

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **18th October 2022**
 Report Subject: **Improving Schools Programme**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S Edmunds, Executive Member**
 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)
	29.09.22	06.10.22			18.10.22	26.10.22		

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, in line with national changes to school evaluation, improvement and accountability changes.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The report covers all schools and settings within the County Borough identified by the Education Directorate, supported by the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and/or Estyn as needing to improve. The Blaenau Gwent (BG) Improving Schools Programme operates within the regional arrangements for supporting schools across South East Wales.

2.2 During 2021-22 the majority of BG's schools participated in a Professional Discussion with the Local Authority (LA), EAS and other partners. This discussion focussed on the school's priorities for improvement, the support it requires and identified practice that is worth sharing. Schools have received a series of briefing sessions across a range of forums, to enable them to prepare for the above new ways of working. This approach has continued for the 2022-23 academic year and all schools have been notified of the dates of their Professional Discussion session. Importantly, there has been an incremental reduction in Schools Causing Concern from 6 schools in 2019 to only 2 schools in 2022. Abertillery Learning Community has been removed from Estyn Significant Improvement category

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

Members to consider and accept the report as provided.

3.2 Option 2

Members to scrutinise the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

4. **Evidence of how does 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 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.

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.

4.3 These key plans inform business planning arrangements at an Education Directorate level which when coupled with the findings of self-evaluation enables the right support to be put in place to support school to improve at an appropriate pace.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial implications for this report. However, 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. Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements of approximately £350,000 from the core Education Directorate Budget and this is a decrease of 0.4% on the previous financial year.

5.1.2 There will be financial implications in supporting schools to improve and this is identified in the individual school support plan.

5.2 **Risk Including Mitigating Actions**

Risk is associated with ineffective processes to ensure good progress against priorities in identified schools. Failure to raise standards features in the corporate risk register of the Council, particularly in relation to schools causing concern. This risk is also reflected in the Education Directorate and EAS risk registers. Mitigating actions include the routine monitoring of quantitative and qualitative information, regular Securing Improvement Partnership meetings between the Council and the EAS, regular quality assurance meetings within the Education Directorate and across teams as well as school inspection findings.

5.2.1 There is regular review of a school's progress towards its priorities. For most schools not in a category this is achieved through professional discussions. As a result of the relaxation of the accountability framework, which culminated in the suspension of the routine collection of qualitative data by Welsh Government, this has created an inherent risk associated

with making informed judgements on school performance. School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored 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 DMT. 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 i.e., the quality of 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.

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 action identified to support those schools identified as a school causing concern and/or in an Estyn category. This information is in the support plan for the school, the post Inspection plan and the Local Authority Statement of Action.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 **Schools in an Estyn Category**

6.1.2 **Brynmawr Foundation School (Appendix 1)**

- The school was inspected in October 2019 and placed within the category of schools requiring Special Measures.
- The school continues to be subject to a LA statutory warning notice to improve and intervention is now in place. The LA reviewed the statutory warning notice in the autumn term.
- Governance and the work of the Governing Body has significantly improved.
- The school now has an established Senior Leadership Team in place.
- A strong support plan continues to be implemented as part of 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. Coaching and mentoring of leaders forms a core aspect of this support.
- The school continues to be 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, tailored to the specific needs of the school. The next LA led meeting is in October 2022.

- Estyn has undertaken two monitoring visits since the last report to the former Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with one visit occurring in the autumn term 21 and a further visit in the summer term 2022. In the most recent monitoring visit that occurred in the summer term 2022, inspectors reviewed two recommendations. 'R2 Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning' and 'R4 Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders' ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement. Estyn noted the progress made and concluded that 'Brynmawr Foundation School is judged to have made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.
- In particular, within the feedback, it was noted that for R2 - there are behaviour improvements. which have been sustained that are particularly around high tariff pupils. The new Assistant Headteacher role has had a positive impact although there is a concern as to whether the workload is too operational. The school now has a more systematic approach to behaviour but it needs to develop: -
 - The role of the pastoral Middle leaders
 - Focus on pupils' attitudes to learning and increase the challenge around the quality of teaching.
- R4 – Senior and middle leaders have undergone useful training and are developing in the right direction. Outcomes of the reviews are too generous, particularly judging the effectiveness of teaching in relation to its impact on learning. Some of the planning for improvement is still too broad and needs to be more whole-department level. Senior leaders should decide what is important and have a clear focus. There needs to be a relentless focus on teaching.
- As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is maintaining the level of follow-up activity.
- Estyn will re-visit the school in around four - six months' time to monitor progress against a sample of the recommendations.'
- A further Estyn monitoring visit is anticipated later this Autumn term.

