

The

Blaenau Gwent County  
Borough Council

Education &  
Leisure Services  
Annual Performance  
Report

2023- 24 Mid Year Snapshot



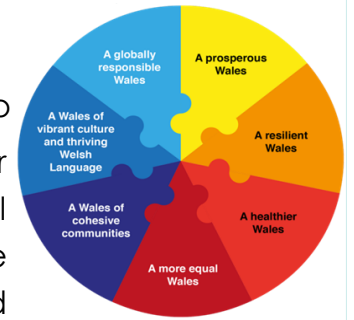
*Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-  
informed Life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives*

# Contents

Foreword	3
The Shape of Our Place	4
Director's Overview & Reflections on 2022/23	7
Local, Political Leadership, Governance & Accountability	11
Audit and Inspection	12
Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community	14
Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services	44
Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services	49
Maximise partnership working to meet community need	50
Case Studies	51
Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management	58
Future Direction	

# Foreword

**Why this is important** - Improving the quality and provision of teaching and learning is vitally important to ensure we are achieving ambitious outcomes for all children and young people. We will continue to invest in our education services and present service activity which highlights how we are contributing to the Council's overall aim of delivering all seven national well-being goals. These goals are set out within The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which is legislation aiming to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven National well-being goals.



The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the **sustainable development principles** which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The sustainable development principle is made up of the following five ways of working, pictured below:



**Integration**



**Collaboration**



**Involvement**



**Long Term**



**Prevention**

Throughout this report some areas of performance that meet these ways of working are demonstrated by the above images.

**The Purpose of this report** - To present service activity for the period, detailing achievements and challenges aligned to the priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27, which are to :



**Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent**



**An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**



**Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**



**Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient**



# The Shape of Our Place



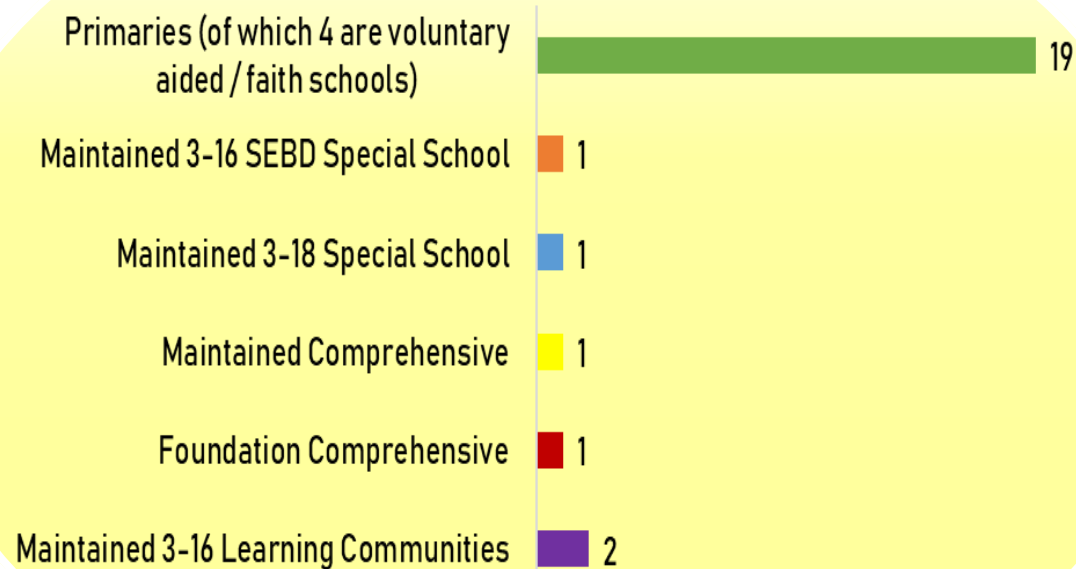
Blaenau Gwent is relatively small geographically, being at most 15 miles north to south, and 8 miles east to west. It is defined physically by high hillsides dividing three main valleys. These valleys are home to our towns and villages and house our education provision, made up of sustainable communities for learning nestled within beautiful countryside.

Blaenau Gwent has 25 schools across 31 school sites and there are currently circa 9,000+ pupils on roll across all Blaenau Gwent schools.

The Education Directorate provides services to support children and young people's educational learning opportunities whilst working collaboratively with our schools and the Aneurin Leisure and Awen Trust in a Council client function role.

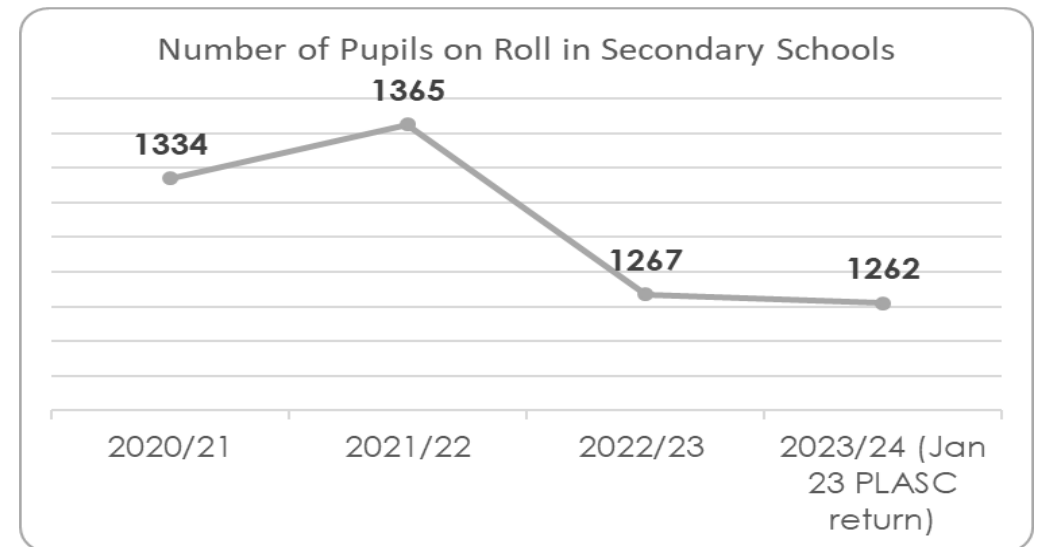
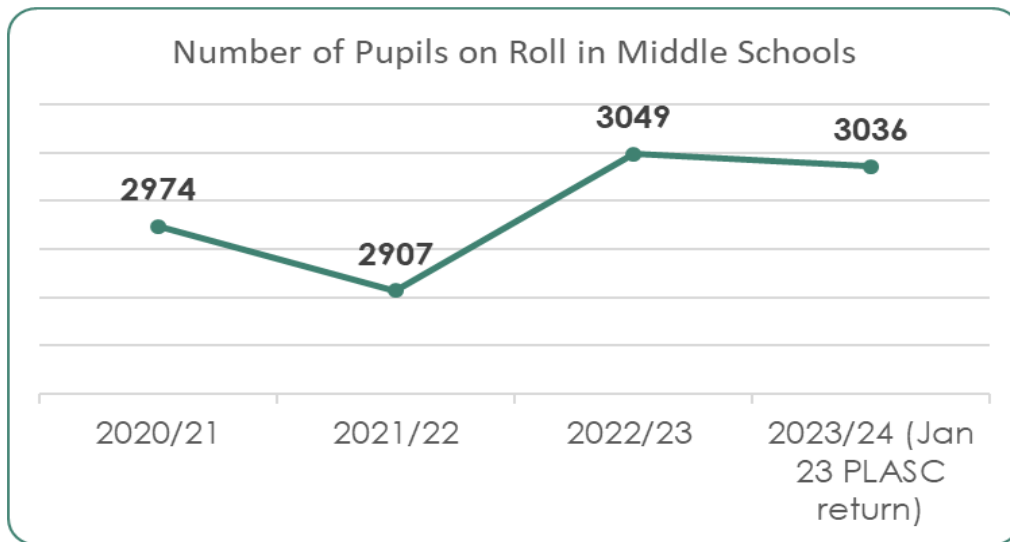
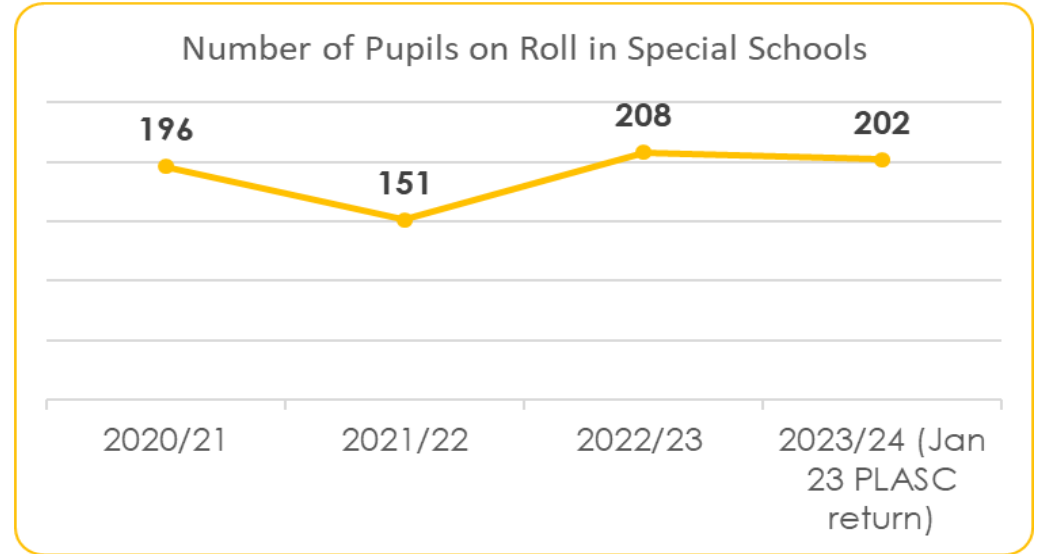
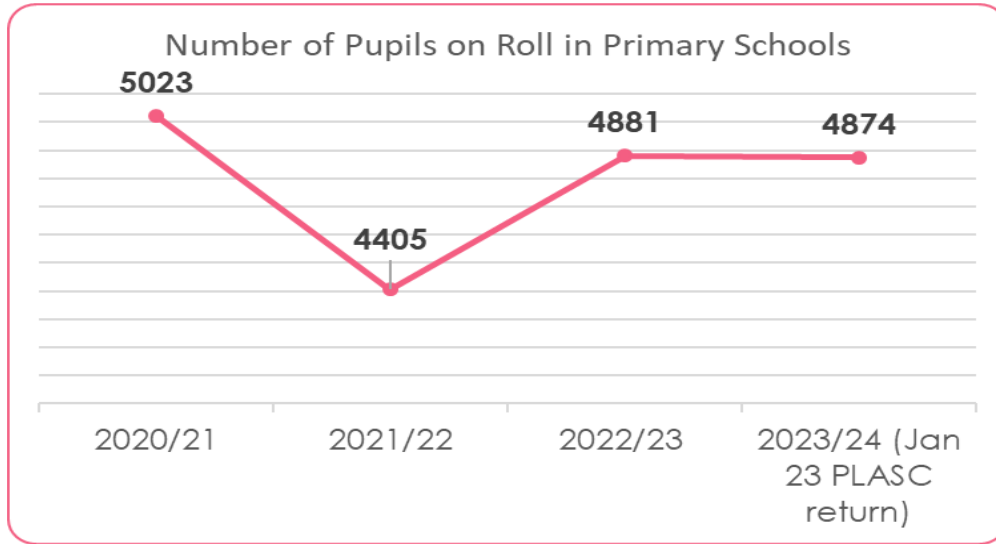
The Education Directorate's three main areas of core service delivery are

- **School Improvement and Inclusion;**
- **Education Transformation and Business Change; and,**
- **Young People and Partnerships.**

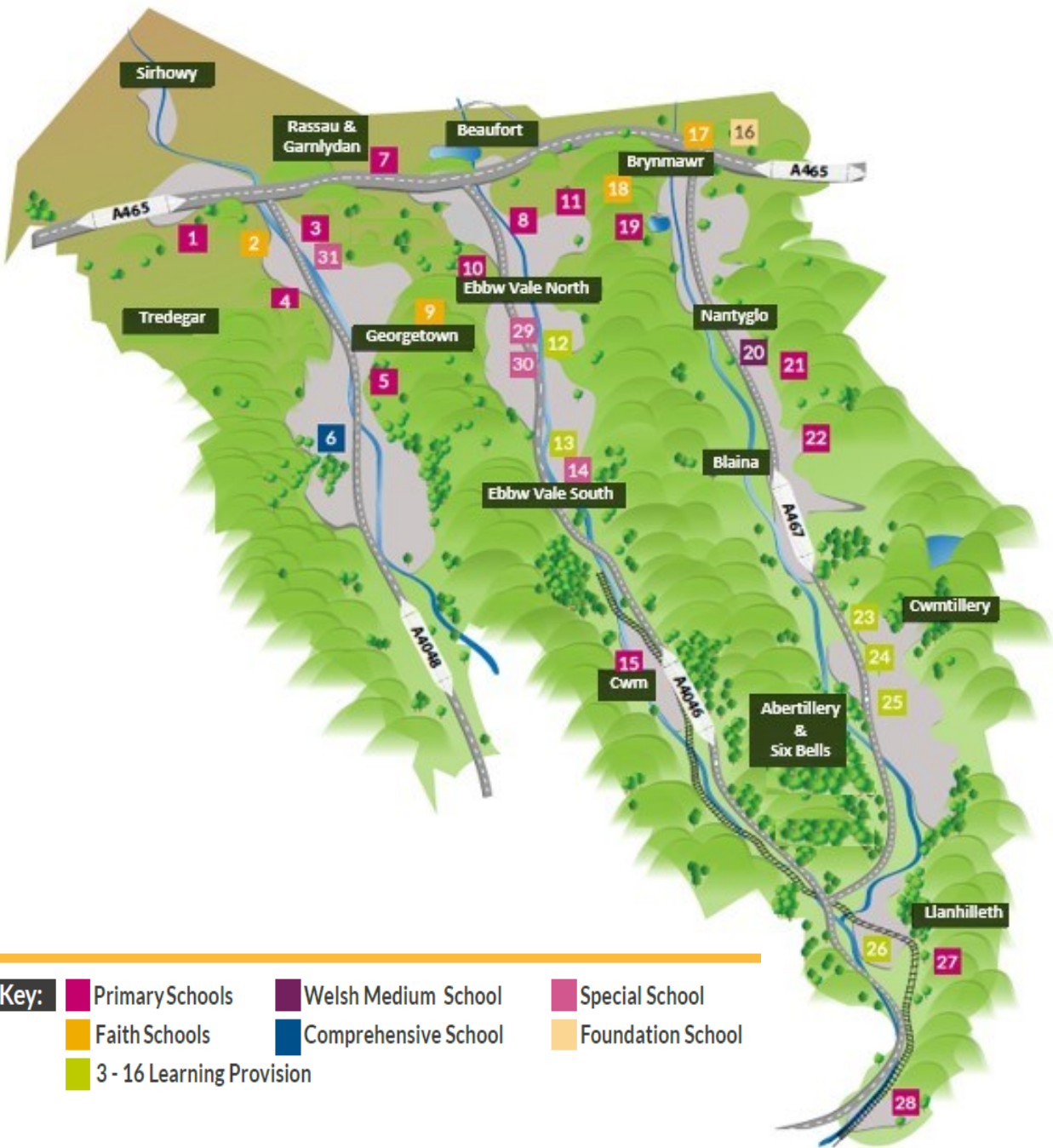


## The Shape of Our Place (continued)

Number of pupils on roll in each categorisation of school.



