Blaenau Gwent – Estyn/Welsh Government Joint Digital Focus Summary – 19 January 2023

Education Digital Standards

- Evidence of good collaboration with SRS and EAS covering technical support and school improvement.
- Confidence that schools adhere to the EDS through the SLA with SRS. SRS has an infrastructure brief aligned to the EDS and know when things are coming end of life. Blaenau Gwent would be sooner than most other LAs.
- EdTech funding accelerated an existing LA funding programme to future proof their infrastructure.
- Blaenau Gwent provides guidance but don't dictate on devices. Belief that schools will prioritise budget sustainability for devices going forward.
- Head teachers understand and value the conversations with the LA about sustainability and buy in.
- Blaenau Gwent trust SRS on infrastructure intelligence for refresh and SRS trust Blaenau Gwent on devices and that they will manage devices going out of support.
- Schools feel that they are best placed to decide what equipment they need for teaching and learning.

Quality and impact of online provision for schools

- EAS supports digital learning, practice and professional learning.
- More schools are including digital in school development plans.
- LA has a long running and embedded ICT strategy group.
- More schools are engaging with EAS digital leaders course - vision for digital in each school is crucial.
- LA not convincing when asked about continuity of learning through access to devices for all learners in the case of school closures etc.
- LA has the data on Free School Meals but it's schools that hold the information on their digitally excluded learners.
- School view that teachers' digital skills and confidence are improving, and that digital has become more mainstream. More focus now on how the technology/device can be best utilised for teaching and learning as opposed to just the technology.

Hwb Approach and Other platforms

- Blaenau Gwent continues to encourage Hwb first approach.
- LA Digital strategy is drafted ready to go out for consultation.
- There is appetite for migration but there are perceived barriers in terms of control, the migration process and the effort involved.
- Secondary reticence to migration and perception that Hwb doesn't cater as well for them as primaries.
- 18/25 schools use Hwb as their main platform, the other schools have a Google Edu domain (more common to secondaries).
- Most schools use Hwb alongside other applications such as Purple Mash, Class Dojo and Seesaw, particularly to engage younger learners.
- LA delayed Hwb migration due to PSBA issues. There are plans to migrate email to Hwb with files to follow shortly after.

Digital Resilience

- Online safety is included and referenced throughout the Safeguarding policy – all staff have the responsibility for online and offline elements.
- Schools utilise 360 Safe Cymru template online safety policy and use 360 Safe tool.
- Covid slowed the momentum of engagement with 360 Safe, LA committed to re-focusing on this.
- There are some questions from schools around which elements of online safety are the responsibility of the ICT lead in school and which is safeguarding lead.
- Schools utilise Community Engagement Officers on parental engagement.
- More digital safety issues are bleeding into schools, younger and younger learners at primary. The role of parents here is key and engaging with them is hard.
- Reporting mechanisms into children's service, utilising MyConcern which is a work in progress. They have a consistent set of categories agreed from last term which require further refinement.

Key Observations

- High reliance on SRS as the SLA provider. High trust from the LA and growing trust from schools in SRS relationship.
- Blaenau Gwent is considering the impact of sustainability plans on schools and intends to provide updated plans to the Welsh Government. Schools are encouraged to spend their own funding and Welsh Government funding on devices. Conversations about sustainability are collaborative involving heads, the LA and SRS and start with the premise – what do you want to achieve.
- Schools are placing greater emphasis on developing computational thinking skills. Staff training is being provided to enable teachers to work with learners in developing these skills. Cluster-based professional learning offers are being utilised to assess the placement and development of learner skills.
- Blaenau Gwent is actively addressing digital exclusion by considering the cost-of-living crisis and ensuring access to digital learning for all learners. Efforts are being made to monitor engagement and identify learners

who require access to digital equipment at home but further clarification rquired. Additionally, alternative options such as libraries are being promoted for learners without digital access.

- LA provided comprehensive evidence to Welsh Government which was appreciated.

Key Actions and Follow Ups

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