

Committee: **Cabinet**
 Date of meeting: **29th November, 2023**
 Report Subject: **Improving Schools Programme**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**
 Report Submitted by: **Luisa Munro-Morris, Interim Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
23.10.23	26.10.23	08.11.23			13.11.23	29.11.23		

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.

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 Since February 2023, many of our headteachers and senior leaders have been engaging with Action Short of Strike (ASOS). This has led to the majority of our primary headteachers not engaging with Professional Discussions with the Local Authority (LA) since this time. Professional Discussions are an important way for the LA to engage with schools on their priorities for improvement, progress with implementing national reform, and to offer appropriate support where relevant.
 - 2.3 Presently, there are two schools formally within the Schools Causing Concern category – Brynmawr Foundation School and the River Centre. Following an inspection in the summer term, Bryn Bach Primary requires Estyn follow up. This does not place the school in an Estyn category.

3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 This report will be considered by the People Scrutiny Committee on 13th November 2023, and any feedback will be provided verbally to Cabinet.
 - 3.2 **Option 1**
 Members are asked to consider the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations.

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 authorities' 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.

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. 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.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

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:

5.2.1 **Universal support:** 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. In schools where there are emerging risks they are prioritised early in the academic year. However, due to ASOS these discussions are not currently taking place in the majority of our primary schools.

5.2.2 **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 a half-termly basis, to support and challenge a school with specific areas for improvement.

5.2.3 **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 half-termly meetings. For example, a school will be supported with creating and delivering against a Post Inspection Action Plan.

KS4 data will be reported for the first time since 2019 again for the 2022/23 cohort. The Welsh Government are reintroducing All Wales Core Data Sets, and KS4 results will be published on 'My Local School'. Schools will be placed in Core Data Set families in the Autumn term 2023.

School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored by DLT 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 DLT. 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 actions created to support those schools identified as a school causing concern and/or in an Estyn category. This information is held within each school's single plan.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

As part of their inspection, Estyn will comment on any health and safety concerns that they identify. The River Centre was issued with a health and safety letter. All of the recommendations in the letter have been actioned.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.2 **Schools in an Estyn Category**

6.2.1 **Brynmawr Foundation School**

The school was inspected in October 2019 and placed within the category of schools requiring Special Measures. Estyn made 4 recommendations:

- Improve pupils' standards across the school, including their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching to motivate, engage and challenge pupils to make good progress in lessons.
- Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders' ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement.
- The school has been subject to an LA statutory warning notice to improve.
- Governance and the work of the Governing Body has significantly improved.
- The school now has an established Senior Leadership Team in place.
- The school continues to access support through 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.
- Until July 2023, the school was a 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. This pilot has now come to an end and the Welsh Government have decided that the arrangement will not continue past July 2023.
- Estyn completed a re-visit in the Spring and Summer term 2023. In the Spring visit they looked at the recommendations linked to pupil behaviour and leadership. Estyn recognised that the school had strengthened its approaches to supporting pupils' behaviour and wellbeing and further strengthened its work to improve leadership and plan for school improvement. It also commented that 'governors support the school with commitment and energy' and 'They have a sound understanding of the work of the school and provide appropriate challenge and support.'

In the summer term Estyn looked at the recommendations on pupil standards and teaching. They identified a number of strengths, including:

- 'The majority of pupils at Brynmawr Foundation School make sound progress, and a few make strong progress in their learning.'
- 'A majority of pupils write for an appropriate range of purposes across the curriculum.'

However, Estyn also identified some areas for further improvement. In both visits, Estyn concluded that 'Brynmawr Foundation School is judged to have made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.

- The school received preliminary KS4 data in August 2023 which showed good progress when compared to 2019 data, particularly in the core subjects.

- As a consequence of the KS4 data and 2 Estyn re-visits which indicate progress in the school, the LA made the decision to lift the statutory warning notice in September 2023. The school will continue to be a Team Around the School when they are removed from an Estyn category, in order to ensure that appropriate support is still in place.

6.2.2 The 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. Since November 2022 a dedicated Acting Headteacher has been 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 spring, 2023.
- Following an Estyn inspection July 2022, the school was placed in Special Measures. Estyn made a number of recommendations:
 - Address those issues identified in the health and safety letter.
 - 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.
 - Ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently engaging, broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for their next stage in life and learning.
 - Improve the behaviour of pupils, particularly on the secondary campus.
 - Improve the quality of the learning environment and culture, particularly on the secondary campus.
 - Improve the outcomes for pupils, particularly those on the secondary campus.
 - Establish systems, procedures and routines across the school that are clearly understood by staff and relevant partners.
- A Post Inspection Plan to address the recommendations was created by the school, with the support of the EAS, and the LA. Significant progress has been made against the actions within this plan, including:
 - Remodelling of the secondary site
 - A new vision for the school
 - New safeguarding procedures in place
 - New curriculum offer for pupils introduced September 2023
 - New behaviour policy in place
 - Home to school transport being provided by the LA since September 2023
- The school was subject to an Estyn re-visit in May 2023. Estyn recognised that good progress had been made and that the school is focusing on the right things to develop first. However, it also identified that the school was very early in its improvement journey.

6.2.3 **School Inspections**

6.2.4 **Bryn Bach Primary School (Appendix 1)**

Bryn Bach Primary School was Inspected in July 2023. Estyn commented in their report that ‘Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and participate in school life enthusiastically. They feel safe and secure and know who to talk to if they need help or support.’ However, they also commented that ‘While teachers are beginning to develop an overview of how well pupils are progressing in their learning over time, they do not always use on going assessment effectively enough to ensure that teaching provides sufficient challenge for all pupils’.

The report outlines 4 recommendations:

- Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement processes so that they impact more positively on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve standards of writing.
- Improve pupils’ Welsh oracy skills.
- Ensure that learning experiences meet all pupils’ needs and develop their skills systematically.

Due to Estyn’s findings the school has been placed under Estyn Review. This is the lightest touch of follow-up, as it is not statutory. It involves reviewing the progress the school has made towards addressing the recommendations highlighted in the report about 12-18 months after the publication of the inspection report.

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

Brynmawr Foundation School, The River Centre and Brynbach Primary are all participating in a Team Around the School approach. This is a multi-agency meeting where the school is both supported and appropriately challenged. The School Improvement or the Principal School Improvement Partner from the EAS attends this meeting to consult on ideas for supporting the school and to discuss engagement with opportunities such as EAS Reviews.

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 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 Head of School Improvement and Inclusion ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to supporting schools within the Education Directorate and across the Council corporately 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 (IIA)***

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 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 – Inspection Report – Bryn Bach Primary School