

Improving Schools Programme

1.0 School Categorisation

The national framework for the categorisation of schools is based on a staged process. For the 2020-21 academic year this process has been suspended. In the interim the regional identification support level is now classified as high, medium, low and self-improving. However, in terms of the judgements shown in this report on the overall category of support are based on a four-colour model, green, yellow, amber, and red, with 'green' denoting the category where least support is needed.

Blaenau Gwent has a strong position overall on school categorisation and a relatively small number of Schools Causing Concern, with progress being identified in all of these SCC schools. In the case of schools categorised as Red, the school's Challenge Adviser works with the school to create a Single Plan i.e. the school development plan, which defines the support available through the Local Authority and the Education Achievement Service (EAS). In the schools requiring such improvement regular half-termly Schools Causing Concern meetings (SCC) are held, which in the case of Blaenau Gwent Schools are chaired by the Executive Member for Education and are attended by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Corporate Director of Education, Strategic Education Improvement Manager, Principal Challenge Adviser and EAS representatives. Following each meeting, the Schools Causing Concern Panel evaluates the progress which the school has made and determines the next steps which should be taken in relation to supporting the school. This can include the invocation of formal powers of intervention should that be considered appropriate.

2.0 Statutory Responsibility

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 consolidates, clarifies and reforms the law in relation to intervention in schools causing concern. The statutory guidance defines a 'school causing concern' as one which is:

- Subject to a Warning Notice issued under the 2013 Act.
- Not subject to Warning Notice but meets one or more of the six grounds for intervention and there is a related risk to the health and safety on any person that calls for urgent intervention
- Deemed by Estyn to require significant improvement.
- Deemed by Estyn to require special measures.

Under the terms of the Act, a school will be 'eligible for Intervention' where one of the following six grounds for intervention exist:

- Ground 1: The standards of performance of pupils at the school are unacceptably low.

- Ground 2: There has been a breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed.
- Ground 3: The behaviour of pupils at the school or any action taken by those pupils or their parents is severely prejudicing, or is likely to severely prejudice, the education of any pupils at the school.
- Ground 4: The safety of pupils or staff at the school is threatened (whether by a breakdown of discipline or otherwise).
- Ground 5: The governing body or headteacher has failed, or is likely to fail, to comply with a duty under the Education Acts.
- Ground 6: The governing body or head teacher has acted, or is proposing to act unreasonably in the exercise of any of its or his or her functions under the Education Acts.

Local Authority powers of intervention

Under Section 5 of the Act, the LA is able to intervene in schools causing concern in the following ways:

1. Direct the governing body to secure advice or collaborate with another school
2. Appoint additional governors and nominating a new Chair
3. Appoint an Interim Executive Board
4. Suspend the delegated authority for the governing body to manage the school's budget
5. Direct the governing body to take certain action or to desist from taking certain action.

A school remains eligible for intervention by the LA until one of the following events takes place;

- the authority gives notice that it is satisfied that the grounds for interventions that have been dealt with or that using its powers of intervention would not be appropriate for any other reason.
- the Welsh Ministers determine that the power to intervene is no longer in effect and give notice in writing to the local authority and the governing body of their determination.

3.0 Performance Information and Data

All schools are usually categorised on an annual basis in accordance with the National Model for Categorisation. The process takes place at a regional level and historically when in operation the national moderation has confirmed that the regional process is robust. This process has been suspended though since 2020, in line with national requirements.

3.1 School Categorisation January 2019

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

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School).
- **2** schools were categorised as Amber (one school Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary remained as Amber with Brynbach Primary School being categorised from yellow to amber due to the need to provide additional support. Overall this represented a reduction of 2 schools compared to the previous year.)
- **10** schools were categorised as yellow (Coed-y-Garn Primary, Glyncoed Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Sofrydd Primary Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, Ystruth Primary with a further 3 schools moving from Amber to Yellow, including River Centre, EFLC and St Illtyd's Primary)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Deighton Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School with a further 3 schools moving from Yellow to Green Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Cwm Primary and Willowtown Primary). This is again an improvement on the previous year and over a three-year period represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

