

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **15th December 2020**
Report Subject: **Improving Schools Programme 2020**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J Collins, Executive Member for Education**
Report Submitted by: **Lynn Philips, Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
26.11.20	26.11.20	27.11.20			15.12.20	13.01.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Scrutiny Committee with an overview of those schools over the last 3 years that have presented as a cause for concern, their progress and the work delivered or currently underway to continue to support improvement.

NB. Members will be aware that the presentation of this report has been delayed as a result of the suspension of business as usual activities, but is now presented to ensure that members are made aware of the improvement journey of some schools.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The report covers all schools and settings within the County Borough identified by the Education Directorate, supported by the EAS and/or Estyn as needing to improve.
- 2.2 The Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme operates within the regional arrangements for supporting schools across South East Wales and aligns with the regional policies and processes for school monitoring, evaluation, support and intervention. The regional arrangements build on the national frameworks and guidance and in particular the National Framework for Categorising Schools and the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The background to categorisation is explained further in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme focuses particularly on those schools which need to secure improvement in schools categorised as Amber and Red.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

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

3.2 Option 2

Accept the report as provided.

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

4.1 Corporate Improvement Plan

Outcome Statement 2020/22	Corporate Plan activity
Support a fairer sustainable economy and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes• To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing

4.2 Statutory Responsibility

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 consolidates, clarifies and reforms the law in relation to intervention in schools causing concern. The Welsh Government's statutory guidance for schools causing concern (February 2014) details the local authority powers of intervention in schools causing concern, the grounds on which those powers can be invoked and the procedures governing the intervention process. A further explanation of this is explained further in Appendix 1, which includes the LA powers of intervention.

4.3 Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan Objectives

This report is in line with the following objectives as set out in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan:

- Blaenau Gwent wants everyone to have the best start in life.
- Blaenau Gwent wants safe and friendly communities.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

There are no direct financial implications for this report. However, the Council allocates approximately £42.8m to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes.

Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements of approximately £364,000 from the core Education Directorate revenue budget. The EAS is the Council's commissioned school improvement service who work directly with schools to provide professional challenge and

support to improve. The Education Directorate holds the EAS to account for the impact and effectiveness of their work in schools in Blaenau Gwent.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

The strategic risk is associated with underperformance and ineffective processes to improve performance and progress in identified schools. Failure to raise standards is identified as a key risk to the Council, both in terms of reputation and pupil life chances. This is reflected in the Corporate Risk Register, Education Directorate and EAS risk registers.

Mitigating actions include the routine monitoring of quantitative and qualitative information, regular quality assurance meetings between the Council and the EAS, regular quality assurance meetings within the Education Directorate and across teams, school inspection findings and school categorisation results.

The progress schools make in their School Development Plans is monitored on a half-termly basis. School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored on a fortnightly basis. School's safeguarding processes are also closely monitored.

Holistic support packages are devised via regular internal Council services meetings between OD, finance, health and safety, education and school governor support services. Through ongoing robust self-evaluation processes school level performance data is regularly analysed and evaluated to identify emerging trends or possible underperformance.

The quality of provision i.e. the quality teaching and learning in classrooms is monitored and supported via the EAS. The quality of school leadership is also supported extensively by the EAS via a range of programmes and school-to-school networks.

5.3 **Legal**

The improving schools programme operates within the legal framework of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct staffing or workforce implications arising from this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 **School Categorisation**

All schools are categorised on an annual basis in accordance with the National Model for Categorisation. The process has taken place at a regional level and for the last 3 years' national moderation has confirmed that the regional process is robust. Appendix 1 shows the significant reduction in the level of support that Blaenau Gwent schools require for the period 2017 to

2019. Members will be aware that there is no national categorisation process planned for the end of this year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.1.2 Schools in the Red and Amber Categories that have made positive progress (2018 to 2020)

Appendix 1 details the progress of the following schools;-

- Ebbw Fawr Learning Community (Red to Yellow),
- St Joseph's RC Primary (Amber to Yellow)
- St Mary's RC Primary (Yellow (in year) to Amber to Yellow),
- Rhos-y-Fedwen (Yellow to Amber (in year) to Yellow)
- Brynbach Primary School (Yellow to Amber to Yellow)
- Glyncoed Primary School (Yellow to Amber (in year)

6.1.3 Schools Causing Concern

6.1.4 Schools - Support 2019 to 2020

Appendix 1 details the additional support that is now provided to Sofrydd Primary School (Yellow to Amber). It is pleasing to report, however, that Glyncoed Primary School has been removed from the schools causing concern protocols in 2020.

6.1.5 Schools in Receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice (Red)

Appendix 1 details the arrangement and progress for the two schools, Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School that are in receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

6.2.1 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

The regional policy for monitoring, evaluation and intervention in schools through the categorisation process is derived from the National Categorisation Framework, but has been evolved through the engagement of a variety of stakeholders including schools and members of governing bodies.

A range of Council departments and external partners are involved in delivering programmes to support schools requiring improvement. Monitoring progress towards targets enables effective targeting of support.

6.2.2 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

Analysis of aggregate school performance data is a key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need.

Robust monitoring of school performance facilitates support for schools to ensure that schools maintain high quality outcomes in the longer term.

6.2.3 **Preventative focus**

Through effective monitoring and evaluation of school performance, early identification of emerging areas for improvement can be achieved with consequent early intervention to secure improvement.

The effectiveness of the Council's monitoring, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

6.2.4 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The Council collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of school improvement services through the Education Achievement Service (EAS).

The Council also secures a range of pupil support services such as Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired, Speech and Language and Ethnic Minority support services through regional collaboration.

Within the Council, the school improvement, transformation and inclusion leadership teams ensure that there is a coordinated approach to supporting schools in the Education Directorate and across the Council as a whole.

6.2.5 **Integration (across service areas)**

The Council commissions its school improvement function on regional basis.

6.3 **EqIA**

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since this is not a change of policy or practice. However, implementation of the council's monitoring, evaluation and intervention practice in schools has a positive impact on children and young people and on staff within a particular school. By improving the quality of education, standards are improved for all children and young people. Through the Council's school improvement strategy, particular focus is given to vulnerable learners and those who are at risk of underachievement.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Monitoring of school improvement is an important mechanism for ensuring that members of the Education Scrutiny Committee and the Executive are sufficiently informed to enable them to hold the Education Directorate and EAS to account effectively for the quality of education provision and most importantly pupil outcomes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Improving Schools Programme