# Location of Schools



<b>Key:</b>	<span style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> Primary Schools	<span style="background-color: #5d3fd3; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> Welsh Medium School	<span style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> Special School
	<span style="background-color: #ffc107; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> Faith Schools	<span style="background-color: #17a2b8; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> Comprehensive School	<span style="background-color: #ffc107; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> Foundation School
	<span style="background-color: #90ca39; color: white; padding: 2px;">1</span> 3-16 Learning Provision		

- 1 Brynbach Primary School
- 2 St Joseph's RC School
- 3 Glanhowy Primary School
- 4 Deighton Primary School
- 5 Georgetown Primary School
- 6 Tredegar Comprehensive School
- 7 Rhos y Fedwen Primary School
- 8 Glyncoed Primary School
- 9 All Saint's RC School
- 10 Willowtown Primary School
- 11 Beaufort Hill Primary School
- 12 Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase
- 13 Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Primary Phase
- 14 Pen Y Cwm Special School
- 15 Cwm Primary School
- 16 Brynmawr Foundation School
- 17 St Mary's Church in Wales School
- 18 St Mary's Roman Catholic School
- 19 Blaenycwm Primary School
- 20 Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg
- 21 Coed y Garn Primary School
- 22 Ystruth Primary School
- 23 Abertillery Learning Community - Roseheyworth Road Campus
- 24 Abertillery Learning Community - Secondary Campus
- 25 Abertillery Learning Community - Tillery Street Campus
- 26 Abertillery Learning Community - Six Bells Campus
- 27 St Illtyds Primary School
- 28 Sofrydd Primary School
- 29 River Centre 3-16 Learning Community - Secondary Campus
- 30 River Centre 3-16 Learning Community - Primary Campus
- 31 River Centre 3-16 Learning Community - House

# Director's overview and reflections on 2023/24 (April to September)

## Overview

Blaenau Gwent has big ambitions for our schools and learners. We are determined to play our part in Wales being a first class education system with a clear ambition to increase the skills and standards of education across the County Borough. We fully support and are committed to the Welsh Government's national mission for educational transformation, including curriculum and ALN reforms. The Education Directorate are currently consulting on a new vision and strategic priorities.






### Education Directorate Draft Vision:

*'Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-informed life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives.'*

### How are we going to deliver this:

- Ensure that people are consulted and informed
- Provide effective and responsive school support services
- Provide a school estate that is fit for the 21st Century
- Prioritise people's physical, mental health and well-being
- Ensure effective collaboration with key stakeholders
- Ensure all services are inclusive
- Maximise opportunities for our communities

**Education Improvement Plan (Business Plan) – 5 Priorities**, supporting delivery of the Corporate priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27 (detailed on page 3):-

-  Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services
-  Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community in Blaenau Gwent
-  Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management
-  Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services
-  Maximise partnership working to meet community need

### Reflections on 2023/24

This report demonstrates how the Education Directorate contributes to the team (the council as a whole) aim of delivering our corporate priorities. Throughout the body of the report you will find details of performance, both positive achievements and areas that we continue to focus on improving. We recognise that even the achievements are not yet completed but remain areas for progress to be maintained and improved upon where possible.

You will find below a short summary detailing some examples of these performance outcomes, broken down into sections of how they are supporting delivery of our corporate objectives.



As a council we are looking to be **'an ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place'**. To support this, the Education Directorate aim to deliver effective and efficient services within financial constraints. The Local Authority has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years and 2022-23 provisional end of year position was favourable despite an overspend on Transport. During the reporting period new and better processes have been put in place between Education & Finance to ensure improved monitoring of the budgets and 2023/24 portfolio is currently on target or underspending in some areas. The financial outlook, however, for the public sector will be challenging over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and continued close financial management will be essential to achieve value for money. The Education Directorate wants to drive forward the right leadership approaches, right staffing capacity, people with the right skills/capabilities and the right forward planning to prepare for the future needs of the service. Appropriate training has been delivered to staff during the period and good engagement with staff and members continue. The Directorate sickness absence levels have also improved. It is recognised that one of the main strategic risks identified for the directorate is dependency on external funding to support key services and the workforce. During the reporting period a full review of directorate priorities has been carried out and the new vision statement and associated priorities are now directly aligned with Estyn recommendations for improvement.



## Director's overview and reflections on 2023/24 (continued)

As a council we are looking to **'Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'**. To support this, the Education Directorate aim to ensure that all children and young people are given the best start in life, enabling them to live healthy, fulfilling lives whilst contributing to society and forming a valuable part of their community. We prioritise the importance of language acquisition and reading across the board, to support with positive outcomes and attainment. We continue to support children and young people to be in a good position to find skills and employment at the appropriate times, However, our NEET figures for 2022 demonstrate an increase in this category leading to a deep dive into the reasoning behind this increase. As a result improved processes/systems have been put in place allowing resolutions for other gaps to be developed. The monitoring of school attendance and exclusion numbers is key to understand potential barriers to learning. This is one area that needs further work and something that we will be analysing in much greater depth. Our long term aim is to decrease the percentage of adults aged 16-24 with no qualifications, and a number of new areas of work detailed throughout the report will support this, including a new Youth Service provision development of which was led by engagement with young people within our community, development of a digital presence making it more accessible and effective links with Elected Home Education young people, all of which will support these better outcomes. Partnership working and effective communication continually improves and better links have now been developed with early years and health. There are some new initiatives around mental health which will help to improve access to timely and appropriate support and the counselling / play therapy service has been extended to include the age range of below 6 years. The ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity project is progressing well alongside delivery of our Additional Learning Needs expansion and Sustainable Communities for learning Band B projects. Our educational building provision continues to deliver suitable learning environments due to effective monitoring and management of capacity and pupil places, effective delivery of needed minor works and larger school remodelling and rebuild works.



## Director's overview and reflections on 2023/24 (continued)



As a council we are looking to '**empower and support communities to be safe, independent and resilient**'. To deliver this, the Education Directorate support children and young people's educational learning opportunities whilst working collaboratively with the Aneurin Leisure and Awen Trust in a Council client function role, with an aim to ensure that all children and young people's well-being and educational needs are catered for. There is an appropriate safeguarding culture within the local authority where all staff and elected members receive suitable safeguarding training. Effective integration and collaboration between directorates and external partners such as education, schools, health and children's services delivers a system which manages the needs of our pupils and young adults. Counselling services and youth support services are in place and working well. Our dedicated staff and the implementation of integrated systems and processes support our children and young people to be resilient members of society.



As a council we are looking to '**Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**'. To support this, the Education Directorate aim to ensure that decarbonisation measures are at the forefront of our future planning and teaching. The environment and biodiversity considerations form the basis of all new school buildings and existing school upgrades and we encourage nature friendly management on school grounds. Effective partnership working enables us to provide advice and guidance to support our children and young people around biodiversity, decarbonisation, equalities, diversity and inclusion. These partnerships with schools and the Children's Grand Council are very effective and not only inform but support our children and young people to have a voice. We are and will continue to deliver effective sustainable communities for learning which are environmentally friendly and support the delivery of our educated young people who will in the future form our connected communities.



**Luisa Munro-  
Morris**  
Interim Director  
of Education



**Cllr Sue Edmunds**  
Cabinet  
Member  
Education

# Local Political Leadership, Governance and Accountability

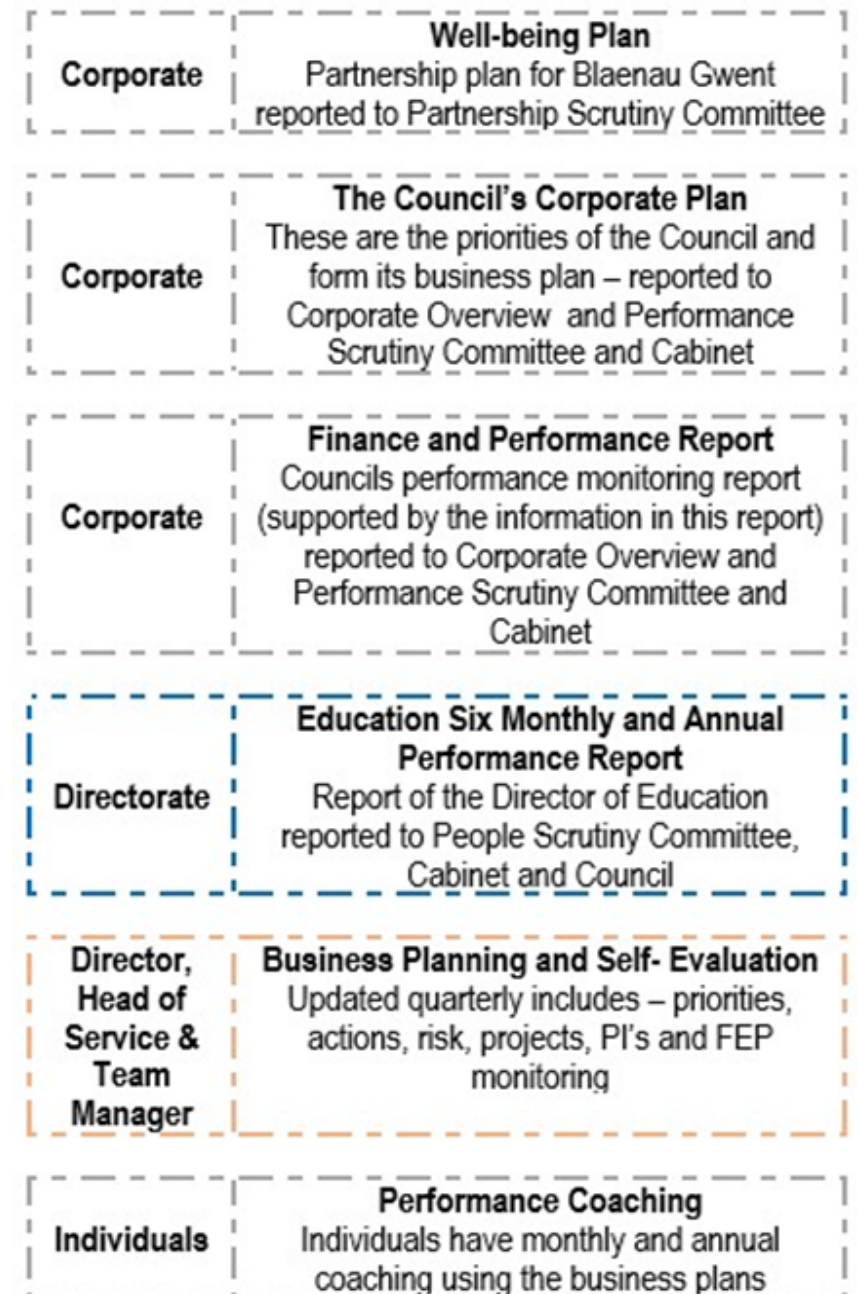
The structure of the Education Directorate provides clear levels of management and accountability. The Council has a clear governance and accountability framework in place which all directorates are signed up to. This framework identifies how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create a 'golden thread'. This framework is produced corporately and Education is compliant, the services also have additional regulatory requirements as part of the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework.

The Internal Planning framework to the right demonstrates how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create this 'golden thread'.

## Progress against actions

This report is broken down into the Directorate priority areas previously detailed in the 'Director's Overview' on page 7.

The following overview pages and case studies detail our performance for the period along with some associated achievements and challenges aligned to supporting delivery of the corporate priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27.



# Audit and Inspection

The Education Directorate is subject to audit, inspection and review by Estyn and Audit Wales. On a quarterly basis the Director of Education and service managers meet with Estyn to discuss achievements, performance and key challenges. Estyn also undertake an annual review and evaluation of the Directorate's performance.

## Estyn



No new Estyn Inspections have been instigated during the reporting period that were specific to Blaenau Gwent. However, at the end of 2022, Blaenau Gwent Council was subject to an Estyn inspection resulting in the following recommendations for improvement which are being monitored as part of the corporate business planning process until fully delivered upon.

**Report title:** Report on Blaenau Gwent Education Services

**Local or National Report:** Local

**Completion date:** Published February 2023

**Report Link:-** You can read the full inspection report [here](#)

**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**

## Audit Wales



No specific Education Audit Wales Inspections have been instigated during the reporting period. However, in response to previous corporate inspections carried out by Audit Wales, recommendations for improvement were made which are then monitored as part of the corporate business planning process until fully delivered upon. Ongoing recommendations are:-

**Report title:** Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up

**Local or National Report:** Local

**Completion date:** Published November 2022

**Report Link:-**You can read the full inspection report [here](#)

**Recommendation - The Council needs to take further action to fully comply with the recommendations in the October 2019 follow-up report on corporate arrangements for safeguarding of children.**

The following pages detail Performance broken down into the five priority areas of the Directorate :

**Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community.**

**Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services**

**Maximise partnership working to meet community need**

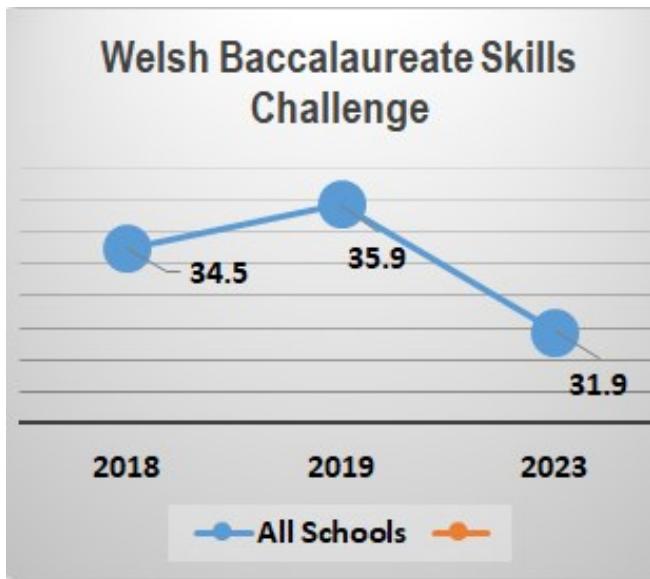
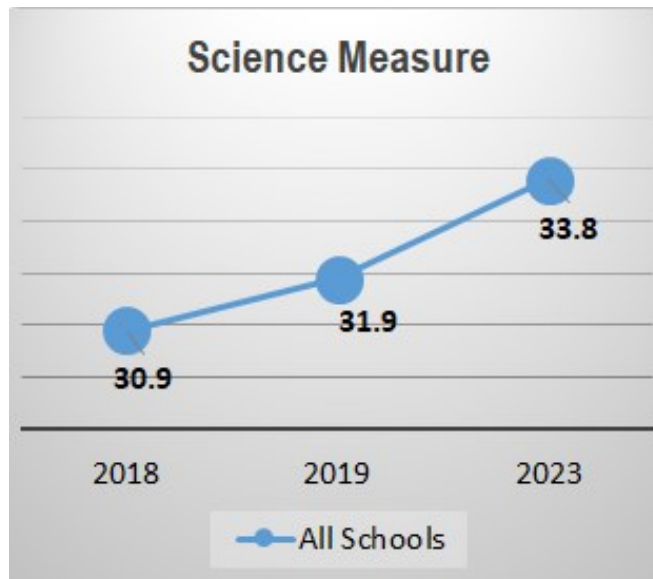
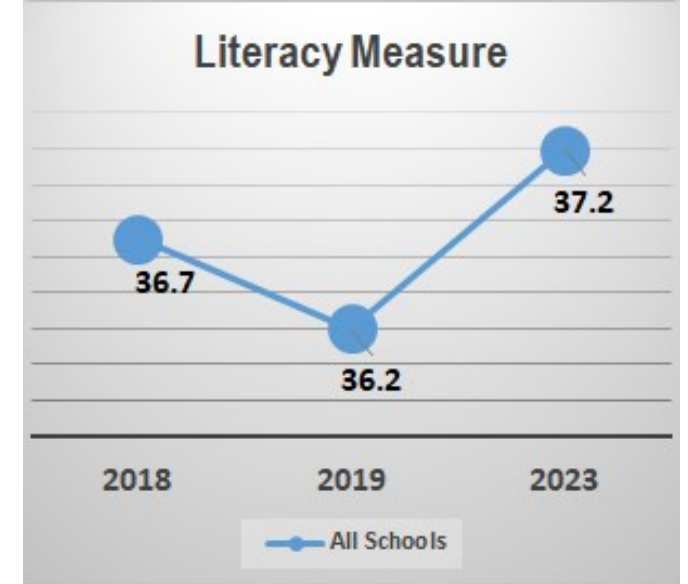
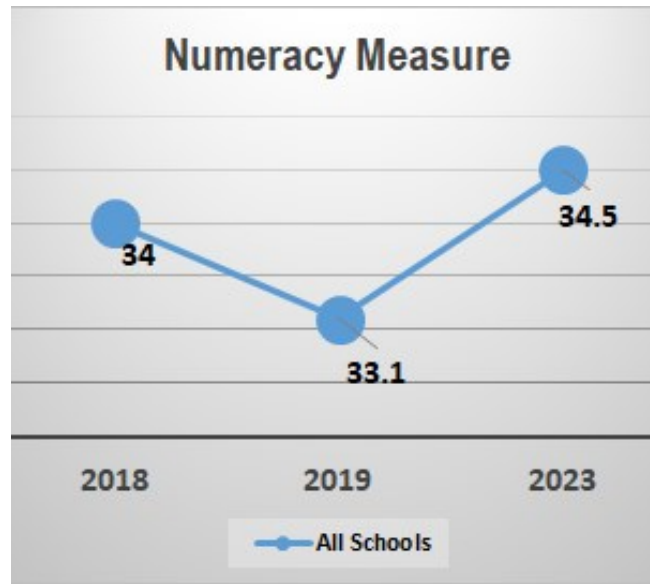
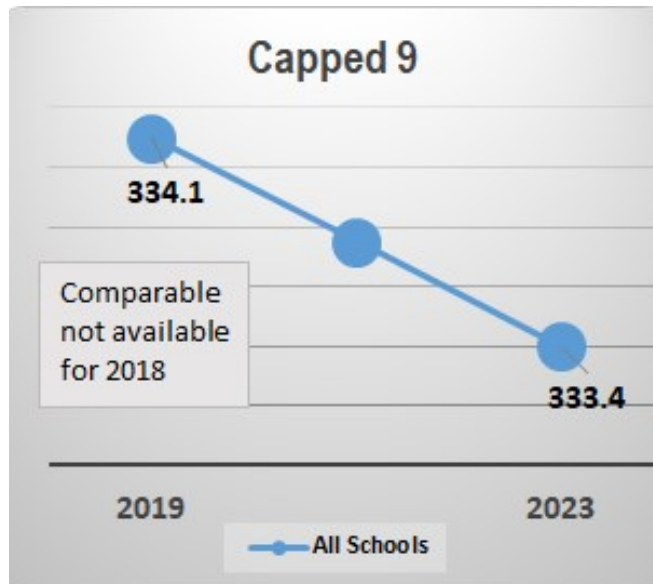
**Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management**