3.2 School Categorisation January 2020

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

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School), as both schools are in an Estyn category.
- **2** schools were categorised as Amber (Glyncoed Primary School and Sofrydd Primary School.)
- **10** schools were categorised as Yellow (Coed-y-Garn Primary, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, St Illtyd's Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, River Centre with a further 2 schools moving from Amber to Yellow (Brynbach Primary

and Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary) and one Deighton Primary School moving from Green to yellow)

- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Cwm Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary, Willowtown Primary, Ystruth Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School. This is again an improvement and represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and further demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

3.3 School Categorisation 2020/2021

As previously explained the school categorisation process has been suspended and as such no comparative data is available, however, there has been progress made in made in a number of schools.

3.4 Brynbach Primary School (Yellow to Amber to Yellow)

In January 2019, the school was categorised as Amber in 2019 in recognition of the additional support required by the then recently appointed Headteacher. Throughout that academic year, the then EIB processes reported that progress against the school development plan priorities are Good with the school being removed from category at the end of the year and the categorisation process for 2019/20 confirming that the school was now categorised as Yellow.

3.5 Glyncoed Primary School (Yellow to Amber)

Glyncoed Primary School was classified as Amber in January 2020 as a result of concerns in relation to leadership capacity at the school as a result of a number of leadership changes over a period of time. Progress was evaluated and assessed as strong and during the autumn term 2020 the school was removed from the SCC process noting the evident progress that had taken place at pace.

4.0 Schools Causing Concern Update

The regional approach to School Causing Concern was amended in preparation for the 2019/20 academic year and the protocol is embedded at the end of this document. As such, these meetings form part of a wider drive by SEWC Councils and EAS to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people. The Council and EAS roles will be principally:

- To review and evaluate pace and progress in relation to identified School Development Plan priorities.
- To challenge the Headteacher and Governing Body on the rates of progress in their school.

- To recommend and monitor actions aimed at accelerating improvement.
- To consider the extent to which the school has been successful in achieving required improvement. This will determine future actions by the LA and EAS. This may encompass:

4.1 **Schools Causing Concern (SCC) Progress:**

During the period from March 2020, schools have been operating under very different and challenging circumstances. In March, the focus of the Council/EAS support for schools shifted to the delivery of the National Continuity of Learning Plan and subsequently the regional distance and blended learning PL offer. During this time, national programmes for leadership and regional network meetings have continued and schools have engaged with these activities to varying degrees. In addition, SDP review meetings, Team Around the School meetings, Schools Causing Concern meetings and bespoke meetings with individual schools have given schools opportunities to identify and access appropriate support. During this period schools have been presented with a wide range of professional learning opportunities and support to deliver distance and blended learning.

Since March 2020, restrictions have meant that school visits have been very limited, and evaluations of the quality and effectiveness of leadership and the quality of teaching and learning have been undertaken largely through virtual meetings and review of documentation. Opportunities to examine first-hand evidence have, therefore, been very limited as is the case in all schools across Wales. At the commencement of the 2021/22 academic year there were only 3 schools identified as a cause for concern and one school was added to during the spring term. Below is summary of their progress made to date:

4.1.1 **Sofrydd Primary School (Yellow to Amber)**

Sofrydd Primary School was categorised as Amber in January 2020 as the school development plan was identified as unsatisfactory and became part of the regional schools causing concern arrangements. During early 2020, a Leadership and Management review was commissioned which reported to the governing body of the school just prior to the initial wave of the pandemic.

The purpose of the review was to evaluate and review the current leadership standards in the school, the quality of provision and standards achieved by pupils to provide an evidence base, to support the school to identify its key priorities for improvement and enable the local authority and the EAS to provide the appropriate level of support.

The review identified 12 key recommendations for securing improvement and now informs the work programme that is being progressed. Key to this improvement agenda has been the need to improve governance arrangements, which have continued to be strengthened through the

successful recruitment of a new Chair of Governors and Vice Chair of Governors who has continued to work alongside the Acting Executive Headteacher, this relationship has continued to deliver satisfactory progress against the recommendations, however, there is a need for the school improvement service to verify judgements. At the start of the Summer term 2021 a new Acting Headteacher commenced in post. This position will be kept under review in the summer term of 2021.

