

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements

The Local Authority's systems, practice and policy demonstrate that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements as detailed in the revised Keeping Learners Safe guidance. The Managing Director has overall strategic accountability for securing effective safeguarding arrangements across the Council. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy identifies key personnel and their deputies (including elected members) across all Council services with responsibility and accountability for safeguarding. The Council has a well-established Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee in place that scrutinises safeguarding performance across the Council's services and also involves key partners. CLT monitors arrangements closely. The strategic leads group keeps safeguarding arrangements under close scrutiny and is responsible for the implementation of the action plan arising from the WAO report regarding safeguarding.

Clear lines of accountability and reporting are in place. Named officers with clear responsibilities and accountabilities are in place. At Directorate level the Strategic Safeguarding in Education lead (SSL) is Michelle Jones and the Deputy is Claire Gardner. The Safeguarding in Education Manager (SEM) is Sarah Dixon with responsibility for the operational management and oversight of child protection and safeguarding issues in education. This post is located within the Social Services Directorate and is line Manager by the Children Services Manager.

The Designated Senior Person for Youth Service is Claire Madden, for Early Years and Play Claire Smith. The matrix evidences that all schools have a designated senior person DSP, a deputy DSP and a designated governor for safeguarding. All of the above ensure that there are clear reporting structures in place for each of the settings aligned to the Safeguarding in Education policy. All schools have a designated Lead for Children Looked After (CLA) who work closely with the CLA Education Coordinator and Mentors. The contact information is reviewed every September to ensure appropriate structures are in place in each setting.

Monthly meetings between the Strategic Safeguarding in Education Lead and the Safeguarding in Education Manager provides the mechanism for support, a coherence in approach and consistency of practice. The Professional Lead for Community Safety, who is the Council's Community safety and Preventing Violent Extremism lead, joins for part of these meeting to ensure that any broader community safety issues are shared and a joint multi-agency approach implemented. Regular meetings with corporate officers supports a coherence of approach, for example, the Safeguarding in Education Manager meets regularly with the early years and play, youth service, home to school transport, and school DSP's.

The Education Safeguarding Policy is updated annually and most recently during the Autumn Term 2020 and includes a section on Covid. The Policy has been extended to cover all education settings. The most recent version is being adopted by all school governing bodies; the safeguarding matrix confirms this. The effectiveness and impact of policies is monitored through regular review of the findings captured in the safeguarding matrix. Since the pandemic the routine sharing of information presented to the Education and Social Services Joint Scrutiny Committee has been suspended as schools were not in routine operation at this time. Following the return to face to face learning in April 21 this work stream is being progressed with an expectation that the routine data collection recommences.

Monitoring of safeguarding procedures have been enhanced by the development of a Quality Assurance protocol for validating processes across education services and a reporting timeframe into DMT. Learning from these visits informs future policy and practice. This QA process has had to flex during the year in response to the pandemic and this information was reported to the Education and Social Service Scrutiny Committee in October 2020.

The statutory Partnership Agreement makes clear schools' obligations regarding safeguarding. Adoption is monitored via close scrutiny of the Matrix. The annual return from commissioned services demonstrated that all services have appropriate safeguarding policies and practice in place. (EAS, GEMS, Youth Offending, SRS, and Gwent Music).

Historically, evaluation of the joint quarterly report identifies any emerging trends which are used by the Safeguarding in Education Manager (SEM) to inform her work in schools. Evaluation of this has informed the ongoing work programme of the SEM. However, the arrangements for the collation of performance information were improving following the implementation of the WCCIS system and is changing to a more contextual nature, however, the school information reported to Safeguarding Scrutiny has been temporarily halted as a result of the Pandemic.

During the year the LA began the implementation of the MyConcern model across all school settings. Take up has been varied and has been impacted by the pandemic but despite this it is pleasing to note that the majority of schools are now using the system. There is however a need to ensure all schools are using it moving forwards, so that there is a consistent approach which will enable the LA to use the overarching dashboard facilities.