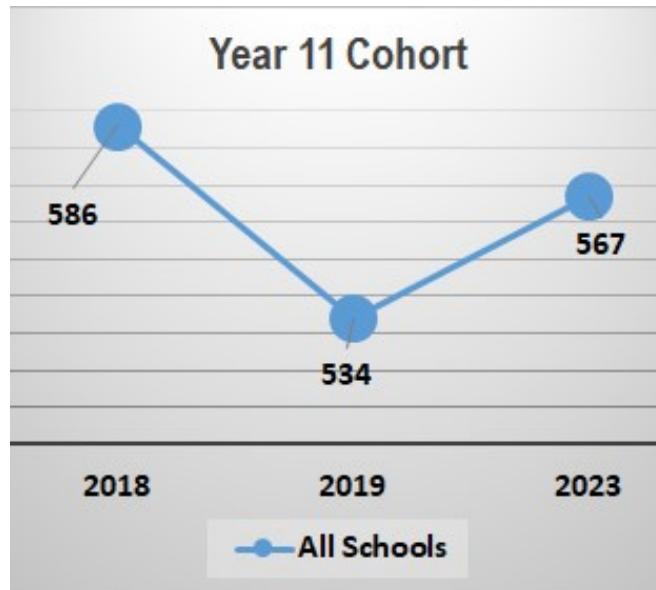
**Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services**



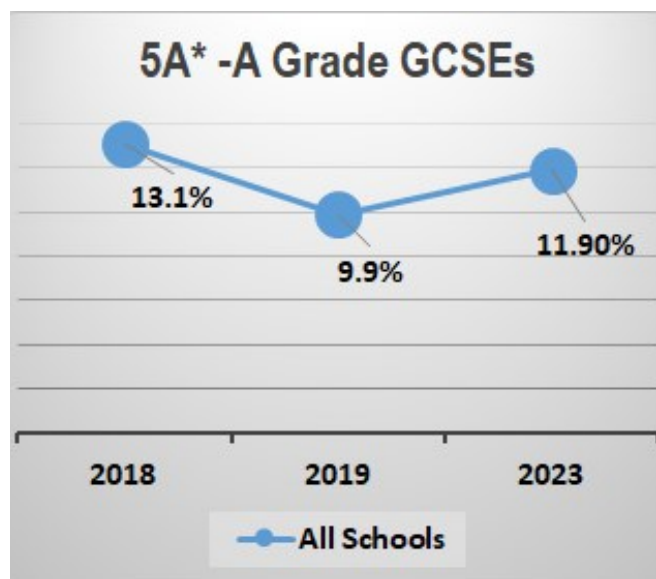
The **KS4 results were positive** and are anticipated to be in line with the School Development Plan targets. Some examples are shown below :-

(Note: only 2018, 2019 and 2023 comparison data shown due to routine data collection impacted by the covid pandemic)





*Note: "All Schools" incorporates the 4 main secondary settings plus the "special schools" that also contribute to the KS4 results. The breakdown by school is not yet available.*



We have seen a **reduction** in **Schools Causing Concern**

from **6 schools in 2019**

to

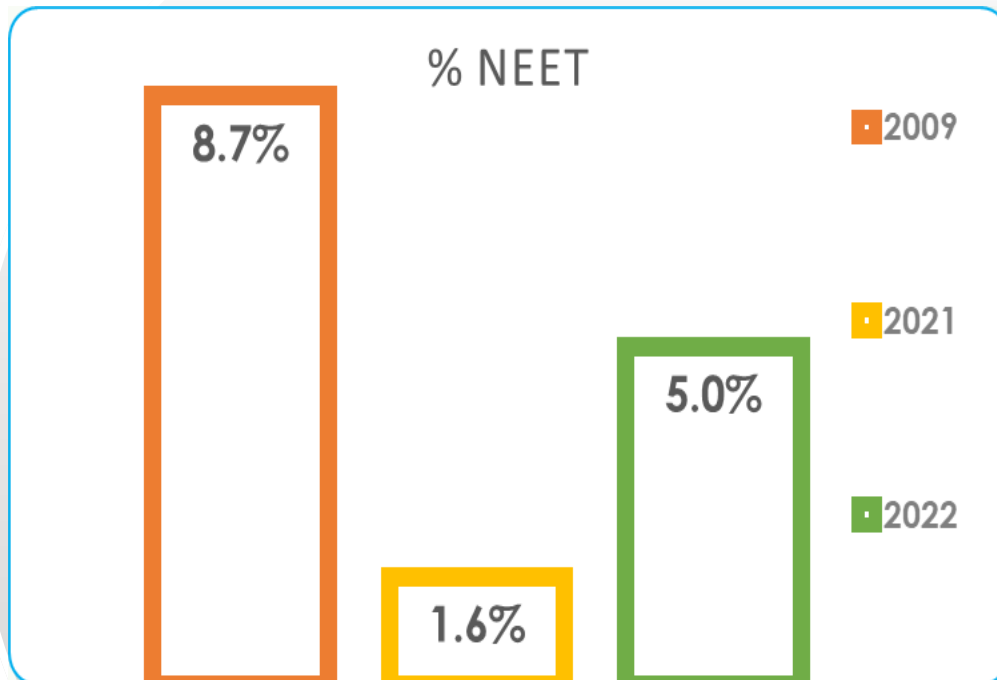
**2 schools in 2023.**



Going forward we will monitor and ensure the pace of change in school's causing concern is improved.



Blaenau Gwent continues to deliver a number of services that offer support for young people aged 11-25 who at risk of becoming or are currently not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).



**In 2022 Blaenau Gwent had a larger than expected figure of 5% (31 young people) NEET.**

Following this increase, there was a **deep dive evaluation with key partners** to understand and determine the cause and other contributing factors. This provided several findings, such as **gaps in the post 16 transition** for young people linked to **Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)** provisions and/or linked to Social Services, **out of county learners** and **faults in systems leading to the processing of Education, Training and Employment (ETE) status** (sometimes impacting the visibility of young people to key support services).

The evaluation proved to be a meaningful exercise and achieved its intended purpose, and as a result it has helped place more emphasis across the partnership on their engagement and involvement, leading to improved processes/systems and has allowed resolutions for other gaps to be developed (i.e., creating dedicated youth and community workers at SEBD/ALT education provisions).







Blaenau Gwent provides a good accessible counselling service to young people using counsellors who are qualified and experienced in working with young people. This will also continue using a range of digital means where young people cannot be seen in one of the appropriate settings. There are some new initiatives around mental health which may improve access to timely and appropriate support, links continue to be made by the co-ordinator with these services to ensure there is open discussion and a joined up approach in improving access to mental health services particularly for those with diagnosis/clinical mental health conditions.

A total of **263 young people** aged year 3 to 25 years **accessed counselling or play therapy** during 22/23 academic year - **222 of these were new referrals**



For the financial year 2023/2024 Welsh Government has again provided additional funding, with indicative funding provided until March 2024, to extend the service to below year 6. This indicative funding has assisted in being able to retain the current play therapist. In Blaenau Gwent and across Wales, there is a need for a service such as play therapy for young people aged 10 and under.

By providing a digital presence, the Youth Service has become more accessible to a wider audience of young



Youth workers contribute to care and support plans and attend various multi-agency meetings in relation to safeguarding issues including Section 115 meetings and Community Safety Meetings. Good relationships are forged with Social Workers and Families First Support Workers which enables a good mechanism for sharing appropriate information with regard to improving well-being or improved outcomes for young people.





The partnership with Schools, Coleg Gwent and Post 16 providers has strengthened through the establishment of the Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board.



**A-level A\*-C grades in Coleg Gwent were slightly lower (76.5%) than All Wales figures of 78.9%. A\*-E grades in Coleg Gwent (97.8%) were slightly higher than the all-Wales overall pass rate of 97.5%.**



The Youth Service is established as an **accreditation centre** with Youth Workers also providing support for parents of Elected Home Education (EHE) young people wanting to deliver units.

Currently it has contact with **18 EHE young people**, to provide a link with the service.

The **Positive Futures** school groups and community referrals are highly successful in helping young people better understand their behaviour and how to manage it. **38 young people** are **supported** in a weekly social group and 8 young people who are on the cusp of permanent exclusion from across all mainstream secondary schools are supported each year to develop social skills, understand peer pressure and how to manage their emotions through attending a rolling programme of workshops.

The scheme **promotes positivity, health and wellbeing** and new experiences to help **raise aspirations, resilience, reduce anti social behaviour** and first-time entrance into youth justice system.





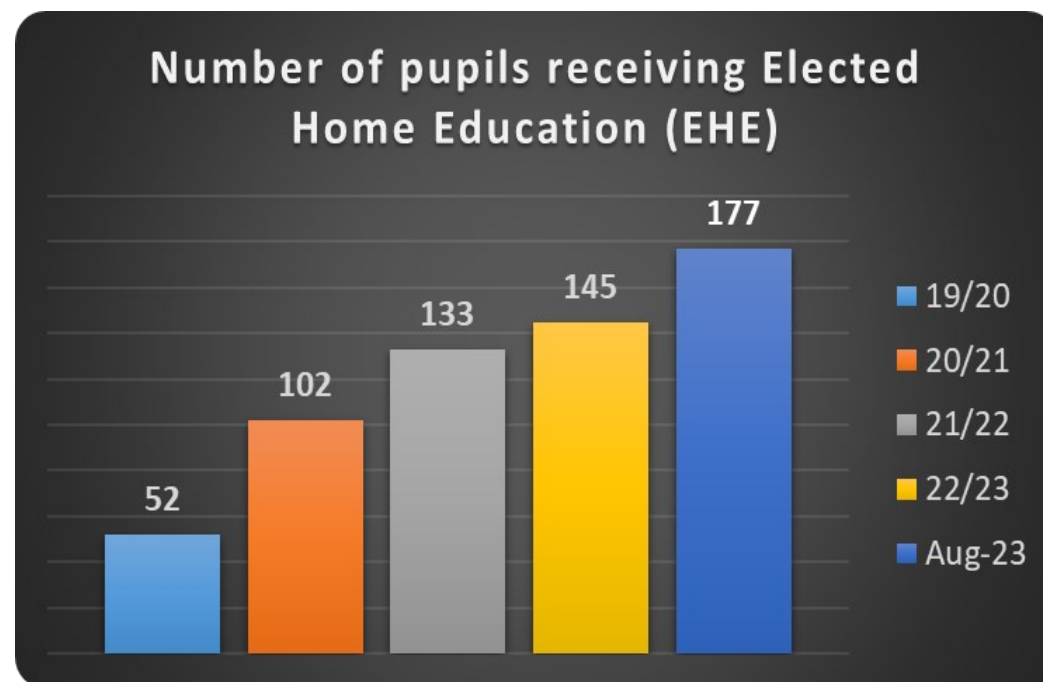
## Elected Home Education within Blaenau Gwent

As demonstrated in the chart there has been an increase in the number of home educated children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. Elected Home Education (EHE) pupils continue to be supported by the Education Welfare Service, however this needs to be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits increase in line with the above.

**As at 31st August 2023 there were 177 pupils on the EHE database compared to 145 at the end of February 2023. This is an increase of 18%.** Thirty of these pupils are from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community (GRT).

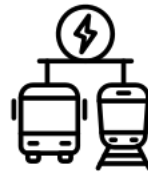
Between 1st September 2022 and 31st August 2023, 74 children became EHE. Fifty-Two of these were secondary aged and Twenty-two were primary age.

Thirteen children were from schools outside of the Local Authority, seven children were from Abertillery Learning Community, 10 from Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, 11 from Tredegar Comprehensive and 11 from Brynmawr Foundation School.





## Cymunedau Dysgu Cynaliadwy Sustainable Communities for Learning



The delivery of the Sustainable Communities for Learning **Band B programme** is well underway with an **investment of circa £33m** into the school estate.