4.1.2 Schools in Receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice

4.1.2.1 Abertillery Learning Community (Red)

The school is currently subject to a LA warning notice to improve and a programme of intervention. However, it is important to note that for 2020 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon.

A school leadership review was undertaken in the Autumn term of 2017, which resulted in LA intervention and when the school was inspected in February 2018 it was then placed in the statutory category of requiring significant improvement. A follow-up visit was held in July 2019 and Inspectors noted the progress that had been made in respect of many of the recommendations for action from the inspection, although noted that many of the improvements are at an early stage of development and as such confirmed that the school will remain within an Estyn category. Following a successful period of leadership continuity by two established Headteachers, the Governing Body successfully recruited a suitably experienced Headteacher to the permanent position of Headteacher and also appointed a new Chair of Governors. Both have been in place now for in excess of 2 years. Additional LA governors remain in place to provide additional capacity to the governing body for progressing key personnel matters.

The Learning Community has had several changes in senior leadership since the core inspection:

- A new substantive Headteacher was appointed in January 2020.
- A new Director of Learning took up post in the Summer 2020.
- A Deputy Phase Lead at primary was appointed in Spring 2021.
- A new substantive Secondary Phase Lead started at Easter 2021.
- A new Secondary Assistant Headteacher started at Easter 2021

The Learning Community has engaged well with support on offer from the Council and the EAS. The model for supporting the school is via Challenge Adviser, with additional Learning Network School support (via Tonyrefail Community School). The Learning Community has engaged with this arrangement, though delays to planned support were caused in the Autumn and Spring due to COVID affecting capacity in both secondary and primary settings. EAS support visits commenced at the end of the Spring term 2021. The focus of support from the Challenge Adviser, and also from the Learning

Network School, is specifically to enable leaders to make strong progress against the school's recommendations

SCC meetings scheduled half-termly during 2020-2021 were disrupted by the pandemic, however, catch-up sessions between the Council and the Learning Community continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There were two formal SCC meetings that were held in the autumn; in October and December. In November 2020, the EAS had completed a review of progress against the Estyn recommendations using a limited evidence base gathered as part of an on-site visit. The outcome of this was shared in the December SCC meeting. The formal SCC meetings continued into the Spring term on a half-termly basis. Moreover, the Abertillery Learning Community Corporate Group was reinstated in the Spring term. The group is chaired by the Managing Director of the Council and the emphasis of the meetings is to gain corporate assurance against the Learning Community's capacity to improve standards and consider sustainability issues, particularly the revenue budget and dealing with the projected financial deficit. The ALC revenue budget provisional out-turn is a significantly improved position with a deficit circa £324,000 against the projected deficit of over £1m+.

There is also consideration of the following high-level strategic overview strands of work to capture the statement of actions moving forward. Updates are reported against areas set out below and progress is cross-referenced to the LA statement of action plan:

- OD strategy
- Financial strategy (5 Year Plan)
- Provision strategy (ICT, Inclusion, Youth service)
- Engagement strategy

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

4.1.2.2 Brynmawr Foundation (Amber to Yellow and to Red)

In December 2013 Brynmawr Foundation School was inspected by Estyn and placed in Estyn monitoring; with an adequate judgement for its current performance and prospects for improvement. Recommendations included

improving the school's performance and improving quality in teaching and learning. The school was categorised as Amber in 2014 and 2015. The school was issued with a statutory Warning Notice in 2015 to improve standards, particularly in Maths. Support was put in place and Key Stage 4 outcomes improved significantly in 2016. The Warning Notice was subsequently lifted.

Due to the improvement secured, in 2016 the school was classified as Yellow, having made strong progress against Estyn's recommendations and with improved performance at the end of KS4.

However, following an unexpected decline in KS4 performance in 2017, particularly in Maths and the outcome of an EAS review of the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school, the school was categorised as Red in the 2017-18 in the national school's categorisation process and invoked the LA powers of intervention. The school continues to be subject to a LA statutory warning notice to improve and after a period of support, intervention is now in place.