Progress Update:

From evidence seen there is still work to be done, but the school is making progress against its recommendations although as set out above the pace of these improvements needs to progress. The school continues to be supported by Cardiff High School and a further monitoring visit is expected later this term. The next multi-agency meeting will focus on teaching and learning and will consider the role and impact that both senior and middle leaders will play in this area for improvement.

6.1.3 **Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community (Appendix 2)**

- The school was inspected in February 2018 and placed in the category of schools requiring significant improvement.
- The school received an Estyn monitoring visit in February 2022 and all six Recommendations were inspected:
 - R1. Improve standards, in particular outcomes at the end of key stage 4
 - R2. Improve standards of behaviour in the secondary phase
 - R3. Improve the quality of teaching
 - R4. Improve planning for progression of skills, including the Welsh language, and the breadth of the secondary phase curriculum
 - R5. Improve the quality and impact of leadership at all levels, including in self-evaluation and planning for improvement
 - R6. Provide robust financial management to address the deficit budget
- Estyn concluded that Abertillery Learning Community was ‘judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection in February 2022. As a result, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.’
- Following the outcome of the Estyn inspection the Local Authority formally withdrew the statutory warning notice under which the school had operated since 2018. However, the Local Authority will continue to support the school moving forward through the ALC Corporate Group continuing to function in supporting financial sustainability planning. The Learning Community will also be subject to regular Team Around the School (TAS) meetings to ensure that the school receives appropriate support to continue to improve. This support is particularly relevant as the experienced Headteacher that led the school out of significant improvement has recently advised the Governing Body and Local Authority of her intention to retire at the end of the Spring term 2023.

Progress Update:

- Arrangements are underway to secure a new Headteacher for the start of the summer term.
- The Learning Community will continue to receive support from the LA and the EAS, its commissioned school improvement service.
- This will include twice yearly professional discussions facilitated by the Local Authority and continuation of the ALC Corporate Group, which focuses upon the schools’ financial situation. The Resource Bases located at the setting will also be included in the LA review that is scheduled for this term.

6.1.4 River Centre (Appendix 3)

The previous report to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee in October 2021 identified that:

- The LA is concerned that the school does not engage with key statutory LA functions and services. The pre-warning letter of Spring 2021, which set out the LA's concerns, particularly- relating to ALN Panel engagement and school improvement shortcomings e.g., the School Development Plan (SDP).
- Schools Causing Concern/TAS meetings have not provided the LA or EAS with the assurance of the effectiveness of the school's provision/admissions for learners. As a result of a lack of progress in addressing the issues identified in the Pre-Warning letter; a Statutory Warning letter was issued to the Governing Body in September 2021. This set out the statutory grounds for intervention as follows:
 - **Ground 2:** there has been a breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed in that:
 - 1. The Headteacher and the Governing Body have been unable to share effective self-evaluation and a school development planning cycle based on regular and robust first-hand evidence of both provision and standards, both within the SIP cycle and the Schools Causing Concern protocols.
 - It is the view of the School Causing Concern panel that the Headteacher does not provide governors with all the information they need in a timely fashion for those governors to comply with their obligations to challenge the Headteacher.
 - **Ground 5:** the governing body or Headteacher has failed, or is likely to fail, to comply with a duty under the Education Acts as set out in Ground 2 and,
 - **Ground 6:** the Governing Body or Headteacher has acted unreasonably in the exercise of any of its functions as set out in Ground 2.
- Over the past 18 months, there has been much needed significant changes to governance leadership and staffing. This has included a paid LA appointed Chair of Governors being appointed, additional governors to bring further capacity and expertise.
- Staffing has been in a state of flux and there is a need to stabilise the continuity of staff predominantly in the secondary campus. A new senior leader with a focus on wellbeing will start October 2022 and recruitment for a Head of Campus Secondary and two additional teaching staff has begun.
- The Headteacher remains absent from work and the school has benefited from two experienced Headteachers undertaking an Executive Headteacher role, with the most recent appointment commencing in April 2022. This has provided additional capacity to

the setting through the release of experienced members of that schools' senior leadership team.

