting with their peers during lessons, and do not always behave appropriately towards each other.

Many pupils are capable learners and have positive attitudes towards learning. They quickly settle to lessons, follow the routines of the classroom and are ready to learn. Where pupils receive helpful feedback on their work, they make simple changes that begin to improve its quality. Many pupils work collaboratively in lessons. For example, in Year 3, pupils work together to plan a drama performance retelling the story of Rama and Sita. They overcome difficulties by discussing and compromising to ensure that all are happy with the roles given.

Nearly all pupils begin to develop into ethical citizens. For example, Year 6 pupils study Greta Thunberg, and through this research have a good understanding of how they as individuals can impact the world in which they live. Many pupils know the importance of recycling and its effect on the environment. For example, they explain how recycling paper and milk cartons reduces the pressure on the Earth's resources. Many pupils have a good understanding of the rights of a child and try to ensure that their peers have equal opportunities during the school day. Many pupils successfully develop entrepreneurial skills during 'Enterprise Week'. For example, they plan how they can make money during the summer fair for a national charity.

When given the opportunity, many pupils develop their leadership skills well. Through groups such as the 'Tech Team', School Council and Criw cymraeg, they have a positive impact on school life. For example, the Criw Cymraeg promote a Welsh personality of the month, and this helps other pupils to understand the impact of Welsh people on the world stage.

Many pupils see the benefit of exercise and healthy eating on their general well-being and identify their time in the forest school area as one that promotes calmness and relaxation. Across the school, many pupils are ambitious and confident in their learning and show resilience when faced with a challenge. For example, when pupils in Year 3 produce an online form to make a survey on a French artist, they discuss the issues involved, solve problems of inputting a picture into the form and are supported well by the 'Tech Team' who encourage and guide their peers.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's curriculum focuses on developing pupils' learning as they move through the school. Each term, the school focuses learning in different themes that give pupils a broad range of experiences across all of the areas of learning. For example, pupils learn about the plight of the people in Ukraine in the topic 'where is the love'.

Pupils have a useful say in what they learn, and this helps to engage them in their topics successfully. For example, in the theme 'a bit of a do', pupils guide the topic towards learning about cooking and foods from around the world. However, staff do not ensure that pupils' learning builds systematically across the school and the curriculum tries to cover too many different learning experiences each term. As a result, pupils do not always sufficiently embed their knowledge and skills as they move through the school. In a few instances, teachers miss out important areas of the curriculum, such as religion, values and ethics (RVE), and provide too few opportunities for pupils to develop their English writing and Welsh oracy skills.

In the main, the school's curriculum provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to develop their numeracy, literacy and digital skills. The school has effective provision

to help pupils to develop their reading skills, including through a broad range of interesting texts and dedicated reading skills sessions. As a result, many pupils develop strong reading skills. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across the curriculum are too inconsistent. There are a purposeful range of mathematics sessions that give pupils a strong numerical understanding, but too few opportunities for pupils to apply these skills to real-life learning.

Throughout the school, teachers use a 'Bubbles and Missions' approach to learning. Many adult-led sessions provide pupils with suitable learning opportunities. However, 'missions' are often low-level tasks that do not help pupils to make strong enough progress and deepen their understanding. In the nursery and reception classes, pupils have plentiful opportunities to lead their learning and to learn outside. However, as a result of the organisation of the day a minority of pupils do not engage appropriately, and they spend too little time learning purposefully. In addition, teachers plan insufficient opportunities for pupils in the older year groups to learn in the outdoors, particularly in Year 1 and Year 2. In Years 3 to 6, teachers and support staff direct pupils' learning too closely, and the over-use of worksheets prevents pupils from working with enough independence.

Pupils have a useful range of opportunities to learn about the history and experiences of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. For instance, pupils study global issues, such as the slave trade and focus on the experiences of individuals, such as Walter Tull, the first Black officer in World War One. There are appropriate opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to develop a suitable understanding of the history and culture of Wales. For example, pupils study the life of the local politician, Aneurin Bevan and work with local artists to create tiles to celebrate the NHS.

In many sessions, teachers identify clear learning objectives and success criteria. They are beginning to involve pupils in setting their own success criteria and use modelled examples well to help pupils understand what they need to do for their work to be successful.

In a minority of sessions, teachers monitor pupils' learning successfully as the lesson progresses. They identify misconceptions or errors and provide pupils with useful verbal feedback that enables them to improve their learning. However, this does not happen consistently enough, and often pupils continue with their misconceptions and repeat the same errors. In many cases, teachers' written feedback is not helpful enough to allow pupils to understand how and where they need to make improvements to their work.

Support staff generally work well alongside classroom practitioners. They provide well-tailored support and interventions for pupils who find the work difficult or have other additional needs. A majority of support staff in classes ask well-chosen questions, for example to support pupils to think more deeply about what they are doing. However, a minority of support staff do not to always extend and deepen pupils' understanding effectively enough.

While teachers are beginning to develop an overview of how well pupils are progressing in their learning over time, they do not always use on going assessment effectively enough to ensure that teaching provides sufficient challenge for all pupils.