The suitability and condition of the school estate continues to improve with circa **58%** categorised as A/B



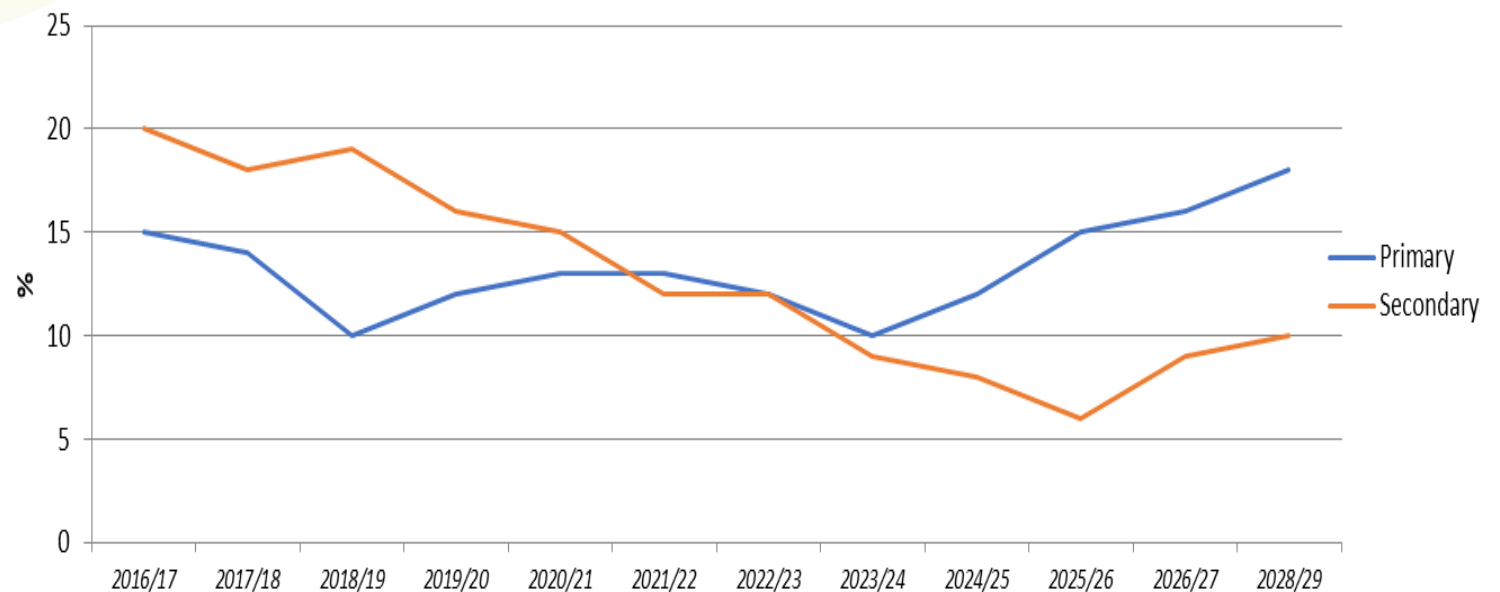
**LONG TERM** –Building condition and suitability ratings and capacity projections inform the prioritisation of projects within Band B and the rolling programme for Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, along with potential further school organisation priorities, minor and planned works programmes etc.

The Band B Programme seeks to deliver the following key projects:

- **Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Refurbishment**
- **Ebbw Fawr Primary Redevelopment**
  - Glyncoed Primary New Build
  - Rhos y Fedwen Primary Refurbishment
- **Continued Secondary School Re-modelling**



The 2023 primary projections show a small number of primary schools projected to have over 15% surplus places during the next 5 years. However, the surplus in these schools does need to remain higher, to enable pupil population growth in line with live birth rate fluctuations, also due to the fact that a reduction in the admission number would negatively affect configuration of the teaching and learning environment and staffing levels.





**Rhos y Fedwen Primary - Remodelling** - Willis is the appointed contractor for the Foundation Phase scheme, they commenced works in August 2023 and are scheduled to conclude February 2024. Tender documents will be going out January 2024 for the 3G pitch area, this has been moved due to the contractor also being on site now and the advice from professionals is not to lay pitches in cold/wet weather and plan between April/September months. The project group meets regularly to inform implementation of works.

**Brynmawr Foundation School - Remodelling** of Brynmawr Foundation school is needed and the project team have been working closely with Community Services and the school to carry out a comprehensive Options and Cost appraisal - The outcome of this determined that the school will need extensive remodelling/refurbishment in the next 10 years at a very high cost therefore longer term options for the school are being explored.

**Ebbw Fawr – Secondary Campus** - In 2022 the school raised sufficiency issues for the 2024/25 academic year, stating that it needed additional classrooms to accommodate pupil needs. Since then, this has become a priority for the Education Transformation team to develop options. A full business case is intended to be submitted to Welsh Government, based on the preferred option of a standalone extension with additional classrooms, a canteen and dining area on the grounds of the existing school site in April 2024.



**Tredegar Secondary** - A project group in relation to Tredegar Secondary school has met several times over the last year, the project brief is being developed by the school in relation to an extension to the building (Subject to planning approval) in line with projected sufficiency figures. This will then form the basis of the business case submission to WG, which depending on the development of the project brief, is intended to be submitted in the Spring term 24

By March 2024 Welsh Government has stipulated that any remaining projects for delivery under the Band B programme will automatically move over to the Rolling Programme. This programme will benefit Councils across Wales as it has a 1-3 year plan, a 4-6 year plan and a 7 year and beyond plan. This means that any project not delivered under the Band B programme will automatically transfer into their 1-3 year plan. A new Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) will need to be completed and submitted by the deadline date. The Project team are currently carrying out a desktop exercise on the priorities coming forward from schools capacity and condition survey.





The inclusion team lead by Education Transformation team went out to consultation in April 2023 to increase the capacity for resource bases and ASD provision in mainstream schools. The statutory notice period ran through June/July with a decision for implementation scheduled for this year. The proposal is in 2 parts, part one meet the need of learners in secondary and Welsh-medium provision. Part 2 will focus on the success and need for additional bases after 2025, this will also consider religious character schools.

The council have been awarded 2 grants 2022/23 and 2023/24 from Welsh Government Additional Learning Needs (ALN) capital grant.



- The 2022/23 grant was used predominantly for Pen y Cwm and River Centre 3-16 Learning Community – Secondary Site
- The 2023/24 grant allocation will be used to implement the ALN review.

### River Centre Learning Community – Secondary Campus

- In 2022, the school had an Estyn Inspection which recommended change and with this in mind the ALN grant was used to transform the learning environment, both internally and externally, making this a fit for purpose facility for vulnerable learners .

The River Centre Secondary Campus was **subject to investment circa £450,000.**

The complete refurb included 3 extra classrooms including sensory provision, new furniture, home economics and independent living area, outdoor muga and gym.



Works to Pen y Cwm Special School includes remodelling the existing learning environment to create additional classroom spaces and associated facilities i.e. additional sensory rooms and a hobbit house, to create an outdoor learning space. This work continues whilst the Council are working with the school to develop a long-term plan to support sustained growth and development.



**Better links** have been developed **with early years and health**, and a more comprehensive **tracking tool has been created** in order to improve the tracking of pupils with Additional Learning Needs **to ensure better planning of provision.**

Our Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EY ALNLO) now holds registers and continues to work closely with health colleagues, attending ISCAN panel meetings to maintain accurate registers.

### Early Years Additional Learning Needs

Every Local Authority will have a designated officer known as the 'Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer' (EY ALNLO), who will have responsibility for strategically co-ordinating the Local Authority's functions in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools.

The role of the EY ALNLO is to work with parents, early years settings, health professionals and others who may be working with children below compulsory school age, to raise awareness of the ALN system and to promote early intervention. The EY ALNLO holds robust and

#### Early Years ALNLO

Promotes early intervention.  
Focus on early years.



#### What does the EYALNLO do?

The EY ALNLO works closely with health visitors as well as many other health professionals and monitor children below the age of 5 to identify ALN at the earliest opportunity. The EY ALNLO also works alongside the Early Years Support Team and the Inclusive Practice Team here in Blaenau Gwent, to provide support and advice as well as signposting of services within a strategic role.

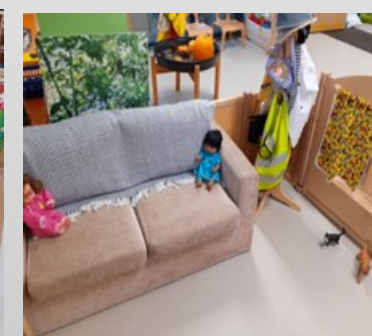
The EYALNLO has responsibility for co-ordinating the local authority's role in relation to children under statutory school age, who are not attending maintained schools. This is applicable to all children until they are of statutory school age – the term after their 5th birthday.

#### What happens when a learner starts school nursery/reception?

The EY ALNLO will support a learner until they begin school. Once the learner is registered at, and attends a school, responsibility for supporting this learner passes onto the school and the schools Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo).

#### Additional Learning Needs coordinator (ALNCO)

The school ALNCO is the lead co-ordinator for learners with additional needs. They work in maintained schools, school nurseries, resource bases and special schools.





**The ALN Code makes it clear that learners should be able to access provision, in so far as possible, within their locality.**

The Local Authority are keeping their Additional Learning Needs provision under review as per the Welsh Government directive. As is similar in most Local Authorities across Wales, and certainly within the South East Wales Consortium family, placements for specialist provision are extremely limited for learners with cognition and learning difficulties in primary settings and secondary is running above capacity. We are already running **over capacity at Primary Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) placements**, and we currently hold a **waiting list of 6 pupils** requiring an ASD placement as determined by Additional Learning Needs Panel.

In order to mitigate the need for out of county placements for ASD learners, **Inclusion and Education Transformation worked together over 22/23 to plan future resource base allocation within the Borough.** This involved an ALN consultation which formed the basis to move forward to a development and implementation stage, with the first being the **development of an ASD base at the Tredegar Comprehensive site, which opened September 23** with an investment of **approximately £200k**.



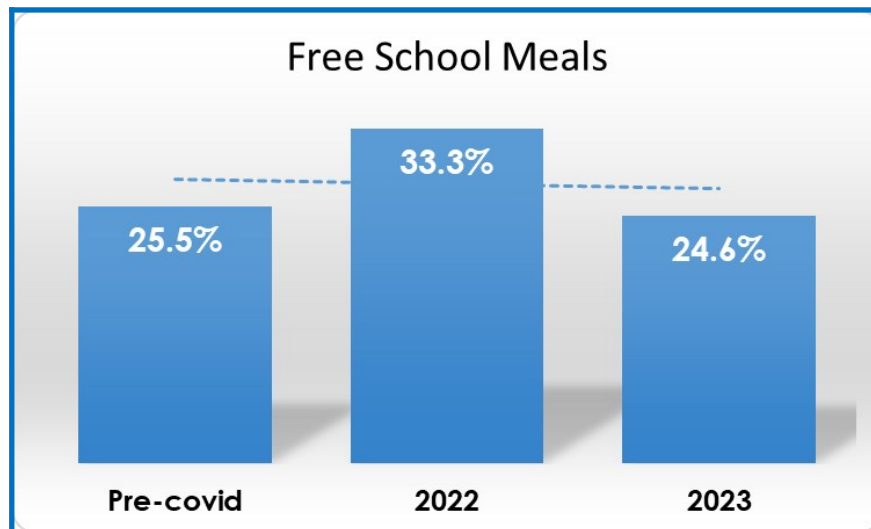
There are further plans in place to extend capacity in primary settings for 24/25 with 2 schools earmarked for ASD bases, one of which is Welsh medium. This should mitigate the need for seeking out alternative options for the learners on waiting lists for specialist ASD provision. Further information regarding the plans to increase capacity is available via the ALN Consultation. [RIGHT CLICK HERE AND OPEN HYPERLINK](#)







In terms of transition panel for year 6 – 7, last year the Local Authority considered 33 children for a more specialist placement for secondary. By December 2023 the team will be aware of figures for entry Sept 24 and those learners will be presented at panel for consideration.



Current data suggests that eFSM figures have gone down, however a robust check is currently being undertaken to ensure figures are accurate.

Of all the Welsh local authorities, **child poverty rates are highest in Blaenau Gwent (30.3%) and Ceredigion (30%).** <https://www.business-live.co.uk/economic-development/new-data-reveals-extent-child-27044774> It is also reported that **children from larger families are significantly more likely to live in poverty.** The current Child Poverty Strategy for Wales has been in place since 2015.

A “Draft Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2023: Integrated impact assessment”



has been published by Welsh Government to help alleviate the situation. Right click here to view the strategy



A resource base review was carried out in the autumn/spring terms and recommendations for inclusion were made and shared with all resource base placements. We are aware that across Blaenau Gwent there is a variation in inclusion to mainstream time for learners and thinking ahead, and in order to move a learner on back in to mainstream, there needs to be **promotion of inclusion.** We are, for example, aware of in excess of 10 learners in Penycwm Special School that would potentially be able to move across to a resource base; however, places in those resource bases appear to be currently stagnant and there is work needing to be done to support integration with mainstream peers.



### Accessibility and Poverty -

Over the summer 2023, young people were consulted on what is needed in each area and since September, Youth Service teams have implemented new provision in each area covering Abertillery, Brynmawr, Cwm, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. The Youth Service's Detached Team works across all areas going to where young people are at – town centres, shop fronts, parks, bus stops and other areas where young people are meeting and gathering. By delivering a mix of both detached and centre based work the Youth Service provides opportunities for young people to access within a variety of settings. Most the Youth Service's open access activities and opportunities are provided outside of school hours either during the evening, weekends or school holidays to ensure they are accessible when young people need to access them.



The ethos within the Youth Service is to assume that all young people may need financial support, to avoid stigmatising any individuals. Therefore, all opportunities are provided free and where possible transport is provided. Where activities maybe more than an a few hours, refreshments and food is provided to all young people so that those who would not normally be able to provide this for themselves are not 'singled out'.

-  We provide Free Activities and youth club access
-  We provide Free facility hire at sports centres (sports pitches)
-  Free gym memberships
-  Monthly free movie screenings at Brynmawr Cinema
-  Free sanitary products available – part of the period poverty/equity approach
-  Free hygiene products available such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap and deodorants
-  Free clothes washing and drying facilities at both youth centres
-  Fresh new bedding/sleeping bags/cooking equipment available for those who need it
-  Prom outfits/Interview clothes/General clothing
-  Equipment/resources for college/school/training/employment





Youth Service Activities include providing a full summer and winter programme during school term and school holidays, supported by the Welsh Government Youth Support Grant.

The full summer programme of activities had themed days and were mixed with both positive activities, health and well-being and new experiences.

At the start of the summer period **over 250 young people attended the Open 4 youth event** at Ebbw Vale Sports centre.

Over **400 young people participated in the full summer programme.**

To make the booking process fair and accessible for all young people there was an electronic booking process. This was promoted via our social media channels.

Food was provided to any young people that may need it on activities during the school holidays



Through the development of the Service's digital platforms (social media and website) young people can access information and support without the need to physically attend at a time that suits them. By providing a digital presence, the Youth Service has become more accessible to a wider audience of young people.



**As of September 22 a transition process commenced whereby the duties for Post 16 Additional Learning Needs became the local authority responsibility.**

Arrangements are currently in place for the transfer of Welsh Government (WG) post 16 funding to local authorities until the end of implementation when WG will transfer a mean amount of funding via the LEAG for post 16. At this current time we must use the funding only for registered Independent Specialist Provision (ISPI); however, then we will be able to utilise these funds as we wish for Post 16 following the end of implementation.

**This year (Sept 23 entry) there were 2 applications for Independent Special Post-16 Institutions ISPI from Year 11 learners where the local Further Education college had indicated they could not meet the need.**



**COLLABORATION** - The Early Years ALN Lead Officer has close links with the ALN Teams both in the education and social services directorates; the focus is learners pre statutory school age, those with emerging needs and those who may be identified as ALN.

During academic year 22/23 there were no learners who were identified as requiring an IDP in the Early Years settings ( An IDP is a document for children and young people with additional learning needs which helps teaching staff to plan for your child, teach them, and review their progress.)

**This academic year there has been extensive work with Early Years team in Social Services, which has included forging relationships with the Local Authority team and also the early years settings.**

There were **21 referrals to Early Years panel** during the summer term of 2023 in readiness for learners **commencing nursery in September 23**; these referrals were specifically following Education Psychology assessments for two terms of Rising 3 funding for schools.

