

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **21st July 2021**
Report Subject: **Improving Schools Programme 2021**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J Collins, Executive Member for Education**
Report Submitted by: **Lynn Philips, Corporate Director of Education**

| Reporting Pathway | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| 27.05.21 | 03.06.21 | 06.07.21 | | | 22.06.21 | 21.07.21 | | |

1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of the report is to provide Executive Committee with an overview of those schools that have been inspected in the period, including those schools that have presented as a cause for concern, their progress and the work delivered or currently underway to continue to support them to improve.

2. **Scope and Background**

The report covers the inspection outcomes reported on during the period and all schools and settings within the County Borough identified by the Education Directorate, supported by the, 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 and is aligned with regional policies and processes for school monitoring, evaluation, support and intervention. The regional arrangements build on the national frameworks and guidance and in particular the National Framework for Categorising Schools and the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The significant improvement in performance of Blaenau Gwent's schools during recent years and the latest position is explained further in Appendix 1.

The Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme focuses particularly on those schools which need to secure improvement in schools categorised as Amber and Red.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

The Executive is asked to accept the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness.

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 **Corporate Plan**

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

4.2 **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 Welsh Government's statutory guidance for schools causing concern (February 2014) details the local authority powers of intervention in schools causing concern, the grounds on which those powers can be invoked and the procedures governing the intervention process.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget**

There are no direct financial implications for this report. However, the Council allocates approximately £42.8 million to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes.

Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements of approximately £350,000 from the core Education Directorate Budget. The EAS is the Council's commissioned school improvement service commissioned to work directly with schools to provide professional challenge and support to improve. The Education Directorate holds the EAS to account for the impact and effectiveness of their work in schools in Blaenau Gwent. The EAS value for money report has previously been shared with Members that indicates an improving position i.e. educational standards are increasing with less financial resources.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

5.2.1 The Estyn Inspection Framework focuses primarily on standards, the quality of education provision and the quality of leadership in educational establishments and schools. Improving pupil performance is fundamental to the development of a highly-skilled workforce which is essential to Blaenau Gwent's longer term economic development. Failure to identify schools and provide support appropriately places at risk the quality of education and standards in individual schools. The Estyn Inspection approach provides an external viewpoint through which potential school risks are identified and resolved. Failure to ensure that there is robust monitoring of settings and of Council services carries with it a number of significant risks:

- Undetected and unaddressed decline in school performance and the quality of provision.

- Learners do not achieve to acceptable levels
- Lack of overall improvement in schools' performance
- Children do not receive the best start in life
- Negative impact on the reputation of the Council.

5.2.2 Similarly, ineffective monitoring of Council Services also poses a range of risks including:

- Reducing standards and quality of provision in settings
- Poor value for money
- Ineffective support for settings which hinders improvement
- Negative impact on the reputation of the Council.

5.2.3 However, there are clear Education Directorate led risk mitigation considerations in place that are facilitating strong school improvement. Mitigating actions include the routine monitoring of quantitative and qualitative information, regular quality assurance meetings between the Council and the EAS, regular quality assurance meetings within the Education Directorate and across teams, school inspection findings and school categorisation results. The progress schools make in their School Development Plans is also monitored on a half-termly basis. School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored on a fortnightly basis. School's safeguarding processes are also closely monitored. Although notably during the pandemic many of these routine business processes have been suspended, in line with national requirements. However, holistic support packages are devised for schools via regular intra Council services meetings between OD, finance, health and safety, education and school governor support services. Moreover, through ongoing robust self-evaluation processes school level performance data is regularly analysed and evaluated to identify emerging trends or possible underperformance.

5.2.4 The quality of provision i.e. the quality teaching and learning in classrooms is monitored and supported via the EAS. The quality of school leadership is also supported extensively by the EAS via a range of programmes and school-to-school networks. Through the monitoring of performance by means of Estyn reports, the Scrutiny/Executive Committees are provided with assurances that educational settings and supporting services are able to deliver provision of a high quality.

5.3 **Legal**

Estyn is an inspection body, established under the Education Act 1992. Whilst, the improving schools programme operates within the legal framework of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013

5.4 **Human Resources**

There is no direct staffing or workforce implications arising from this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 **School Categorisation**

Under normal circumstances, all schools are categorised on an annual basis in accordance with the National Model for Categorisation. The process has taken place at a regional level and historic national moderation has confirmed that the regional process is robust. However, there has been no school categorisation process undertaken since 2020. Importantly, Appendix 1 shows the significant progress made and the reduction in the level of support that Blaenau Gwent Schools require during recent times.

6.1.2 **Schools in the Red and Amber Categories, that have made positive progress (2019 to 2021)**

Appendix 1 details the progress of the following schools: -

- Brynbach Primary School; and,
- Glyncoed Primary School.

It is pleasing to note that both schools have made further positive progress and are now not in receipt of additional support with Brynbach Primary School being categorised as yellow in 2019/20 and Glyncoed Primary School was removed in the autumn term 2020 from the Schools Causing Concern process.

6.1.3 **Schools Causing Concern (SCC)**

6.1.3.1 **Schools who are in receipt of additional support 2019 to 2020**

Appendix 1 details the additional support that is now provided to Sofrydd Primary School (Yellow to Amber).

6.1.3.2 **Schools in Receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice (Red)**

Appendix 1 details the arrangement and progress for the two schools, ALC and Brynmawr Foundation School that are in receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice and the River Centre, which is in receipt of a Pre-Warning Notice letter.

6.1.3.3 **Educational Inspections**

Since the last inspection report to this Committee in the Autumn of 2020 there have been no further Estyn inspections undertaken.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

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

The regional policy for monitoring, evaluation and intervention in schools through the categorisation process is derived from the National Categorisation Framework, but has been evolved through the engagement of a variety of stakeholders including schools and members of governing bodies. A range of Council services and external partners are involved in delivering programmes to support schools requiring improvement. Monitoring progress towards targets enables effective targeting of support.

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

Analysis of aggregate school performance data is a key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need.

Monitoring of school performance facilitates support for schools to ensure that schools maintain high quality outcomes in the longer term.

6.2.3 **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 Council's monitoring, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

6.2.4 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The Council 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 Council 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 Council, the school improvement and inclusion leadership teams ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to supporting schools in the Education Directorate and across the Council as a whole.

6.2.5 **Integration (across service areas)**

The Council commissions its school improvement function on regional basis.

6.3 **EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)**

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since this is not a change of policy or practice. However, implementation of the council's monitoring, evaluation and intervention practice in schools has a positive impact on children and young people and on staff within a particular school. By improving the quality of education, standards are improved for all children and young people. Through the Council's school improvement strategy, particular focus is given to vulnerable learners and those who are at risk of underachievement.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Monitoring of Estyn reports and improvement pathways is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Executive are sufficiently informed to enable them to hold the authority to account effectively for the quality of education provision, and importantly, pupil outcomes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Improving Schools Programme

Appendix 2 – Estyn Inspection Framework

Appendix 3 - Operational appendix for meetings of Schools Causing Concern