Care, support and guidance

Provision for most pupils' personal development is good. The school supports nearly all pupils' emotional, health and social needs well. The provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is a strength of the school and the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) works effectively with staff across the school to support the needs of pupils.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with additional learning needs well through a range of monitoring and assessment activities. Teachers successfully match the needs of pupils to worthwhile targets that lead into purposeful interventions to support their literacy and emotional development. As a result, most pupils with ALN make good progress in the development of their literacy, numeracy and social skills. Staff have built very good relationships with the pupils they work with.

Staff write and review one-page profiles with the pupil and their parents or carers, and this helps to ensure that pupils' needs are mapped correctly. Staff work effectively with a range of external agencies, such as the educational psychologist and mental health teams to support pupils and their families well.

Staff provide good support for pupils as they join the nursery class. Where pupils have specific needs, staff ensure beneficial additional support prior to the pupil joining. This ensures that most pupils settle well.

Similarly, the school works well with the local high school to support pupils with specific needs as they move from Year 6 to Year 7. For example, staff from the primary school host meetings between pupils, their families and high school staff to discuss pupils' one-page profiles and how the high school can build on the support provided by the primary.

The school ensures that pupils learn important facts about their bodies as they grow older and how to keep themselves healthy and safe. However, the school does not fully address the requirements of the relationships and sexuality education (RSE) curriculum, particularly for older pupils.

The school provides good opportunities for many pupils to use their imagination and be creative, for example, many pupils performed in the national singing group, 'Young Voices'. The school also ensures suitable opportunities for pupils to access a range of sports both competitive and non-competitive. For example, pupils compete in the cluster sporting events in rugby, netball and football.

The school promotes pupils' rights successfully through weekly collective worship. Pupils talk confidently about what is important to them in life and how relaxing and reflecting on activities can lead to a positive mental state. The local vicar visits the school to support the pupils in their spiritual development help them to reflect and value stories from the bible.

The school provides pupils with opportunities to become active citizens of the school through a variety of pupil leadership groups. Many pupils have identified aspirations for the future and older pupils have considered what skills they will need to meet their goals, for example developing artistic skills to become a fashion designer.

Leaders embed a culture of purposeful safeguarding processes among all staff and these practices are an integral part of their daily responsibilities. As a result, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. The school has robust procedures for monitoring and tracking attendance, which have a positive effect on the attendance of nearly all pupils across the school.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders have worked effectively with staff, pupils, families and governors to establish a clear vision for the school. All staff work together to encourage pupils to be responsible and respectful and, as a result, behaviour is good and pupils feel safe. School leaders' relationships with parents and carers are effective. This has a positive impact on pupils' well-being.

Senior leaders provide worthwhile and successful opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills. Nearly all staff take on a variety of roles and these are beginning to have an impact on the curriculum. Leaders encourage all staff to engage in professional learning that relates to the school's improvement priorities and the needs of individuals. Staff performance targets link clearly to important elements of the school improvement plan, for example pupils' well-being, the development of their reading skills and the use of research to improve provision. Leaders tailor performance management priorities well to staff's responsibilities and interests. Overall, leaders are developing a valuable culture of professional learning in the school.

Self-evaluation processes are appropriate and suitably inform leaders of many of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders use a wide range of information appropriately to inform their evaluations, including data from pupil assessments, carrying out learning walks and scrutinising pupils' standards within their books. For example, the school has identified writing and the development of skills as priorities for next year. However, self-evaluation processes are not always sharp enough, for instance in identifying shortcomings in the quality of teaching and learning.

The school uses specific grant funding effectively to ensure beneficial support for identified pupils. For example, leaders use the pupil development grant well to provide a range of intervention strategies to support pupils to improve their well-being, and literacy and numeracy skills.

The school addresses a majority of national and local priorities suitably. It has been particularly successful in implementing ALN reform. As a result, nearly all pupils with ALN make good progress towards their individual learning goals. The school's work on the Curriculum for Wales is developing appropriately. However, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills and the provision for the Welsh language are underdeveloped.

Members of the governing body know the school well and have a wide skill set that leaders within the school utilise effectively. They visit the school regularly, taking part in a variety of activities including learning walks, book looks, school assemblies and meetings with all staff.

Leaders have a sound understanding of their responsibilities in relation to keeping pupils safe and have established a strong safeguarding culture in the school. In most cases, governors make suitable arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking amongst pupils. However, they allow pupils to bring drinks other than water into school to drink during the day.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Publication date: 05/09/2023

Agenda Item 10

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **13th November 2023**
Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 19th December 2023**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**
Cllr Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member People and Social Services
Report Submitted by: **Scrutiny and Democratic Officer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	30.10.23			13.11.23			

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present to Members the People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 19th December 2023 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 July 2023, 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 19th December 2023, 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 19th December 2023, as presented.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 13th December 2023

People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Dates	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Cabinet / Council
Meeting: 19th December 2023 Deadline: 5 th December 2023	Director of Social Services Quarter 1 and 2 Update	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the quarterly update of the Director of Social Services Annual report.	Tanya Evans	Cabinet
	Director of Education Quarter 1 and 2 Update	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the quarterly update of the Director of Education Annual report.	Luisa Munro-Morris	Cabinet
	ICT Strategy	Pre-Decision To consider the Draft ICT Strategy and recommend approval by Cabinet.	Joanne Watts	Cabinet

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