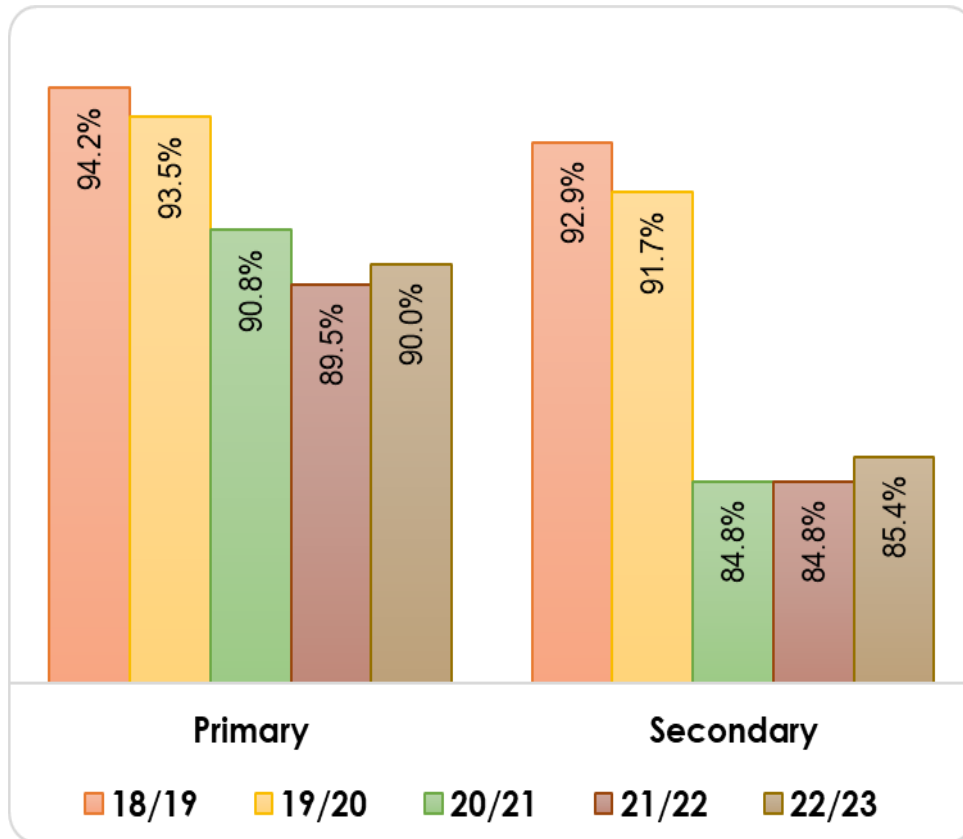
**Moving forward into the new academic year of 23/24 Early Years panels will become part of the ALN statutory panel.**



Joint meetings between Head teachers, senior Education Welfare Officer and Youth Service Manager have taken place with secondary schools to support improving attendance and reducing exclusions. Further analysis will take place in order to identify the reason for decline and put mitigating actions in place.



School Attendance



**Attendance/exclusions are still following the National trend although the downward trend for attendance in Blaenau Gwent seems to have settled.**

Education Minister Jeremy Miles said he would establish a National Attendance Taskforce which would "look in depth" into the reasons behind non-attendance, along with the publication of new "engagement and attendance guidance".

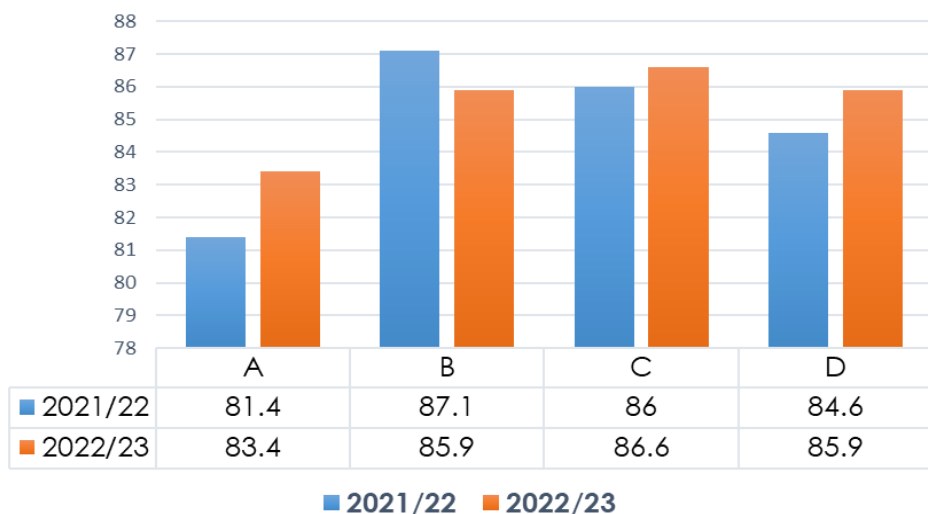
In a written statement, he said: "There are often complex and multiple factors lying behind non-attendance. These could include mental health and wellbeing, availability of specific learning support services, and the ever-rising cost of living and attitudes of parents and learners towards school attendance generally. As such a priority of the group will be to look in depth into the reasons behind non-attendance and bring to bear their expertise to identify actions that can bring about sustained improvements."

Taken from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-66933229> date 27 September 2023

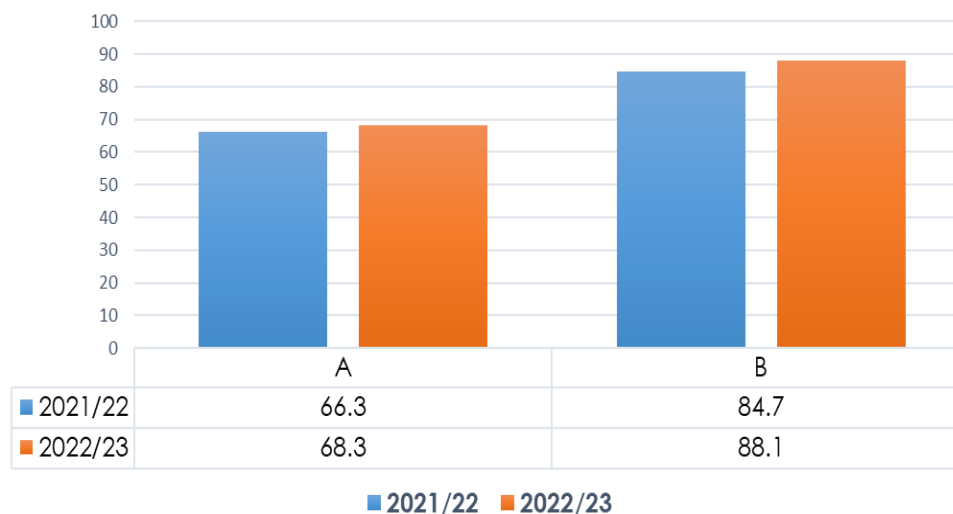




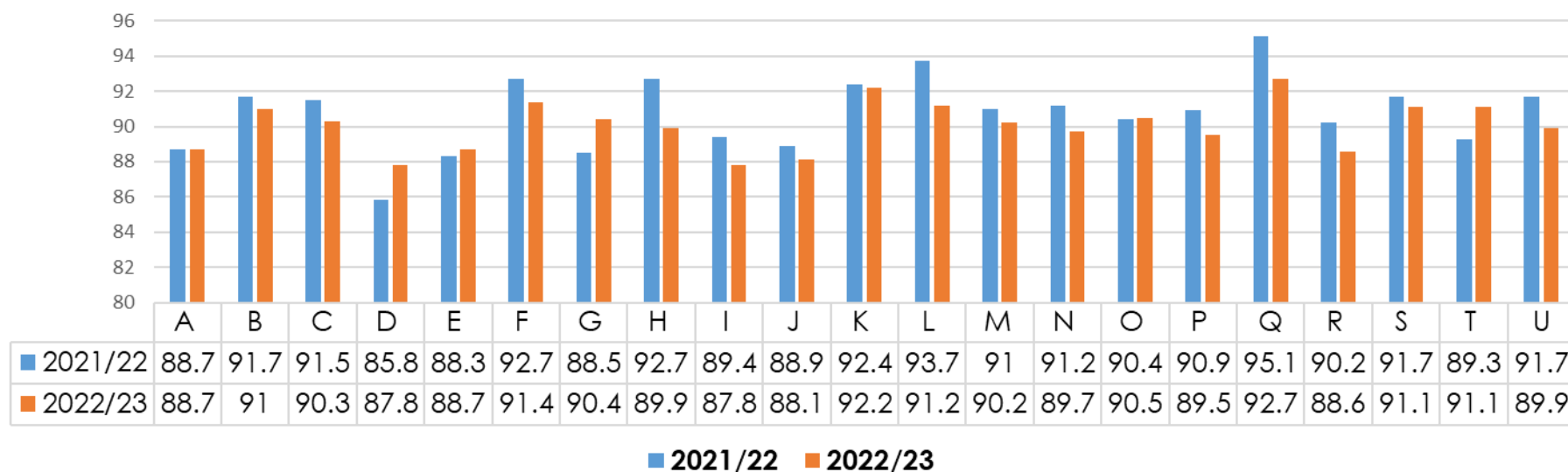
Secondary Attendance Data W/E 21st July 2023



Special School Attendance Data W/E 21st July 2023



Primary Attendance Data W/E 21st July 2023



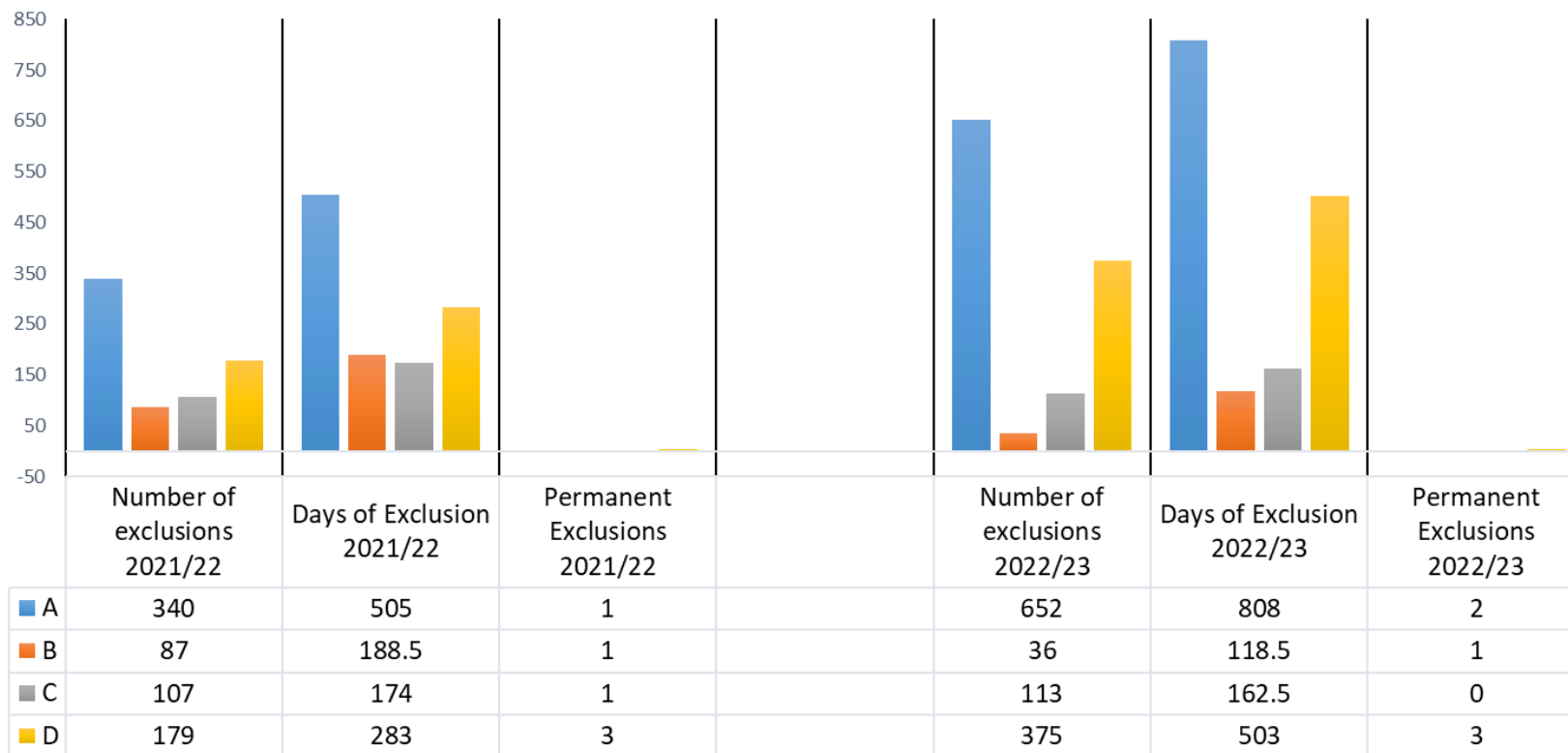


Historically in **Blaenau Gwent, exclusions** have been represented by high numbers and this had started to reduce slightly; however, we are now experiencing an **increase in exclusions** related to an increase in **adverse behaviours in school**. With the introduction of the Vulnerable learner Panel (VLP) this year, the Local Authority has been able to support learners that have been at risk of permanent exclusion and support schools in reducing this category of exclusion. However, the Local Authority is seeing a significant increase in referrals to VLP and we need to be mindful that there is only limited provision and funding available.

The exclusion data detailed over the next few pages shows the comparison of data during the 2022/23 academic year compared to the 2021/22 academic year.

During the academic year 22/23 there were a **total of 1176 exclusions in our Secondary school estate compared to 713 in the previous year** of 21/22.

