

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection Outcome**

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

Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
✓	02.02.23	15.02.23	01.03.23		28.02.23	01.03.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to Members the outcomes from the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection and the full report is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and produce updates for Members that forms part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework. The provision of Education is regulated under the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework and this report will detail the outcomes from the inspection that took place during the Autumn term 2022.
- 2.2 In September 2022, Blaenau Gwent Council received a letter from Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, stating that the Local Authority will be subject to an Estyn inspection, in line with the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. The letter confirmed that the inspection would take place between 28th November to 2nd December 2022.
- 2.3 The Reporting Inspector and the LA's Link Inspector are attending the People Scrutiny Committee session when this report is discussed. The LGES Inspection guidance includes the following text to explain their involvement: 'Following the publication of the inspection report, we expect that a relevant Scrutiny Committee of the local council scrutinises the report and challenges senior leaders, including officers and elected members, about their plans for improvement. At least one inspector involved in the inspection will attend this meeting as an observer but will contribute to the session where it helps clarify any matters relating to the inspection and the report'.
- 2.4 The inspection was carried out in accordance with the inspection framework and the guidance 'for the inspection of Local Government Education Services'. 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

2.5 In the lead-up to the inspection, Estyn identified Blaenau Gwent's 4 Local Questions for the Inspection, including:

- 1) How well does the local authority challenge and support non-maintained settings and schools to improve?
- 2) How well does the local authority tackle inequalities in education experiences and outcomes for children living in poverty?
- 3) How well does the local authority support schools to promote respectful relationships and address negative behaviour effectively?
- 4) How well does the local authority ensure that the interests of learners are above all others in its planning for schools and other education provision?

2.6 Prior to the core inspection week, preliminary work involved surveying staff, learners, parents and other local/regional/national stakeholders with an interest in education services. There was also a preliminary visit held in early November before the core inspection week to interview key stakeholders.

2.7 The Council received preliminary feedback and findings from the Inspection team on 2nd December 2022. This was followed up by a draft and final report, which included the inspectorate findings and identified 3 recommendations for improvement. The full report also details the inspectorate's findings against the 4 local questions. This letter was published on the 9th. February 2023 and is attached to this report. The report provides a high-level summary of the main findings and some of the key considerations, including:

- The local authority has made good progress with its education services since it was last inspected around ten years ago as important areas for improvement have largely been addressed. Senior officers and elected members have a strong commitment to education, and this is reflected in the funding given to schools and education services.

- The local authority generally plans well to make sure that it has suitable education provision to meet the needs of every child and young person. Over the past decade, the local authority has successfully reduced surplus places in schools and improved the conditions of its school buildings. The local authority is suitably developing its Welsh-medium education provision. Whilst there have been some positive developments in provision for pupils with additional learning needs, the quality of planning for future provision is variable.
- There are many strengths in the local authority's work to reduce the impact of deprivation on education outcomes and its support for families in low-income households. There are also many strengths in the services to support children and young people's well-being and promote positive relationships.
- The authority has worked with its regional school improvement service to strengthen the challenge and support it provides to schools. This work has greater impact for children in non-maintained and primary age settings than for young people in secondary age settings. Provision for young people was too slow to improve in two schools placed in statutory categories.
- Despite strengths in education services, corporate leaders have not ensured that their vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood by other officers, elected members, school staff and external partners. Also, corporate leaders have not ensured that the corporate plan is supported by coherent delivery plans for education that include related actions and measurable success criteria. Overall, the quality of self-evaluation, planning for improvement, and performance management is not strong enough.

2.8 The inspectorate has identified 3 recommendations for improvement that the local authority will use to update its improvement plans. These areas for development take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority's plans are to be updated during the Spring term and the revised Education Improvement Plan (EIP) and Self-Evaluation Report (SER) will be brought back to the People Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet early in the Summer term for both scrutinisation and to seek approval. Importantly, developmental work has already begun on addressing the recommendations that are outlined below:

- R1.** Improve the corporate leadership of education services;
- R2.** Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management; and,
- R3.** Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern.

2.9 The outcome of the Inspection is positive overall, progress since the last inspection has been made and there is no requirement for follow-up activity. The 3 recommendations identified can be used to facilitate leverage at a corporate level to deliver continued incremental change. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the LA's areas for improvement are of paramount importance in supporting our children and young people to improve their education, skills and life chances. There will be regular update reporting on progress to Members and the Education Directorate will work with Estyn through the Local Authority Link Inspector (LALI) termly meetings to provide assurances to the inspectorate that improvements continue to be made both corporately and operationally across the range of LGES services.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The report has been considered by Education's DMT and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).

3.2 **Option 1**

That the Governance and Audit Committee considers and accepts the information within the report and is assured that the process for the monitoring of Estyn recommendations is robust.

3.3 **Option 2**

To seek further clarification on any areas within the report and/or to highlight any areas of interest or concern that need to be considered in future monitoring and reporting.

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

4.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and regular monitoring reports will be produced, in line with the Scrutiny and Cabinet Forward Work Programmes.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial considerations associated with this report, however, it is pleasing to note the findings from the Inspectorate on resource management. There was acknowledgement that the LA has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget. The financial outlook, however, for the public sector will be challenging over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and close financial management will be essential to achieve value for money.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

There is one corporate risk for the Education service in the Corporate Risk Register relating to the 2 Schools Causing Concern. Education also maintains a Directorate Risk Register, which is aligned to both service level and corporate risks. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business

planning process and included within the performance reporting for the service. The inspection findings are to be included in the risk registers.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 The detailed inspection findings are included within Appendix 1. The Education Directorate is working together with key stakeholders to deliver 'Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities – all through a child and young person-centred approach'. The Education Directorate are working with corporate colleagues and key partners to ensure that the vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood across the board.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

The Estyn report was published early in February and the reporting of findings provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the LA/ Education Directorate and partners to ensure public accountability for our citizens.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

The LA has shared the inspection findings with stakeholders, including Headteachers and partners. Pupil voice is a key area for the Education Directorate and examples of this are included within the inspection findings, it should also be noted that a member of the Youth Forum contributes to the work of the People Scrutiny Committee.

6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

The report enables the Education Directorate to plan as resourcing, risk and performance is continuously reported. The Estyn findings provide a baseline of where the services are currently placed, and most importantly, where we need to be in the future.

6.5 Preventative focus

The work undertaken by the Education Directorate promotes a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. The respective teams have an active rather than re-active approach to service planning can also help with planning resources and ensuring value for money services are delivered.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The performance of the Education Directorate is monitored via through the democratic process via various reporting mechanisms including the Finance and Performance Report, the Assessment of Performance and various performance monitoring reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Estyn - A report on Education Services in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.