

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **17<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

Report Subject: **Improving Schools Programme**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**

Report Submitted by: **Luisa Munro Morris Head of School Improvement and Inclusion and Michelle Jones Strategic Education Improvement Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
✓	22.12.22	04.01.23			17.01.23	18.01.23		

The Education Directorate's purpose is to deliver '**Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities**' / Pwrpas y Gyfarwyddiaeth Addysg yw darparu '**Ysgolion Gwell, Dinasyddion Gwell a Chymunedau Gwell**'

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the BG Improving Schools Programme, in line with national changes to school evaluation, improvement and accountability.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The report covers all schools and settings within the County Borough that have been identified by the Education Directorate, supported by the Education Achievement Service (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.
- 2.2 During the autumn term 2022 schools have continued to engage in the Professional Discussion with the LA, EAS and other partners. Professional Discussions focus on the school's priorities for improvement, implementation of national reform, the support it requires and identified practice that is worth sharing. This method of engaging with schools is now in its second year. Blaenau Gwent has seen a reduction in schools requiring the high levels of support; presently, there are two schools formally within the Schools Causing Concern category

## 3. Options for Recommendation

### 3.1 Option 1

Members are asked to consider and accept the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations.

### 3.2 **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 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 a local authority's 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 aspiration levels.

## 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

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. In addition, Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements of approximately £350,000 from the core Education Directorate Budget, and processes such as monthly LA/EAS Partnership meetings are in place to ensure the LA can hold the EAS to account for the support and challenge they provide to schools and ensure value for money for the Local Authority.

There are financial implications in supporting schools to improve and this is identified in the individual school support plan and is funded from within existing revenue budgets.

### 5.2 **Risk Including Mitigating Actions**

5.2.1 Risk is associated with ineffective processes to ensure progress against priorities in identified schools. Failure to raise standards features in the corporate risk register of the Council in relation to schools causing concern. This risk is also reflected in the Education Directorate and EAS risk registers. A graduated response is in place to mitigate these risks; this approach is based on an early identification and support model:

5.2.2 **Universal provision:** areas for improvement in relation to individual schools may be raised by a School Improvement Partner (SIP) or an LA Officer, and these are discussed in weekly LA/EAS meetings and more formally in monthly LA/EAS Partnership meetings and appropriate courses of action agreed. **NB.** Professional Discussions are held with all schools once per year. These are timetabled for the whole year. Within schools where there are emerging risks, these are prioritised early in the academic year.

5.2.3 **Targeted support/provision:** If a school is identified as needing more support by the LA, a 'Team Around the School' approach will be adopted. Key partners are brought together on at least a half-termly basis, to support and challenge a school with specific areas for improvement.

5.2.4 **Specialist support/provision:** A school that has been issued with a statutory warning notice by the LA or has been placed in an Estyn category will receive further bespoke support, in addition to at least half-termly meetings. For example, a school will be supported with creating and delivering against a Post Inspection Action Plan. There are also the Multi-Agency Support for Secondary Schools in Special Measures arrangements in association with Welsh Government. This forum is currently used for Brynmawr Foundation School and will be introduced for the River Centre in the new calendar year.

5.2.5 As a result of the Welsh Government's changes to the accountability framework, which culminated in the suspension of the routine collection of qualitative data, there is a risk associated with making informed judgements on school progress/performance. To partially mitigate this risk, BG's schools have agreed to share Assessment data on reading and wellbeing to support with self-evaluation of these two areas. The LA has partly funded this assessment provision through grant allocation. In addition, schools have shared their KS3 and KS4 data for self-evaluation purposes. This data will not be used to hold schools to account but may be used to support schools for self-evaluation purposes as well as the sharing of good practice.

5.2.6 School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored by DMT 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 in schools and leadership is monitored and evaluated in conjunction with the EAS and is in addition to the work the LA undertakes directly with its schools.

### 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 Action Plan and the Local Authority Statement of Action. In most cases, a single-plan approach is now in place where the above action plans are incorporated into one working plan, which all stakeholders work with and are held to account.

## 6. Performance Information and Data

### 6.1.1 Schools in an Estyn Category

#### 6.1.2 Brynmawr Foundation School

- The school was inspected in October 2019 and placed within the category of schools requiring Special Measures.
- The school continues to be subject to an LA statutory warning notice to improve and intervention is now in place
- Governance and the work of the Governing Body has significantly improved. Governors continue to receive tailored support to develop their effectiveness in the role.
- The school now has an established Senior Leadership Team in place.
- The school continues to access support through the EAS Learning SIP + Network School model, working closely with Cardiff High School, with the Headteacher of Cardiff High School undertaking the role of School Improvement Partner. During the autumn term the school has been supported by the EAS with assisted self-evaluation activities regarding teaching and learning, which concluded that teaching has improved but that in the majority of lessons pupils did not make sufficient progress in learning. There is still too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
- 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. The October meeting focused on leading teaching and learning and the role of leaders in the school with a view to accelerating the pace of improvements.
- Estyn completed its third routine monitoring visit during the late autumn term 2022. Estyn recognised that progress has been made but that learner progress remains variable. Estyn concluded that 'Brynmawr Foundation School is judged to have made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.
- Since the last monitoring visit, however, senior leaders are beginning to identify the aspects of pupils' skills most in need of improvement. However, this work has not led to sufficient improvements in pupils' knowledge, understanding or skills.
- Overall, teaching has too limited an impact on pupil progress. Estyn identified that in around half of lessons, there remain shortcomings in classroom practice that prevent pupils from making suitable progress.
- There is recognition by the Inspectorate, however, that teachers are beginning to use some worthwhile strategies, but teachers need to refine their use of the strategies and apply them more effectively. Estyn commented that it is important to share with BFS staff some of the positive messages from the visit to give staff the confidence to build on the strategies they are starting to use.
- The Education Directorate is working with the EAS and the school in relation to the pace of progress in improving teaching and learning. The Estyn monitoring feedback report is attached as **Appendix 1**.