- Team Around the School meetings since the last report have predominantly focused upon consolidating the setting following the Safer School's response. The Safer Schools approach was implemented in February 2022 in response to an incident that culminated with the implementation of three key work streams to support the setting:
 - Building safety and security – building and infrastructure around the River Centre, particularly around the secondary site;
 - Staffing – staffing workforce issues with regards to safety and cultural development within the setting; and,
 - Vulnerable learners – support and understanding associated with the needs and complexities of the learners.

- The group was chaired by the Corporate Director of Education and the purpose was to secure a partnership approach to ensure that the setting is fit for purpose for learners and staff, with the primary goal being for the River Centre to become a safe setting for all its learners and staff, particularly the secondary setting.

- In the summer term, the LA/EAS sourced an experienced School Improvement Partner with track record of working in a Special School similar to the River Centre to work closely alongside the school.

- Furthermore, during the summer term the school received an Estyn Inspection, which placed the setting into Estyn's Special Measures category. There were 7 recommendations included in the report which are:
 - R1 Address those issues identified in the health and safety letter
 - R2 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
 - R3 Ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently engaging, broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for their next stage in life and learning
 - R4 Improve the behaviour of pupils, particularly on the secondary campus
 - R5 Improve the quality of the learning environment and culture, particularly on the secondary campus
 - R6 Improve the outcomes for pupils, particularly those on the secondary campus
 - R7 Establish systems, procedures and routines across the school that are clearly understood by staff and relevant partners

Progress Update:

- The LA and EAS continue to work alongside school leaders to respond to the setting's Estyn Health and Safety Letter and develop a Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP).
- During the summer period significant work has been completed in respect of building works that has seen the following improvements to the suitability of the secondary campus. e.g., toilet improvements, fencing and site safety.
- There is a need to ensure that the staffing at the secondary setting stabilises and sufficient capacity is in place.
- The Safeguarding in Education Manager continues to support the setting in progressing the required actions in the Keeping Learners Safe audit tool. Termly progress reports will be provided to the Governing Body and Education DMT on any work in this area.
- The Education Transformation and Business Change Manager is exploring funding avenues to develop a further programme of building improvement works to improve the learning environment.
- Meetings are in train with the newly appointed School Improvement partner.
- The Corporate Director is reviewing the statutory warning notice in the light of the recent Estyn inspection.
- The placement of pupils at the secondary setting recommences at the start of the spring term. ALN Panel will utilise the risk matrix when determining future placements that will assess the known intelligence, context and inherent risks.

6.1.5 **Schools Causing Concern**

6.1.6 **Sofrydd Primary School**

In the Autumn term 2021, a formal review of progress against the recommendations of the review that took place in 2020, with the new Headteacher and the leadership team. The review concluded to: -

- to remove Sofrydd PS from the SCC/TAS protocol arrangements, but the Local Authority and EAS will arrange a visit that falls outside of SCC requirements.
- the Panel congratulated the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors on the significant progress made in such a relatively short period of time.

6.1.7 **School Inspections**

6.1.8 **Georgetown Primary School (Appendix 4)**

Georgetown Primary School was inspected in June 2022. The school received a positive Estyn report and has been asked to prepare a case study on its work in relation to how it has developed the indoor and outdoor environment to improve pupils' well-being and learning, for dissemination on Estyn's website. There were three recommendations for improvement that were identified:

- R1 Ensure that self-evaluation processes identify the aspects of teaching and learning most in need of development and focus precisely on the difference actions make to pupils' progress and skills.
- R2 Improve older pupils' standards of writing.
- R3 Improve teachers' understanding of effective classroom assessment, including feedback, so that they can evaluate pupils' progress, and identify how best to support their next steps in learning.

The school has drawn up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

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

The regional pilot of new ways of working to reflect the new national arrangements for school evaluation, improvement and accountability 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.

6.4 **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 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 school improvement and inclusion leadership teams ensure that there is a coordinated approach to supporting schools in the Education Directorate and across the Council 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

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 Executive 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 – Brynmawr Foundation School
- Appendix 2 – Abertillery Learning Community
- Appendix 3 – River Centre 3-16 Learning Community
- Appendix 4 – Georgetown Primary School