The safeguarding needs of the Gypsy Traveller population is undertaken by the GT Coordinator. This academic year many gypsy traveller pupils (82.4%) are educated in schools, with very few (17.6%) being electively home educated. During 2019/2020, many of the gypsy traveller population eligible to transition to KS3, didn't transfer (3 out of a possible 8 pupils (37.5%), as opposed to (2 out of a possible 3 pupils (66.7% the previous year)). COVID had a huge impact on this year's figure. School closures, restrictions and limited attendance have affected opportunities for transition work to be carried out, this has in turn affected their transition to secondary school. Initially the GT pupils was not engaging with on line learning due to poor digital and literacy skills levels from parents. A lot of work had to be done to engage and give parents the confidence to support their children with online learning. Covid has had a negative impact on our year 11 GT pupils with regards to their aspirations. Pupils who wanted to go on to college no longer want to, due to fear of another lockdown, and confidence in their own ability with learning.

Attendance was a concern for some, due to fear over Covid. Majority of GT pupils are now back in school. Motivation and lack of concentration is poor in many cases, this in turn is leading to poor behaviour. Restrictions in school i.e. bubbles in school means that GT pupils cannot interact at play times with their normal friendship groups. Support that is currently being provided, baseline testing of literacy levels are being carried out, to prioritise which pupils to work with. Additional funding has been secured at Blaen-y-Cwm primary school, where 13% of their population are GT pupils. This will provide additional support to our GT pupils.

A Children Missing in Education Policy has been implemented in all schools; with training being delivered to school clerks - monitoring and managing this area of work remains an important area. This work is undertaken by the Education Welfare Service who undertakes monitoring activity on a weekly basis. For those children who cannot be located processes are in place with HMRC etc. During the 2019/20 academic year there has been an increase in the number of children missing from education (88 compared to 44 the previous year). However, all pupils were located with 100% CTF being sent. To date this year there has been a decrease in the normal CME referrals being made (29 moving out and 12 moving in). However, as a result of the pandemic there has needed to be a large amount of work around reception admissions and transfer into secondary schools. The reason for this is two-fold, in that a transfer form had not been submitted or the pupil had moved out of the local authority since the live birth data had been received (102 reception and 34 secondary pupils).

The 2019/20 data shows that there has been a decrease in the number of pupils being EHE (10 less at the end of the 19/20 academic year) and also a further reduction in the number of pupils being withdrawn (13 less than the end of the 19/20 academic year). The EHE fade captures the detailed analysis of this and identifies the following trends:

- A high percentage have previously been enrolled in school
- The number of pupils becoming EHE is above the Welsh average. The rate in Blaenau Gwent equates to 8.3 EHE pupils per 1,000 pupils in reception to year 11, compared to 8.5 in 2019. This is above the Welsh average rate of 7.0 per 1,000 pupils (6.5 in 2019). Whilst the rate across Wales increased by 0.5% it is pleasing to see that the rate in Blaenau Gwent decreased by 0.2%
- In KS3 there were 10 pupils that were withdrawn in KS3 during 2019/20. 15 girls and 13 boys became EHE during 19/20
- The month which saw the highest number of withdrawal for EHE is at the start of the academic year
- There were more girls than boys EHE.

PLASC 2020, 79% of families in Blaenau Gwent had received a visit in the last 12 months compared to the Wales average of 45%. Systems to monitor EHE are described as good and a number of planned actions were implemented during the year.

In 2019/20 there were 44 statutory school age children (compared to 30 in 2018/19) referred to the Youth Offending Service for either preventative or statutory intervention. 6 of these children were referred twice meaning that there were referrals for 38 individuals (compared to 34 in 2018/19).

The types of educational establishments and provisions for these children include alternate provision, OOC, Special school, EHE or mainstream provision. However, there is an increase within year of the number of children accessing alternative provision 36.8% in 2019/20 from 16.6% in the previous year.

When looking at the different types of placements for children from Blaenau Gwent, 36.8% of children (5 children) were attending an alternative provision compared to 16.6% in 2018/19. There were 38 referrals for children in Blaenau Gwent receiving intervention from YOS in the period covered by this report. Of those:

- 71% (27 children) were offered full time opportunities (25 hours) compared to 79.4% in 2018/19
- 23.7% (9 children) were offered part time opportunities compared to 14.7% in 2018/19
- 5.3% (2 children) had no provision in place as they were electively home educated (EHE)

