

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **14th September 2021**
 Report Subject: **Education Services - Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member for Education**
 Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	26.08.21	01.09.21			14.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the findings of ongoing self-evaluation processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners, particularly for the Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

2. Scope and Background

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

2.2 The report provides a high-level narrative and the Education Directorate’s Self-Evaluation Policy (appendix 1), which sets out the arrangements for effective self-evaluation. The findings from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) are reflected as actions for improvement in the Directorate’s Business Plans at Directorate, Service and Team level. Effective self-evaluation means that the Directorate remains focussed on improving the right areas of work.

2.3 A comprehensive data set of 2018-19 school performance, coupled with evaluations of impact and effectiveness of Council based and partnership support feeds into the overall evaluation. It should be noted, however, that there has been a relaxation of reporting performance arrangements by Welsh Government. Therefore, the Education Directorate is unable to report on school performance data and categorisation has been suspended so any information presented in this report is to only be used for internal self-evaluation purposes. The report focusses on the Main SER updates, particularly the way that corporately the Council, Education Directorate and partners are supporting our schools/learners across the school estate. Self-

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

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

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

3. Options for Recommendation

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

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

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

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

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

4.1 Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan aims for every child to have the best start in life. Through effective self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, we seek to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress and performance is as good as it ought to be.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

5.1.1 The Council allocates approximately £46.5 million (2021/22) to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. The Council's total gross budgeted expenditure per pupil for 2021/22 was £6,980 which is the 2nd highest in Wales and £593 above the Welsh average of £6,387.

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

5.1.3 The Council commissions the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to deliver the statutory functions of school improvement. The annual financial costs being circa £352,000 and a 2% decrease on the previous financial year. Schools categorisation profile has improved over the last 5 years against a backdrop of decreasing financial contributions to the EAS: this therefore, effectively represents good value for money. The Education Directorate holds

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

5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

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

5.2.2 Risk mitigating actions include:

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

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

5.3 Legal

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

5.4 Human Resources

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

6. Performance Information

6.1 Performance

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

6.1.1 Areas where good progress has been made:

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

- Engagement with schools and school-to-school working has improved significantly.
- Recovery and Renewal processes e.g. impact assessments are well developed with key stakeholders, particularly the schools.
- Strong focus on wellbeing, as recognised in recent inspectorate activity.
- Sound progress has been made on ALN reform and curriculum reform readiness.
- School inspection and school categorisation profile has improved significantly with no primary schools in follow up and excellent practice identified in a number of schools;
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

6.1.2 Areas where further improvement is required:

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

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

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

6.1.4 The Education Directorate will establish a corporate group to work with services across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also

continue to develop a modernised relationship with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

6.2 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

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

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

Analysis of individual school performance data is a key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need. The Welsh Government will determine when schools will be required to resume reporting on performance data.

6.4 *Preventative focus*

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

6.5 *Collaboration / partnership working*

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

6.6 *Integration (across service areas)*

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

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

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

6.8 *Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment*

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

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

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

Background Documents / Electronic Links

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

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