In the autumn term 2019, the school was inspected by Estyn and was placed in a category of Significant Measures and Members will already be aware from a previous report to this committee that the inspectors awarded a judgement against all four inspection areas of 'unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement' and against the inspection area of care support and guidance a judgement of 'adequate and needs improvement' was recorded.

Governance has significantly improved, the additional Governors that had been appointed have been removed evidencing the cultural growth that is now demonstrable within the Governing Body. However, it is important to note that for 2020 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon. The school's engagement in regional Professional Learning Opportunities and professional networks has been strong.

The school has had several changes in senior leadership since the core inspection:

- A new Assistant Headteacher was appointed at Easter 2020.
- Two new Associate Assistant Headteachers joined the leadership team this current academic year.
- The Assistant Headteacher who leads on inclusion and wellbeing will step down at the end of this academic year and a recruitment process is planned for May 2021 to appoint a replacement.
- A new subject leader for mathematics was appointed in April 2021 and will take up post on June 6th, 2021.

The school has engaged well with support on offer from the Council and the EAS, for example, LNS school to school support and Challenge Adviser support. The focus of support from LNS is specifically to enable leaders to make strong progress against the school's recommendations.

SCC meetings scheduled half-termly during 2020-2021 were disrupted by the pandemic, however, catch-up sessions between the Council and the BFS continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There were two formal SCC meetings that were held in the autumn; in October and December. In November 2020, the EAS had completed a review of progress against the Estyn recommendations using a limited evidence base gathered as part of an on-site visit. The outcome of this was shared in the December SCC meeting.

Additionally, the school also shared their own review of progress against the recommendations from the same period:

- In the December 2020 SCC meeting, the Headteacher reported satisfactory progress against all inspection recommendations.
- In the February 2021 meeting, due to school closure the Headteacher reported on the school's home learning strengths and shared results from its recent survey with parents/carers, pupils and staff.
- In March 2021 the headteacher reported that broadly 65% of pupils overall had engaged with online learning during the time of school closure.
- In the March SCC meeting the Headteacher outlined 'improvements' and 'continue focus' areas for each of the inspection recommendations, with no formal judgements presented due to the challenge of gathering first-hand evidence. The Headteacher also reported that governance was now effective in the school with the Chair of Governors solely focussing on BFS and that Governors had implemented new 'recommendation monitoring sub-groups'.
- The Headteacher outlined that the financial position for BFS has improved significantly with a projected surplus at year-end 2020-21 and this is evidenced in the provisional accounts.
- The Headteacher and Brynmawr Foundation School have wholeheartedly embraced the WG Multi-Agency Support for Schools in Special Measures initiative and the initial improvement conference was convened in April 2021.

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

In the Spring term of 2021, the Council acted promptly and issued a pre-warning letter to the Chair of Governors of the River Centre. The pre-warning notice clearly set out the Council's areas of concern, which were predicated around the school's pupil capacity and admission arrangements for learners. In essence, the pre-warning notice concludes that the school has not operated or functioned in accordance with the terms on which it was established, particularly relating to placement of learners back into mainstream settings. The governing body has responded to the pre-warning notice and the Council are seeking confirmation of full compliancy against expectations. There are also other concerns that have emerged, such as the quality of the School Development Plan that will be covered through the SCC protocols.

Following the issuing of the pre-warning notice a number of governors resigned from the governing body, which included both the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors. These vacancies have now been filled and a new Chair of Governors appointed as well as three strong LA Governors being appointed. Consequently, as the school has been identified as a cause for concern, in line with the regional protocol moving forwards the school will participate in SCC meetings with the LA and the EAS. The initial meeting at which an overview of the SCC process took place in March 2021 and the next meeting is scheduled for late May 2021.

5.0 Educational Inspections

5.1 Appendix 2 details the framework that Estyn uses when inspecting educational establishments and the levels of follow up activity.

5.2 Since the last inspection report to this Committee there have been no further Estyn inspections.