Information about pupils who are subject to, or are witness to police attended incidents of domestic abuse, continues to be shared through Operation Encompass, in addition to the usual reporting mechanism. Information about pupils who experience / or who are affected by high risk domestic abuse is shared via representation by Education Welfare Service on MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference). From the data for the academic year September 2019 to August 2020 there were 518 occurrences involving 544 children and young people. The data suggests a greater incidence to children aged 4,5,6,7,10 and 17 being subject to such incidents. Accuracy of reporting requirements by the Police has been improved since implementation 71.3% of all details being recorded to enable Op encompass reports. Despite media coverage of increased domestic incidents during the pandemic and lock down, the data per month when compared to the previous year does not demonstrate consistency with the national trend that has been reported. Further work is needed to better understand how schools utilise this information to inform daily practice in supporting children affected by such incidents

Education officers attend most case conferences (83%). This represents a slight decrease from 90% last year. This will continue to be monitored by the Safeguarding in Education Manager on a termly basis. Any non-attendance is addressed immediately with the school concerned and has been followed up within DSP meetings. Any identifiable actions are implemented to support attendance.

There was a reduction in the number of reports being provided with only a minority being provided. A new case conference report template has been provided to education and this features in the safeguarding refresher training for DSPs.

In late 2015 new legislation (the Children (Performances and Activities) (Wales) Regulations 2015) regarding child performances came into force in Wales. Whilst Blaenau Gwent was compliant with legislation for those pupils that performed for larger companies, more work needed to be done, particularly with local amateur dramatics groups etc. A lot of this work has now been completed and companies contact the local authority for training and licenses. The data indicates through the increase in number of licences being issued that there appears to be a growing awareness of the legislative requirements under these regulations and the associated work undertaken to identify the range of amateur dramatic groups.

In 2019/2020 0 work permits were issued but that was mainly due to lockdown. There was however one refusal due to poor school attendance. There was no child employment campaign during COVID 19 as all schools and many businesses were closed. There were 2 investigations undertaken as a result of illegal child

employment and both were unaware of the legislation. Both premises were informed that the children were unable to work until the correct paperwork was in place. A site inspection was done on one of the companies that employ children and all appropriate safeguarding and health and safety measures were in place.

In the academic year 2019-20, Estyn judged KQ 4 (Care support and Guidance) as good in the two schools and adequate in one school that was inspected. A further detailed review of school inspections for the last three years demonstrated that for KQ 4 the majority (55%) of educational establishments were judged as good, 1 (9%) school judged as Excellent and none as unsatisfactory during 2017-20 and therefore the arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirement and give no cause for concern.

A quality assurance or system test protocol has been developed and the information from this is included in the Performance report to the joint Safeguarding Committee. However, there is a need to re-establish the routine reporting of information to this committee as we recover from the pandemic and move back to business as usual.

During 2019/2020, 15 visits were planned, six of these for the Autumn term. 5 of these 6 visits took place during the Autumn term. From the visits during the Autumn term, evidence has been gathered which has provided reassurance that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place in schools and other education services. Learning from these visits informs future policy and practice and is included in the Directorates self- evaluation process. In line with the agreed protocol the outcome of these visits are reported to DMT on an exception basis in the form of a FADE. The onset of COVID impacted directly on this process and no visits took place in either the Spring or Summer term. This protocol has been reviewed in light of COVID to enable visits to recommence from the Autumn term 2020.

At the onset of COVID, there was direct communication with schools regarding mechanisms for maintaining contact with vulnerable learners. A communication protocol was established. A safeguarding in education bulletin was developed to provide regular safeguarding information to schools and education staff. Referral pathways are regularly reinforced and relevant contact information shared.

Blaenau Gwent's anti-bullying strategy and toolkit provides support to schools when tackling alleged bullying in Blaenau Gwent schools. The local authority has a clear Behaviour Strategy, based on inclusive principles which underpin process and procedure, written within the context of a range of policies, provided by Welsh Government. Monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure the local authority is able to respond appropriately to incidents of bullying in schools. Bullying incident data is incomplete for 2019/20 due to COVID. Data from the Autumn term indicates that the number of incidents was of a similar level to the same period in the previous year. As in 2018/19, the majority of the incidents related to verbal/emotional bullying. In 2019/20 there was one exclusion as a result of bullying but again this figure should be understood in the context of COVID school closures.