### 6.1.3 **River Centre**

- The Governing Body of the school remains under statutory intervention because of the Statutory Warning Notice to improve dated November 2021.
- Staffing - The Headteacher remains absent from work. The school was previously supported by an Executive Headteacher arrangement. More recently since November 2022 a dedicated Acting Headteacher is now in post to provide consistent support for the school.
- The senior leadership team has been further strengthened through a secondment to the post of Head of Secondary Campus since November 2022.
- The Corporate Director of Education and the Acting Headteacher have engaged with all staff and the Trade Unions via monthly sessions.
- Following an Estyn inspection July 2022, where the school was placed in Special Measures, the Post Inspection Action Plan has been submitted to Estyn and an initial monitoring visit took place on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 which reviewed the PIAP and the LA Statement of Action. The outcome of this visit was that the PIAP was viewed as appropriate for addressing the setting's recommendations.
- A positive coffee morning was held with parents/ carers and both school and LA representatives on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022.
- The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion has established and chairs a weekly PIAP progress meeting, to which school representatives and LA officers are invited with a view to secure progress against the seven Estyn recommendations. The following are the high-level actions points from this term's activities:
  - Extensive remodelling work to the secondary campus including the provision of CCTV on site. The deadline for this work to be completed is Spring half-term 2023. This is funded by the LA and WG ALN grant circa £250,000.
  - Alternative provision has been put in place for secondary aged pupils.
  - Processes have been introduced to improve staff and family communication, tracking of pupils and record keeping.
  - It has been agreed with WG and Estyn that early in 2023 that the River Centre will form part of the Multi-Agency Support for Schools in Special Measures.

### 6.1.4 **School Inspections**

#### 6.1.5 **Coed-y-Garn Primary School (Appendix 2)**

Coed-y-Garn Primary School was inspected in October 2022. Estyn commented that 'Coed-y-Garn Primary is a warm and inclusive school, which promotes a positive atmosphere and ethos. Pupils enjoy learning and they are enthusiastic during lessons and in activities. This is due to the very strong working relationships that they have with their teachers and other staff. The learning resource base, and its pupils, play a very important part in the school's daily life.'

Estyn have requested that the school prepares a case study for dissemination on Estyn's website in respect of its work in relation to the impact of the teaching and the use of the learning environment to promote authentic learning experiences in the learning resource base. There were four recommendations for improvement that were identified which are:

R1 Address the issues related to the school site, identified at the time of the inspection

R2 Challenge all pupils through consistent and effective teaching

R3 Ensure that teachers provide opportunities for extended independent writing

R4 Ensure that teachers' feedback moves individual pupils on to the next stage in their learning effectively

The school has drawn up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. The first recommendation relating to health and safety has been largely addressed and Estyn have replied acknowledging the joint response that is being provided by the school and LA in planning to finalise these site-specific issues.

#### **6.1.6 Professional Discussions**

Professional discussions take place between the LA, EAS and our schools on an annual basis to discuss school priorities and progress, in line with the School Development Plan (SDP). During the autumn term professional discussions were held in six schools with further visits planned for the Spring term. This included Abertillery Learning Community which was recently removed from an Estyn category and this school will receive a second professional discussion later in the academic year to ensure that the progress made at the setting continues. Of the other professional discussions held during the autumn term, one school has been asked to engage in a Teaching CSSR to provide evidence of improvement in specific aspects of provision identified through work scrutiny in the autumn term. In the new year, if after receiving this report the LA feel the school needs additional support, the setting will be engaged through the early intervention 'Team Around the School' approach.

#### **6.2 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 school development plans enables effective targeting of support.

#### **6.3 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.

The format of this report will be reviewed in the Spring term 2023. The aim of the review is to ensure that the report provides Members with the most relevant information to scrutinise school improvement.

#### **6.4 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.

#### **6.5 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 works closely with colleagues in the SEWC region.

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 co-ordinated approach to supporting schools within the Education Directorate and across the Council corporately as a whole.

#### **6.6 Integration (across service areas)**

The LA commissions its school improvement function on a regional basis.

#### **6.7 Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

There are no implications arising from this report.

#### **6.8 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 Cabinet 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 Monitoring report**

**Appendix 2 – Coed-y-Garn Primary School Inspection report**