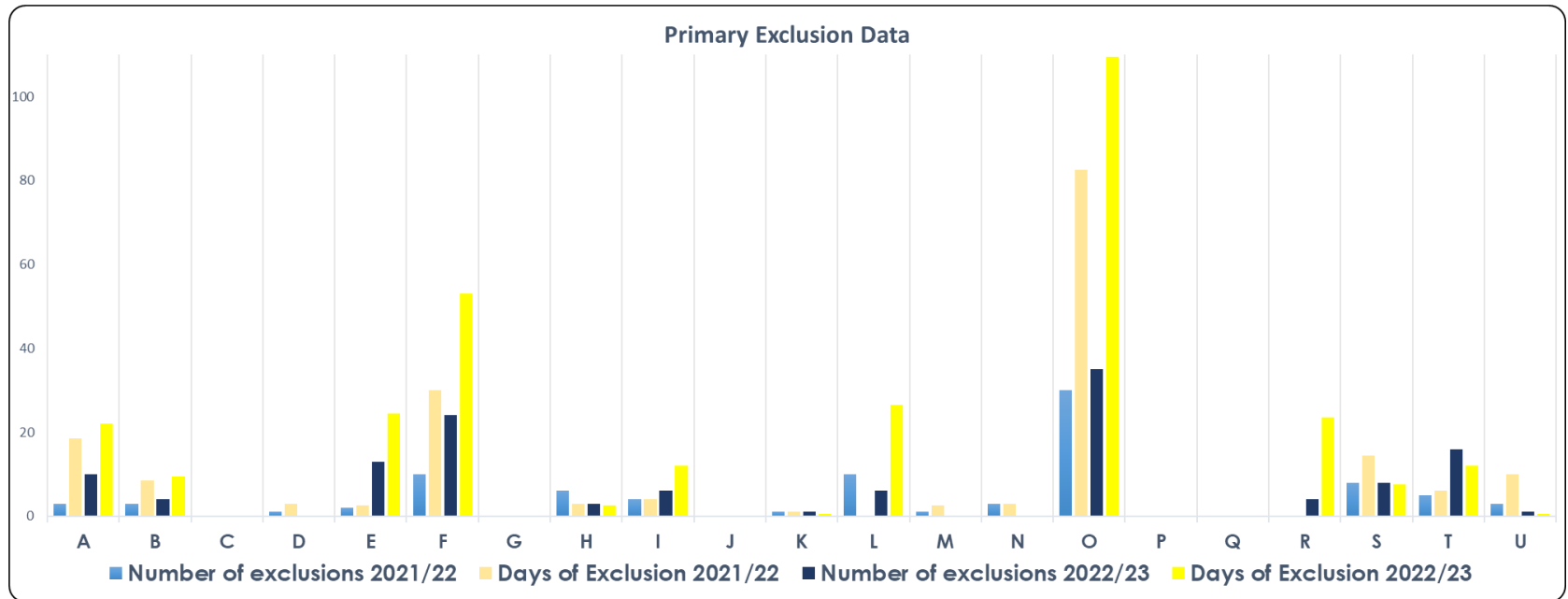
Secondary Exclusion Data





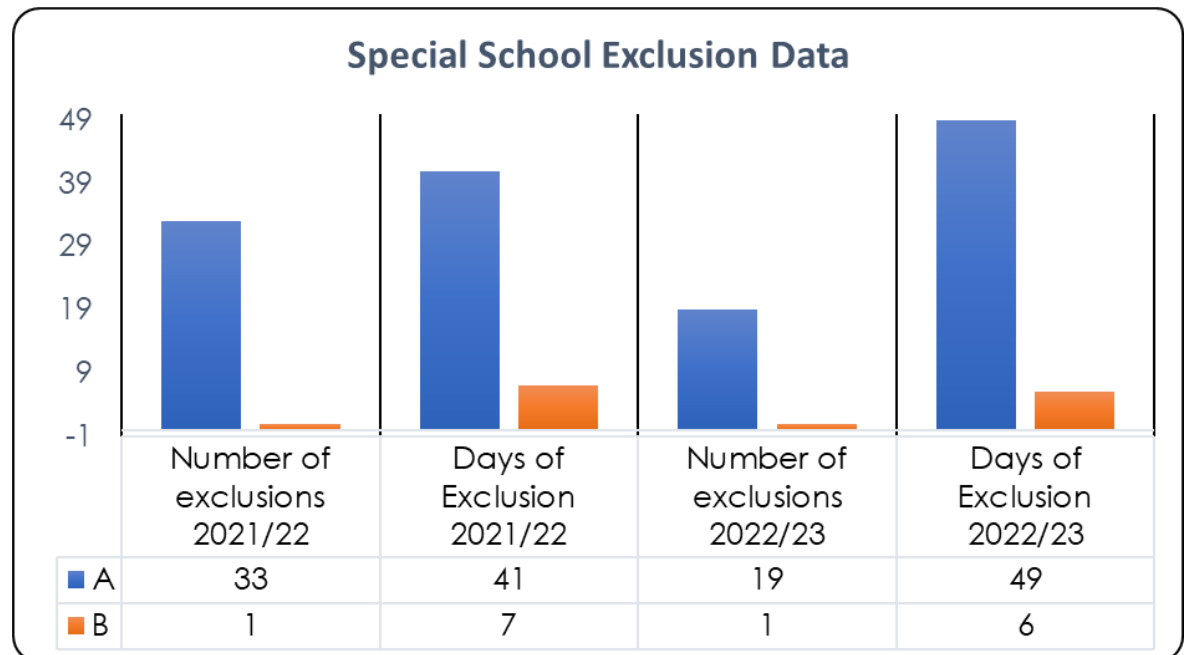
During the academic year 22/23 there were a **total of 131 exclusions overall throughout our primary school estate compared to 90 in the previous year of 21/22.**

There were no permanent primary school exclusions this year.



Although figures show that **exclusions from the 2 special schools have decreased** on the previous year, **the days lost are increased.**

There were no permanent special school exclusions this year.







The summary table below details the overall increase / decrease of exclusion numbers, number of days of exclusion and permanent exclusions across our education settings from 2022/23 academic year compared to the previous academic year 2021/22.

Overall it is not showing a positive picture with an **increase of 490 pupil exclusions across the school estate** compared to last academic year and an **increase of 561 days lost to exclusion**. The number of Permanent exclusions during 2022/23 academic year is again 6 pupils.



<b>Secondary</b>	Number of Exclusions has <b>increased by 463</b>	The number of days of exclusion has <b>increased by 441.5</b>	The number of permanent exclusions has <b>remained the same at 6</b>
<b>Primary</b>	Number of Exclusions has <b>increased by 41</b>	The number of days of exclusion has <b>increased by 114.5</b>	The number of permanent exclusions has <b>remained the same at 0</b>
<b>Special Schools</b>	Number of exclusions has <b>Reduced by 14</b>	The number of days of exclusion has <b>increased by 5</b>	The number of permanent exclusions has <b>remained the same at 0</b>
<b>Total increase compared to last academic year</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>0</b>

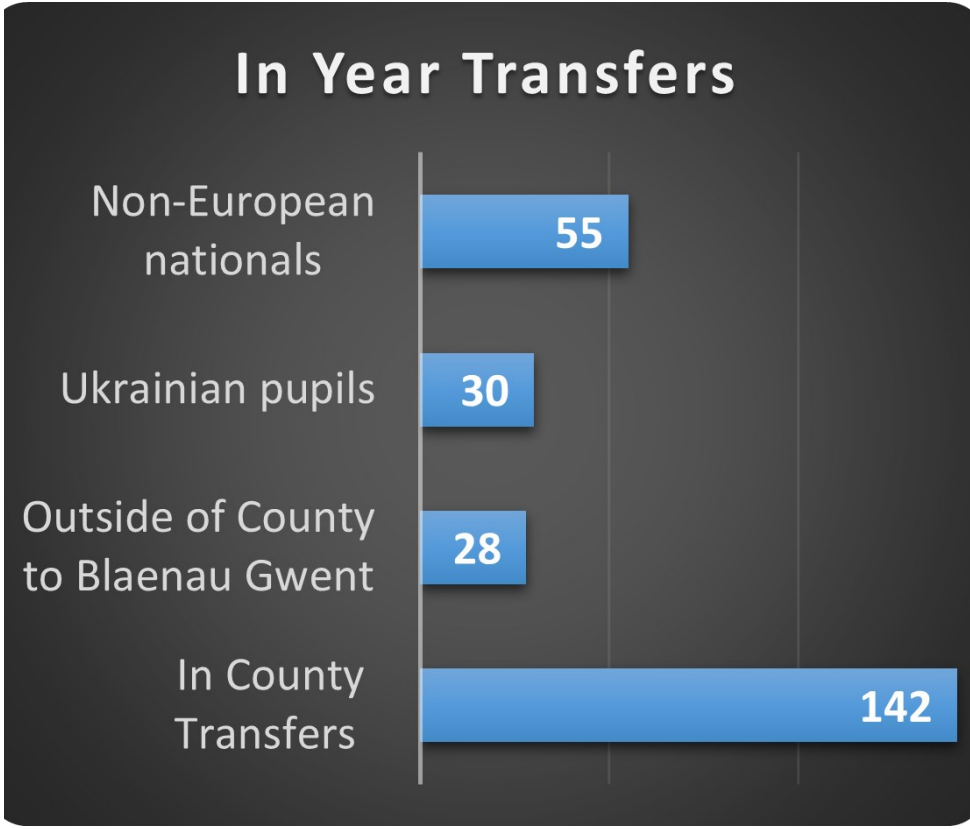


There is merit in looking at what the schools and Local Authority currently provide in terms of alternative curriculum and exploring if there is a more appropriate way of working.



All **admission rounds** were **completed** for 2022/23 academic year with **100% of first preferences being met** for both **nursery and secondary place allocation** and **99% of first preferences were met** for the **reception year group**. This is attributable to the **effective monitoring and management** of school capacities and pupil places along with the continued achievement of **surplus place reduction**.

There have been **255 In Year Transfers** between **September 2022 and July 2023** **33% of which were due to inward migration** from foreign nationals moving **into Blaenau Gwent**. **100%** of these transfers were **processed within 15 days**



**Two admission appeals** were held for the **reception admission round** during the **summer** period. **Both** appeals were **upheld in favour of the admissions authority** due to them being **class size appeals**.



Options for further **engagement and promotion** is being explored to **increase the number of in-time applications** for reception and secondary school.



**INTEGRATION / COLLABORATION** - Strategic links with key partners such as the EAS, Coleg Gwent, Schools, WBL providers continue to be effective, ensuring that Blaenau Gwent is well placed to continue with the transformation of the Education service and supporting our children and young people.





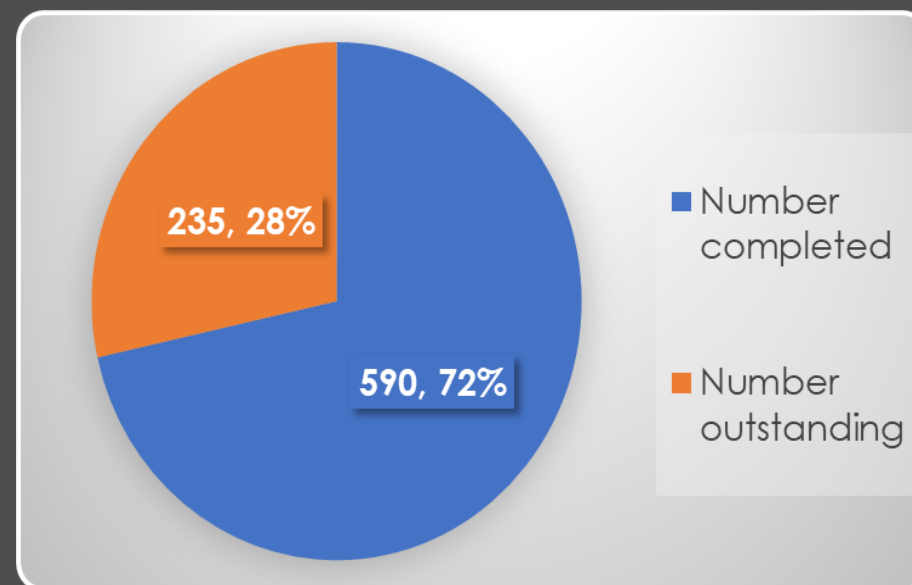
This year the Council received a Welsh Government **Schools Capital Maintenance Grant**, which alongside minor works has resulted in capital investment of **approximately £900,000 in the school estate** to date.

12 projects were completed during the summer holidays, these included full replacement of a toilet block in a secondary school, 8 classrooms refurb, full refurb of a nursery demountable building, creation of a Learning Resource Base (kitchen, office, toilets 3 classrooms) in a former unused building and refurb of 3 rooms in Bedwellty House to create a temporary seedling provision for the new Welsh primary.

**825 TE100's (requests for maintenance, repair and planned works)** were received between September 2022 and August 2023, **100%** of which were acknowledged and **received a response within the specified timeframe.**

72% (590) of the 825 TE100 requests have been completed with remaining 28% scheduled for completion within the 2023/24 academic year. Delays to resolution have been due to the following factors:-

- Budgetary issues in line with identified costs;
- Market forces including material availability;
- Access to school buildings;
- Securing contractors to undertake the work; and
- The capacity of Technical Services to assess the extent of repair/ maintenance work and associated costs.





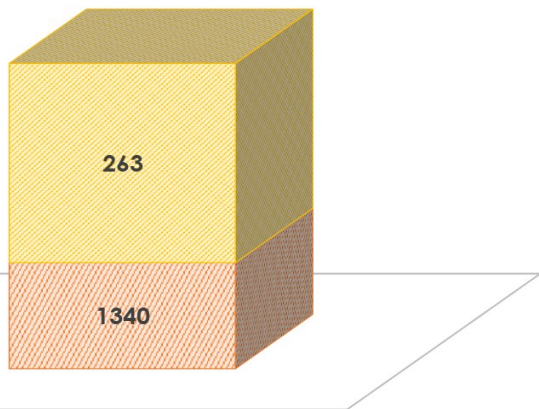
**INTEGRATION** - An effective internal partnership between the Education Directorate and the Build Environment, Environment and Regeneration continues, leading to the delivery of an efficient home to school / college transport provision.



We procure and monitor 28 operators providing transport for over 78 contracts. This includes mainstream, Welsh-medium, faith education and specialist provision for ALN.

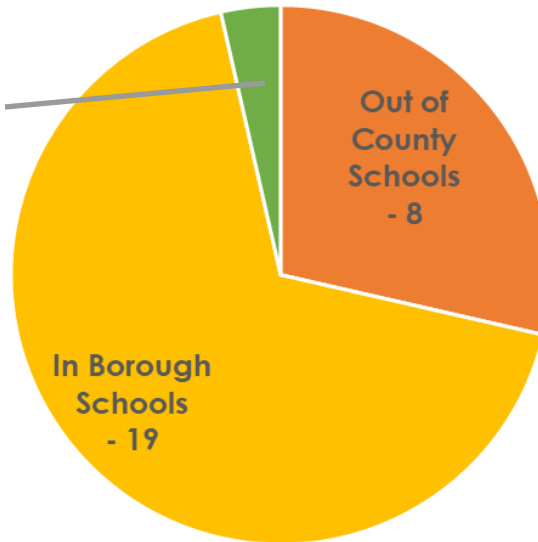
### Over 1600 school pupils use Home to School transport:

■ Mainstream Pupils ■ ALN Pupils



### We transport to:

Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone and Post 16 Provision - 1



We provide support for over 550 Post 16 students living in Blaenau Gwent, they are provided with a discounted bus ticket or travel grant. Applications for this academic year are still being processed.



The transport policy seeks to ensure that there is an appropriate framework to aid delivery of the services. The **Home to School Transport budget out-turn position for 2022/23 was £2.7m** (after the use of £450,000 of funding from reserves) against a budget of £2.2m.

For **2023/24** the **Home to School Transport budget is approximately £3.3m**, this is following the award of a **£682,000 cost pressure in the budget setting process in relation to the uplift in contract prices awarded to contractors as a result of the fuel crisis**. The Council received a number of requests from operators for an increase in the historical contractual rates as a result of the fuel crisis. This was agreed to ensure continuity of the home to school transport service.



**The ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity Project** - The Local Authority has again made strong progress in line with its strategy for improving standards in ICT. This has involved continued progression of the Infrastructure and Connectivity Project, implementation of Waves 1-4 of the Welsh Government HWB EdTech Programme and work towards the development of a strategy and associated sustainability plan for both infrastructure and devices in Blaenau Gwent.

### Estyn & Welsh Government Thematic Review

A recent ICT thematic review was undertaken by Estyn and Welsh Government which provided the council with suggestions to improve practice and enhance outcomes for learners in the LA. The review is based around 4 key areas:

1. Education Digital Standards
2. Quality and impact of online provision for schools
3. Hwb Approach and Other platforms
4. Digital Resilience

Overall the review was positive, highlighting the active work that the Education team have undertaken thus far. There were three recommendations identified:

- Blaenau Gwent to work with schools to re-focus on utilising 360 Safe Cymru tool.
- Provide finalised Digital Strategy to WG once consultation is completed.
- WG to support Blaenau Gwent with planned Hwb email migration and further Hwb adoption across the LA.

The 360 Safe Cymru tool forms part of the council's Education ICT strategy. There are Bi-monthly ICT strategy meetings due to restart in the Autumn-term 2023 where this recommendation will be added to the agenda and discussed in depth.

The ICT strategy is currently in draft format and the consultation has concluded. There were no further comments received from the consultation, however, Education have been liaising with the Digital Team to ensure the strategy aligns with the corporate ICT strategy. The final draft is to be reviewed in the Autumn-term 2023 for final sign off.

Education will collaborate with the Digital team and SRS to consider the Hwb Migration in the Autumn 2023 term

The **Educational Digital Standards** are designed to assist schools to understand, manage and implement their digital environment. The Standards also provide guidance on how schools should future-proof their digital environment to meet the needs of a more digitally focused school curriculum. The standards suggest all infrastructure work undertaken to meet the standards should be carefully considered, planned and procured in compliance with national procurement regulations and installed by professional organisations.



A corporate ICT strategy has been devised by the Digital team, and Education has worked with the team to ensure the Education strategy aligns with the corporate strategy

*'To secure continued development ensuring that all learners regardless of age or demographic have continued safe access to a blend of digital resources, hardware and cloud-based learning throughout the course of their education.'*



There are 9 priority areas identified within the strategy. These areas have been focused on heavily over the past 2 years, we will continue to progress these in line with the Digital competency framework.

- Infrastructure and Connectivity
- Digital Inclusion
- Device Sustainability
- Migration to and use of Hwb
- Digital tools and resources
- Training and Development
- Online Safety
- Support for Schools
- Education Management and support systems
- Blaenau Gwent corporate approach and overview





Through a partnership approach the Youth Engagement and Progression Team continue to support young people to prevent youth homelessness and to support emotional wellbeing.

**Youth Service**

The Youth Service provides a number of high quality projects providing young people with personal support, advice, guidance, advocacy and counselling services in school and community settings - this is supported by a well-developed workforce.