During 2019/20, there were 56 occurrences of the use of RPI reported to the LA. The majority of those were from the two special schools, which accounted for 89% of occurrences. The remaining 6 occurrences were reported by two mainstream schools. This is a decrease on the number of incidents reported for the comparable period of the academic year 2018/19 where there were 114 occurrences reported to the LA from September 2018 to 20th March 2019, where nearly all were reported by the two special schools with two mainstream schools reporting a very small number of occurrences. Reported incidents of RPI are considered

in the first instance by the Safeguarding in Education Manager. Any concerns with the content of the report are then discussed with the school involved. On a half termly basis the Safeguarding in Education Manager and the Service Manager – Inclusion meet to review referrals and consider any specific trends that need responding to. The RPI policy was updated in February 2021 and circulated to schools. The policy contains a model school policy which includes the appropriate processes and procedures for all schools to follow.

Processes dealing with allegations against professionals are managed by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit in Social Services in accordance with All Wales Child Protection Procedures. The systems are embedded and AWCPP, Welsh Government guidance. The work of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board guidance underpins this work. The Safeguarding in Education Manager reports the current position to DMT which is then shared by the Corporate Director with CLT. In BG there were 16 cases involving 16 professionals between September 2019 and August 2020 56% of cases resulted in no further action with 25% resulting in an investigation and, 19% leading to disciplinary action. During the year a tender exercise was successfully completed to secure competent investigating officers to undertake any disciplinary investigations. This process has secured the appointment of 2 companies who have confirmed their professional status and GDPR compliance in handling data.

The Recruitment and Selection Policy, Safer Recruitment for Schools is cognisant of safe recruitment principles for supply staff. This policy has been adopted by school Governing Bodies. The process for managing DBS compliance is embedded across education services and schools. DBS compliance is managed by Organisational Development and any non-compliance is escalated and managed by Directors and senior managers in all departments. In 2019/20 DBS checks were processed for school and education staff. Of these, very few (60, 15%) were for new employees and most (336, 85%) were part of the rolling programme for renewing applications. Escalation processes implemented by managers are effective at dealing with any non-compliance. CLT receive quarterly DBS position statement and this is also shared with Corporate Safeguarding Leads.

At the end of the 2018/19 academic year a policy was developed that proposed that all governors undergo a DBS check on a four year rolling programme in line with their date of appointment. This policy is in place and referred to in the safeguarding policy which has been shared with schools for adoption. The implementation of this policy has been impacted by Covid but arrangements are in hand to resurrect the implementation of this policy.

Early years, Childcare and Play have established a safeguarding quality assurance tool which all centres are required to complete. This is a feature of the regular safeguarding meetings with this service which confirms that safeguarding arrangements are appropriate in these settings.

Safeguarding processes are well established in the Youth Service and fit for purpose. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, with robust records kept on all safeguarding matters including Multi-Agency Referrals to Social Services, feedback and staff training. Regular meetings are held between the Youth Service and the Safeguarding in Education Officer, and any areas of concern outside of child protection are escalated through this process.

During the 2019-2020 academic year the Youth Service submitted 44 safeguarding referrals for 37 young people to Children's Services, and 4 referrals to adult services for 4 young people. There was one referral to children's services and one to POVA for the same young person as they turned 19 during the reporting period.

A training programme has been implemented ensuring that all contractors have timely access to training, however, this year, the training programme has been interrupted by COVID. There are 12 operators that needs to fully complete the training which will account for 27 staff. Mop up training was arranged but implementation was delayed due to COVID. In addition, when the Council procures transport, potential operators are provided with the home to school transport policy which has a safeguarding statement contained within it. A QA visit was completed during the Autumn term following the return to face to face learning which confirmed safeguarding arrangements were fit for purpose.

The Corporate Safeguarding Leads group has been developing a Corporate training framework to ensure clarity and consistency in safeguarding training across the Council.

Regular evaluation of the Matrix reveals that all schools have updated their whole school safeguarding training within the last 3 years. Safeguarding training is now offered on a virtual platform to ensure continued compliance. The matrix reveals that at the end of the academic year 2019/2020, 3 DSPs required refresher training. A DSP training session will take place on 6th October 2020. DSP training is also supplemented through regular updates provided during termly DSP meetings. In addition, all other education settings have updated their safeguarding training with all DSPs in these settings being trained.

There are 227 childcare staff across the maintained & non-maintained settings, 201 have received the safeguarding training for practitioners. 104 Childcare Providers have Safeguarding Level 2. COVID meant that the Prevent Training is on hold, however all Schools have received details on how to access free online training modules relating to Prevent. These are HO approved. Details are shared via the Safeguarding in Education Briefing and a special school's Prevent Briefing.

Training for governors is offered through the BG specific EAS training programme and upon direct request from schools. COVID has impacted on the availability of this training during 2019/20. Plans are now in place to provide this training through virtual platforms.

Group 1 Training for VAWDASV was rolled out to educational settings in early 2018. The position at the end of August 2020 evidenced that the majority of Local Authority staff employed in schools, youth services and central education had undertaken the training (73% schools and 78% education central staff). Two dates were agreed for the Group 2 Ask and Act training specifically for Blaenau Gwent education staff. These were impacted by COVID. Dates have now been agreed to deliver these through a virtual platform.

Community Safety matters continue to be raised from time to time. However, COVID has restricted the ways we engage with the schools. As a result, the development of Safer School Partnership approach has been somewhat limited. Nevertheless, community safety advice, guidance and support on two cases during the reporting period led to an effective school-led mainstreamed response.

All DSPs have previously received WRAP training with an ongoing training online training modules communicated through the Safeguarding in Education Briefing. This specific focus and positive joint work between the education directorate and the community safety officer has resulted in the development of a Respect and Resilience action plan which further supports a multi-agency approach to tackling aspects of community safety impacting adversely on school life and is actively being progressed through business as usual activities.

The latest data available identifies that nearly all of the schools (96%) have registered, with many (71%) of these having completed all aspects. There is one school that is not registered There is further work to be done to promote the ongoing use of the tool. During the year the Council agreed that the 360-degree safe policy template is to be the agreed by the Executive and implemented in Blaenau Gwent schools. At the end of the year 2019 20, 72% of Blaenau Gwent schools had used the Welsh government funded Hafan Cymru Spectrum project to support their approach to healthy relationships. The Spectrum project had delivered 80 sessions to 947 pupils across seven settings. There were 79 members of staff in these pupil sessions.

The Local Authority has a comprehensive range of Health and Safety policies, procedures and guidance in place, which clearly sets out the management of Health and Safety, both at a Corporate, Directorate and school management level.

All schools have competent persons such as first aiders and educational visits coordinators to manage any risks. The Local Authority and schools meet the standards set out in HSE and WG guidance for Educational Visits. Arrangements for educational visits are effective and improving because: the revised Educational Visits Policy (2017) is in line with the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel National Guidance (OEAPNG); the Outdoor Advisers monitor all trips and visits and reports to Head of Service, indicating the level of authorised school visits on a monthly basis; and, all schools are complying with the EVOLVE system. School visits to high footfall areas now include the terrorist threat risk assessment as part of the EVOLVE process. Due to COVID, during the year very few visits took place.

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas where progress has been made

- The Safeguarding Matrix approach to capturing information is helpful and supports the ongoing improvement in practice in this area.
- The close working arrangements between Education and Social Services have developed well, further supporting a coherence of approach regarding safeguarding in schools and settings. The Safeguarding Policy is regularly reviewed and understood by key stakeholders.
- Recent work to respond to community safety issues, counter potential terrorism and extremist behaviours has progressed well, for example, the Safer School Partnership, and the Respect and Resilience Action Plan.
- The Operation Encompass work has progressed well and supports schools in this regard.
- Quality assurance processes to test the robustness of safeguarding processes have been implemented and inform ongoing work in this area.
- The new Council Policy requiring all school Governors to be DBS cleared is being implemented. Presently, very few are compliant.

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas requiring further improvement

- Continue to develop policy and practice that is responsive to emerging school concerns in line with the Vision for Education of school led improvement in a contextual safeguarding approach.
- Full implementation of VAWDASV (Group 1) training needs to be achieved at school level, as well as the implementation of Group 2 training across all LGES settings.
- The 360-degree safe Cymru Policy needs to be agreed by the Executive and implemented in all schools.
- Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability, including the roll-out of My Concern now that the Council has secured a revenue budget.
- Provide greater flexibility in the training offer to increase the uptake of safeguarding training by school governors

Risk Considerations

- There is a risk that the roll-out of the safeguarding package MyConcern is not implemented fully across the school estate.