**Groups continue to be facilitated with young people in alternative school settings accessing opportunities and provision.**

**This includes a group linked to having difficulties in a mainstream setting (and a group at the SEBD provision), in total 38 young people have engaged.**



**The team has continued to support individuals on a one-to-one basis, along with running groups and community projects.**

**During the last academic year,  
25 young people were supported  
on a one-to-one basis.**

**These young people are often in precarious housing situations, and support is based around navigating appropriate information, advice and guidance from other services to help provide some stability and to enable them to improve their housing situation.**

**This has continued to develop, with ongoing relationships with partners growing and understanding of routes and support available locally expanding, overall becoming more efficient and effective.**



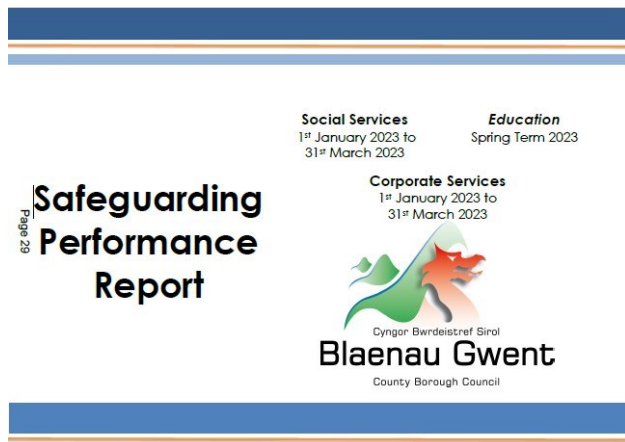


Safeguarding processes are well established in the Youth Service and are fit for purpose. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, with robust records kept on all safeguarding matters including Duty to Report (DTRs) Referrals to Social Services, feedback and staff training. Termly meetings are 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. All Youth Service staff have received training in Prevent and actively use this understanding to identify any concerns in youth settings. Staff are giving regular opportunities to attend other training to identify, support and report safeguarding issues which include child exploitation, domestic abuse, emotional wellbeing support.



**Safeguarding** is a corporate responsibility and is an important aspect of the Education Directorates service delivery.

Between September 2022 and August 2023, **44 referrals (DTRs)** were made to Social Services and more detail relating to these are included in the Joint Safeguarding Report.



Right click here and open hyperlink to view our most recent Safeguarding Performance Report



The Youth Service operates a Safeguarding Policy and Procedure which sits underneath The Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Education Directorate Local Government Education Services Safeguarding Policy and includes the procedure for Youth Workers who work out of hours and the procedure for Safeguarding Adults at Risk.

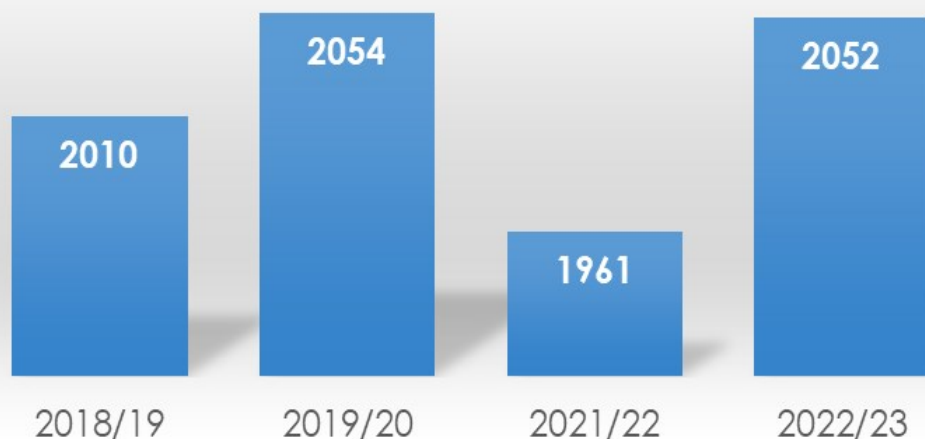
All youth service staff, students, counsellors, therapists and volunteers receive **safeguarding training**. Depending on the role, staff also attend additional training in specific areas such as child exploitation, substance misuse and Prevent to ensure **effective identification and reporting** of safeguarding concerns.







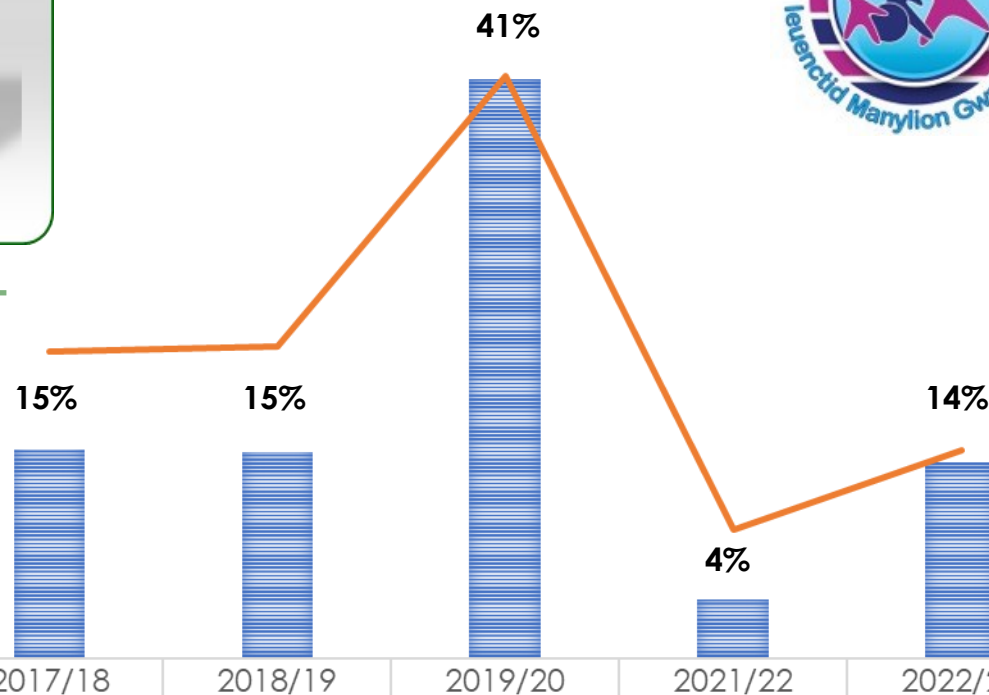
### Number of 11-25 year olds supported by the Youth Service



The **number of 11-25 year olds supported by the Youth Service** during 2022/23 is 2052 (Reach of 19%). The reach is 2% higher than the 2021/2022 data and shows that the reach has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Out of the 2,052 11-25 year olds supported by the Youth Service above, **14% (287 young people) have gained 340 nationally recognised qualifications.** Any achievements are made voluntarily and completed during the young people's spare time.



	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	2022/23
Number of young people supported (11-25) that gained accredited qualifications	306	301	847	86	287
Number of qualifications achieved	448	456	851	188	304



**The number of additional contacts made with anonymous young people (not registered with the service)**

through the 11-25 Counselling Service, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events with some online activities offered.



(one contact is between 1-3 hours long)



**Prevention** - The service is led by the needs and interests of young people, and as we returned to face to face delivery accreditations were not the focus of the work, as needs being presented by young people have been mostly around **emotional well-being** where different approaches have been needed. Dependent on the project, the outcomes for each programme are now measured on participation, improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either school attendance or behaviour, rather than accreditations. Despite this a significant number of young people still undertook an accreditation .





Over the last year, both core and external funding has been secured to continue a variety of projects to meet identified needs which include :

- SPF 11-25 Youth and Community programmes;
- Youth Homelessness;
- Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Duke of Edinburgh;
- Detached and Outreach Youth Workers;
- Positive Futures (ASB programmes);
- Open for Youth Nights;
- Youth Clubs;
- Youth Information Service;
- Young Ambassadors (YAMs);
- the 11-25 Counselling Service;
- the Young Reps Volunteering Programme; and
- the school holiday programme.



Funding was secured via the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) from 1st April 2023 until 31st March 2025 to continue the successful delivery of both Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work. The SPF programme has been planned and developed based upon learning from Inspire and youth workers within the SPF project continue to support young people aged 11-25 who are at risk of becoming or are NEET.

The programme will again support young people within learning settings and in the community. The programme aims to support 900 young people within its duration and key outcomes include development of life skills, employability skills, achieving additional qualifications and transition into further education, training or employment.

Partnership working will remain and continue as a key function of the programme in both 11-16 and 16-25 support pathways, ensuring young people receive the appropriate access to a wide of support without duplication.

Ysbrydoli  Gyflawni  
Inspire  Achieve



Inspire  Work  
Ysbrydoli  Weithio



## Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services



The Council's Workforce Strategy 2022-26 aims to build on existing good practice and is continuing to promote the Council as a good place to work – **developing a workforce that feels connected to and can meet the current and future needs of our community.**

The Directorate recognises the critical need to communicate and engage staff in service delivery, transformation, change, new commercial thinking and financial efficiency. This is currently undertaken through a number of methods: • Regular one to one performance coaching • Annual performance review • Team meetings • Staff meetings • Management team meetings • Staff Surveys • Engagement in financial planning

Close work with Organisational Development continues and includes monitoring of staff attendance rates.

Education Directorate	Quarter 1 (Cumulative) 2022/23	Quarter 2 (Cumulative) 2022/23	Quarter 2 - 22/23 Target	Quarter 1 (Cumulative) 2023/24	Quarter 2 (Cumulative) 2023/24	Quarter 2 - 23/24 Target	Trend
Education Transformation and Business Change	0.60	9.40	2.75	3.56	4.20	3.5	Improvement but over target
School Improvement & Inclusion	0.25	0.47	2.75	0.49	2.32	3.5	Decline but within target
Young People and Partnerships.	2.46	2.46	2.75	0.82	0.78	3.5	Improvement and within target
Senior Management	0.00	0.00	2.75	26.09	40.50	3	Decline and over target
School Based Staff (excluding Teachers)	4.98	7.87	4.25	3.28	5.18	6	Improvement and within target
Teachers	3.29	4.90	4.25	2.53	3.73	6	Improvement and within target



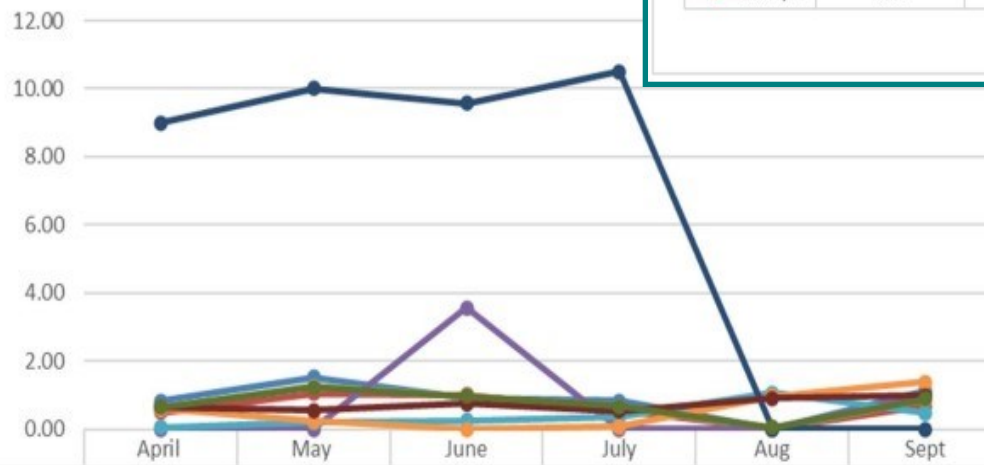
## Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services

### Education staff absence rates - Two year comparison



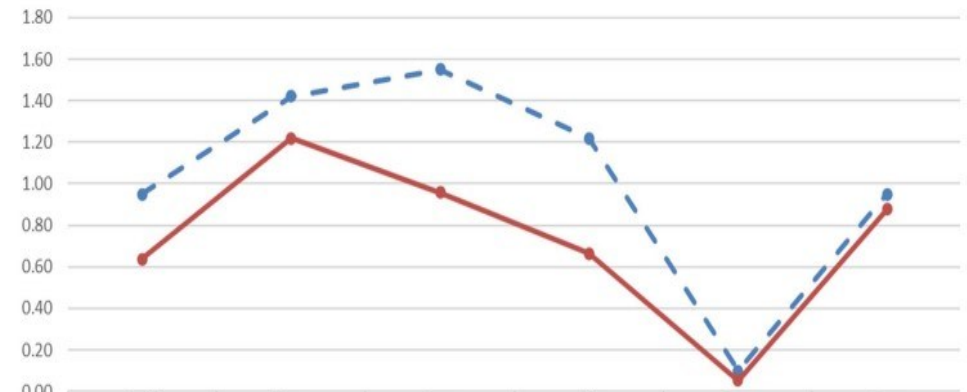
### April - September 2023/24 Sickness Breakdown

Education Directorate (inc. Schools)

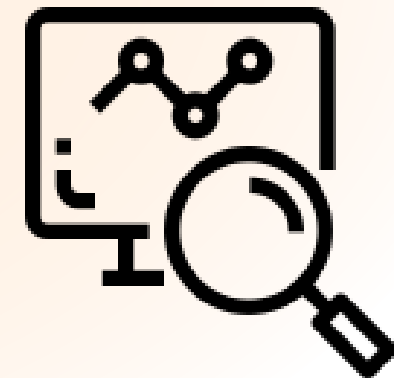


	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
School based staff (excluding Teachers)	0.83	1.52	0.93	0.83	0.00	1.13
Teachers	0.48	1.05	1.00	0.54	0.00	0.66
Schools Total	0.64	1.26	0.97	0.67	0.00	0.87
Education Transformation & Business Change	0.00	0.00	3.56	0.00	0.00	1.00
School Improvement & Inclusion	0.05	0.20	0.24	0.34	1.07	0.47
Young People & Partnerships	0.58	0.24	0.00	0.07	0.97	1.39
Senior Management *	9.00	10.00	9.57	10.50	0.00	0.00
Corporate Education Total	0.64	0.55	0.75	0.52	0.90	0.98
Education Totals	0.64	1.22	0.96	0.67	0.05	0.88

Education Directorate (inc. Schools)



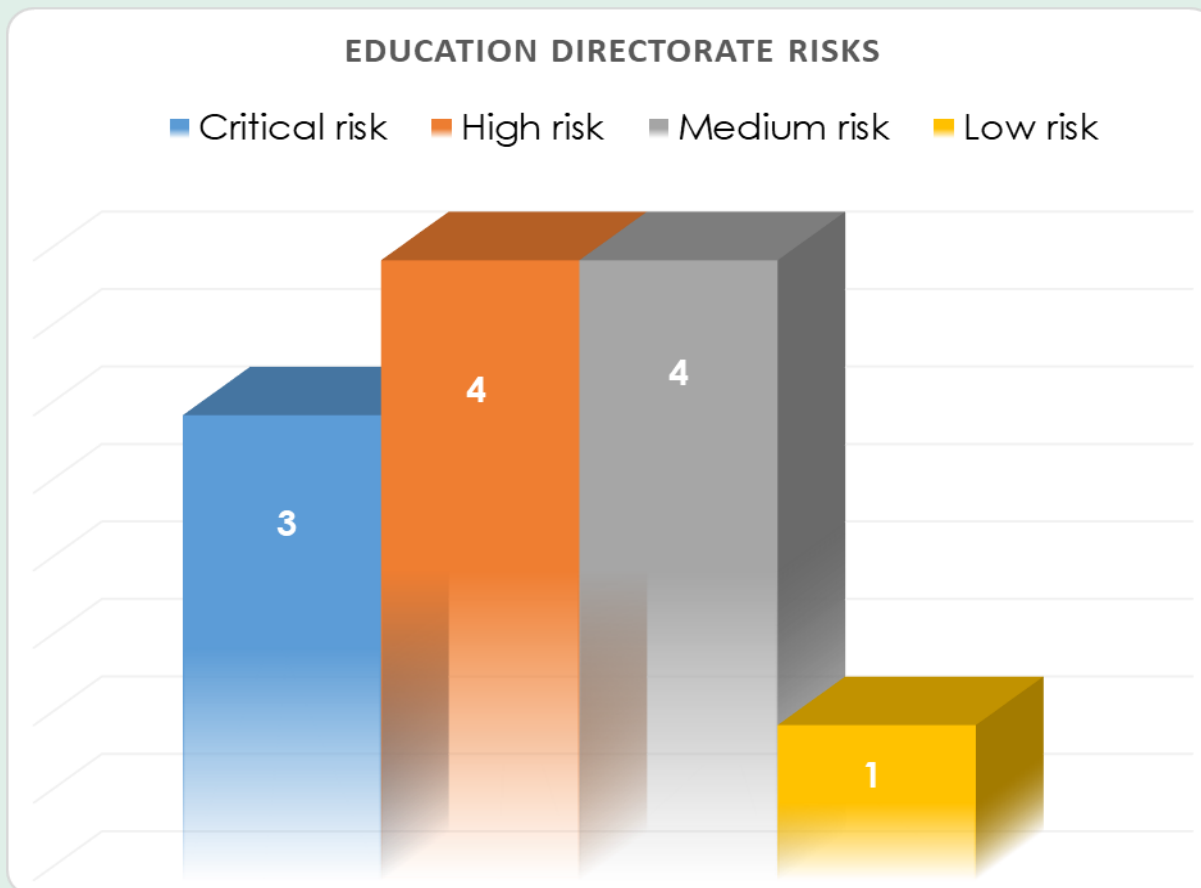
	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
2022 / 23	0.95	1.42	1.55	1.22	0.10	0.95
2023 / 24	0.64	1.22	0.96	0.67	0.05	0.88





**In line with the Council's Risk Management Strategy Department Leadership Team review and challenge the risks on the Directorate Risk Register on a quarterly basis. As part of this process, they will consider new risks for inclusion on to the Directorate Risk Register and consider risks for escalation to the Corporate Risk Register.**

The Education Directorate Risk Register has 12 risks, with 3 having a critical residual status, 4 having a high residual risk status, 4 being medium status and the remaining one being of low status. Mitigating actions are in place for all risks and the critical risks are detailed below .....



- **Failure to support schools in improving pupil outcomes and wellbeing.**
- **Free School Meal (FSM) figures reported to Welsh Government have included pupils who are entitled to a FSM based on transitional protection**
- **Budget concerns**





## Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services



Proposals have been shared with schools in terms of Rising 3 funding becoming a lump sum of funding shared among all schools to align with the Additional Learning Needs agenda for inclusion and to provide equity among schools in being able to build capacity to meet the needs of all learners. Discussions are



The education directorates aim is to work towards developing a robust **strategic plan for partnership working** which enables opportunities for children, young people and the wider community to be maximised. This plan will ensure communication between different service areas and partners is effective , with partnership working leading to improved services and value for money. Partners know the Education Directorate's vision and strategic aims and they provide services which positively build on these.



### Engagement with Members -

Aside from the work programmes for Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council, the Education Directorate also regularly engages with Elected Members to inform Members of key areas of the Directorate to enhance their learning and understanding.



At this stage the Local Authority has not yet received any monitoring forms, which schools are requested to return to demonstrate how the funding has been used and the impact. We are not able to evidence whether this funding has had any positive impact.





**Directorate Priority Review** - A full Business Plan review has been undertaken within the period in line with a review of each service area under the Education Directorate. This has led to new Business Plans being created based on this review, Estyn recommendations (detailed on page 12) and Corporate priorities.

**We continue to develop a clear vision for all teams based on the newly formed vision for the Education Directorate. The plan needs to be supported by clear timelines, related actions and measurable success criteria.**

**Professional Learning reviews are completed, particularly with a focus on ALN to support equity & Inclusion.**



**Improvement planning is based on sharing of key data across service areas and wider stakeholders.**

Need to build on the audit of our professional learning across service areas to promote the best opportunities for our children and young people.



**A Review of what commissioned services**



sit within the Education Directorate has been undertaken and these include:-

- GEMS - Gwent Education Minority-ethnic Service
- SENCOM - Sensory and Communication Support Service
- YOS – Youth Offending Service
- IPS - Inclusive Practice Service
- SNAP Cymru
- EAS - Education Achievement Service



Regular contact has been maintained between the Local Authority and these commissioned services, with a clear vision shared for engagement and measurable, purposeful success criteria aligned to our bespoke priorities for our learners and schools in place.



A system for reviewing the current governance arrangements of each of these commissioned services has been created in preparation for review in quarter 3.





## People, Partnerships and Engagement

The Education Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and uses various engagement methodologies to understand if the service is making the intended outcomes or if amendments to service delivery need to be considered. Throughout the period a variety of engagement events have taken place and some of these are demonstrated by the following symbol throughout the report



During quarter 3 we are aiming to develop a strategy for community engagement - linked to Community Focused Schools.

The Education Directorate recognises the importance of **effective partnership working** in maximising opportunities to support children, young people and the wider community.

It is key to the vision for the directorate:

*Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-informed Life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives*

Some examples of **existing partnership working** are **demonstrated by the following icons** shown throughout the report and examples include:-



Integrated working with all other directorates within the council / a focus on the education of children looked after with Social Services and preventative services / A focus on the development of Educational facilities ensuring that they are fit for the future with the Environment Directorate, such as HIVE and sustainable communities for learning.



Collaborative working with partners such as the Education Achievement Service / Aneurin leisure trust / Health Board - school place planning .

# Case Study - Education Minister visits Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg

**Welsh Minister for Education & the Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, visits Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to see remodelling work funded by Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, creating both internal and external spaces to improve the teaching and learning environment.**

The Minister said: "Well-designed buildings and pleasant surroundings are so important to supporting learners and staff, delivering high standards and aspirations for all. I want our schools to be inspiring places to learn and to teach, for our pupils to thrive, and Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg shows how this can be done."



Being creative in the media suite



Quiet time in the library



Enjoying the outside space

# Case Study - Glyncoed Primary New Build

Works are progressing well on the new build to provide a 360 place primary school and separate childcare facility in Ebbw Vale. There are also close links with the Hive (STEM) Project in Blaenau Gwent. A project team continue to meet regularly. Good progress has been made by Morgan Sindall, the contractor and works on the school are half way completed with occupation is scheduled for April 2024.



Cymunedau **Dysgu** Cynaliadwy   
Sustainable Communities for **Learning**

# Case Study - Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)

## Secondary Schools in Blaenau Gwent have received grant funding of over £66,000 from the Welsh Government's Tech Valleys programme to purchase new equipment to enhance the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths.

Twenty schools across Blaenau Gwent and three across Merthyr successfully bid for Welsh Government funding of up to £3,000. The successful applications were awarded funding for a range of equipment from autoclaves and Raspberry Pi computers to on-line post-mortem sessions and chocolate 3-D printers all designed to help bring authentic work experiences into the classroom. The applications were judged by a panel which included representatives from the Education Advisory Service (EAS), Industry Wales, the Tech Valleys STEM Facilitation Co-ordinator and Welsh Government.



These grants to schools are part of the much wider Tech Valleys STEM Facilitation activity, a **commitment of £570,000 over four years by the Welsh Government**. The aim of the project is to increase the uptake of STEM GCSEs at Key Stage 3 and maintain that interest at Key Stage 4.

## Blaenau Gwent Council – STEM Facilitation Project has reached the final of the Wales STEM Awards 2023

and has been named as one of the 55 companies and individuals shortlisted in the Awards, which is sponsored by Cardiff Metropolitan University. The Wales STEM Awards is back for the third time to shine a spotlight on the organisations and individuals raising the profile of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in Wales. All finalists from across a total of 13 categories will now be considered by an industry-leading panel of judges, with the winners being announced at the awards ceremony at the Mercure Holland House Hotel on **13th October**.

**Councillor John C Morgan, Cabinet Member for Place and Regeneration and Economic Development said:**

### Curriculum Reform -

**STEM** The focus going forward is at a strategic school level for Recovery and Renewal, with an emphasis on Curriculum Reform e.g. STEM activity.

### Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and

STEM Schools focus on these subjects to help our nation's youth gain the skills required to succeed in today's challenging world.



# Case Study - Blaina school becomes first Prem Aware School in Wales

The Smallest Things charity has presented Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary School with their Prem Aware Award! By completing additional training and steps to become a Prem Aware School teaching staff at Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary will have a better understanding of the learning needs some children born prematurely may have, will be able to identify needs earlier, and will be able to provide timely and targeted support.



## **Lauren Cairns, Headteacher, at Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary said:**

*"Having taken the pledge earlier this year, we are ever so proud at Coed-y-Garn to become the first school in Wales to achieve The Smallest Things Prem Aware Award. As a school, we are committed to improving wellbeing and supporting learners, and having an improved understanding of the impact that being born prematurely can have on an individual will be beneficial in supporting our learners and our families."*

## **Congratulating the steps taken by Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary School, Catriona Ogilvy, Founder and Chair of The Smallest Things said:**

*"The Smallest Things is delighted that Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary School has joined our growing list of Prem Aware schools across the UK. In doing so they have shown their commitment to meeting the needs some pupils born premature may have. With an average of two to three children in every classroom being born prematurely, we know that teachers can play a crucial role in supporting and improving the long term outcomes for this cohort of children. Having trained teachers who know what to look out for and how to help pupils born prematurely will have such a positive impact on the children's educational journeys."*

The Smallest Things Prem Aware Award scheme promotes use of the 'Preterm Birth Information for Educational Professionals', a free online training resource developed by Professor Samantha Johnson and her colleagues in the PRISM (Premature Infants' Skills in Mathematics) Study Team. The online resource outlines the impact premature birth can have on a child's development and learning, and offers practical ways to support children born prematurely at school.

While pupils born extremely prematurely (before 28 weeks' gestation) are most likely to need extra support,

# Case Study - Telephony in Blaenau Gwent Schools and the wider Council

In line with the Digital Teams review of telephony across the council, Education are collaborating with the team to review and provide telephony solutions for schools. This is one of the key projects of the Council's Digital Programme which contributes to the Bridging the Gap programme in aiming to reduce our Third Party Spend and maximising the use of core digital systems. Education's involvement is vital in this project in order to engage and co-ordinate with schools. It has already been established that 9 schools are using the current corporate telephony provider (Avaya).



Avaya platform is at "End of Life", and the Council are due to cease the contract. In addition, the PSTN analogue lines are due to be switched off nationwide in December 2025. A number of schools are also experiencing severe issues with alternative providers and there is a risk to safeguarding should these systems fail. Microsoft Teams telephony has been identified as the corporate solution, and to mitigate the potential risks and issues that schools are facing, there are aspirations to move all schools to Teams telephony.

Education recently met with Head teachers to understand current systems, individual requirements, and work towards a "one council approach" for telephony. Including schools in this corporate approach will ensure that communications are modern and fit for purpose. It will enable us to better manage the telephony estate, licenses and call plans. It will help deliver services in the most effective way. A single solution will reduce inefficiencies, duplication, and licence costs.



Education has identified two schools who will pilot the Teams telephony product in the Autumn 2023 term. These schools have been chosen based on the level of risk that their current telephony poses. Following this pilot, all other schools will be given the opportunity to move to Teams telephony by the end of the Autumn term/ Early Spring 2024 term.



**The Education Directorate continue to work with partners, both internal and external in order to support our pupils development.**



# Case Study - Period Equity work in Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent Council is working with schools and a range of local partners to ensure that no female, whatever their age, is disadvantaged by not having access to period products and has made sure these are now readily and freely available in over 100 education and community settings.

MINISTERIAL VISIT BY JANE HUTT

The Welsh Minister for Social Justice Jane Hutt MS has visited Blaenau Gwent to see the pioneering work in period equity and dignity which is being delivered across the county borough, and met with residents and school pupils who have benefitted from the scheme.



Some highlights of the visit

## The Council's Cabinet Member for People & Education, Cllr Sue Edmunds says:

"We're immensely proud of the work going on here in Blaenau Gwent to tackle period poverty and promote period dignity, so it was wonderful to have Jane Hutt MS visit to find out more about our approach to this important issue. We have a very enthusiastic project team with a range of partners who are all fully committed to making sure that no female should be at a disadvantage when it comes to their period. Not only are we committed to making sure products are available, but we are also working with all our partners to break down the stigma around periods. Periods are normal and we want people not to be embarrassed to request products.



#BalchOrMislif  
llyw.cymru/balchormislif

#PeriodProudWales  
gov.wales/periodproud



# Case Study - New Welsh Medium school, Tredegar



Blaenau Gwent Council is building a new 210 place Welsh Medium Primary School, inclusive of a Welsh-medium childcare provision, at Chartist Way, Sirhowy Tredegar. The Council has secured £13.4million of capital funding via the Welsh Government Welsh Medium Capital Grant and Childcare Capital Grant schemes to progress with the school build and will also incorporate a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), a forest play area, a growing orchard and wild-flower meadows. The school will also be climate conscious with solar panels and electric vehicle charging points. A play area on the site will also be relocated as part of the project on the same site and be furnished with new play equipment.

The project has progressed to full planning and appointment of contractor in July 2023. The works on site are commencing September 2023 with the new park being erected outside the school boundary, then the main contractor will start the school build November 2023 with completion being expected early 2025.

In the interim period temporary accommodation was opened in September 23 at Bedwellty House, for pupils of Nursery and Reception age signed up for the new school , so that they can start this academic year.

There are currently 6 pupils that started in September rising to 9 in January 2024.



Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management



## Future Direction and areas that we feel we need to focus upon going forward

As stated at the beginning of this report our overall aim is to support delivery of our corporate objectives. Listed below are some of the areas we recognise that we need to continue to focus on improving. We recognise that even the achievements are not yet completed but remain areas for progress to be maintained and improved upon where possible.

As a council we are looking to be '**An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Further engagement and promotion to increase the 'on time' admission applications;
- Monitor Home to school transport funding issues;
- Secure external funding for the future delivery of services;
- Ensure that our vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood by other officers, elected members, school staff and external partners;
- Develop a strategy for community engagement, linked to community focussed schools;
- Progress analysis of Rising 3 funding impact;
- Develop a strategic plan for partnership working;
- Build on the audit of our professional learning across service areas to promote best opportunities for our children and young people;
- Develop clear timelines, related actions and measurable success criteria to support delivery of the new vision and business plans;
- Develop a suitable vision and strategy for the future provision of ALN; and
- Continue to improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management.





## Future Direction and areas that we feel we need to focus upon going forward (continued)

As a council we are looking to '**Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report that have been delivered by the Education Directorate over this past year to support delivery of this corporate objective, we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-



- Further analysis of reasons for decline in attendance and exclusion and mitigating actions put in place;
- Monitor NEET figures and ensure new systems and processes put in place are effective;
- Continue to monitor and improve on attainment levels;
- Focus on pupil integration back into mainstream and promotion of inclusion;
- Explore options for further engagement and promotion to increase the number of in-time pupil school applications;
- Higher levels of language acquisition and reading across the board, but particularly in our very young children in early years; and
- Focus on improving the pace of change for Schools Causing Concern (SCC) improvement journeys.



As a council we are looking to '**Empower and support communities to be safe, independent and resilient**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report that have been delivered by the Education Directorate over this past year to support delivery of this corporate objective, we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Continue to closely monitor safeguarding and use data more effectively to inform long term planning;
- Monitor timeliness and access to mental health provision along with new referral numbers;
- Monitor numbers of referrals to vulnerable learners provision; and
- Continue to improve the reach of 11-25 year olds supported by Youth and increase the number for which well-being improvements are made.



As a council we are looking to '**Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Continue to effectively deliver sustainable communities for learning which are environmentally friendly;
- Further encourage nature friendly management on school grounds;
- Develop a schools Biodiversity policy and support with the integration; and
- Continue to engage all young people with the environment.