

Appendix 1

Improving Schools Programme

1.0 School Categorisation

The national framework for the categorisation of schools is based on a staged process. For the 2020 academic year, this process has been suspended and further guidance from Welsh Government is awaited. In the interim the regional identification support level is now classified as high, medium, low and self-improving. However, in terms of the judgements shown in this report on the overall category of support are based on a four-colour model, green, yellow, amber, and red, with 'green' denoting the category where least support is needed.

The Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme focuses particularly on those schools which need to secure improvement in schools categorised as Amber and Red.

In the case of schools categorised as Amber, the school's Challenge Adviser works with the school to create a single plan i.e. the school development /improvement plan, which defines the support available through the Local Authority and the Education Achievement Service (EAS).

In the case of schools categorised as Red, the school's Challenge Adviser works with the school to create a single plan i.e. the school development plan, which defines the support available through the Local Authority and the Education Achievement Service (EAS). Unlike with schools categorised as Amber, this could include interventions made under the Local Authority's formal powers as detailed in School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. In cases where such schools have been placed, by Estyn in the categories of either requiring significant improvement or special measures then the School Development Plan will form a part of the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) and are categorised as Red. The Local Authority will draft a plan of support for the school, in partnership with the EAS, and this is known as the Local Authority Statement of Action. This LA plan supports the school to realise its PIAP.

In the schools requiring such improvement regular half-termly Schools Causing Concern meetings (SCC) are held, which in the case of Blaenau Gwent Schools are chaired by the Executive Member for Education and are attended by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Director of Education, Strategic Education Improvement Manager, Principal Challenge Adviser and EAS representatives. During these meetings the school presents and evidences the progress it has made against its agreed action points, and the panel also considers the appropriateness and impact of the support and intervention provided. The panel considers and evaluates the extent of progress the school is making against the action points set out in the School Development Plan or Post Inspection Action Plan, (if the school is in an Estyn Category). Following each meeting, the Schools Causing Concern Panel evaluates the progress that the school has made and determines the

next steps which should be taken in relation to supporting the school. This can include the invocation of formal powers of intervention should that be considered appropriate.

2.0 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. The guidance also summarises the powers of Welsh Minister to intervene in schools where the local authority has failed to do so or has done so inadequately. This includes the Welsh Ministers' powers to direct the local authority to close a school.

The statutory guidance defines a "school causing concern" as one which is:

- Subject to a Warning Notice issued under the 2013 Act.
- Not subject to Warning Notice but meets one or more of the six grounds for intervention and there is a related risk to the health and safety on any person that calls for urgent intervention
- Deemed by Estyn to require significant improvement.
- Deemed by Estyn to require special measures.

Under the terms of the Act, a school will be "eligible for intervention" where one of the following six grounds for intervention exist:

- Ground 1: The standards of performance of pupils at the school are unacceptably low.
- Ground 2: There has been a breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed.
- Ground 3: The behaviour of pupils at the school or any action taken by those pupils or their parents is severely prejudicing, or is likely to severely prejudice, the education of any pupils at the school.
- Ground 4: The safety of pupils or staff at the school is threatened (whether by a breakdown of discipline or otherwise).
- Ground 5: The governing body or head teacher has failed, or is likely to fail, to comply with a duty under the Education Acts.
- Ground 6: The governing body or head teacher has acted, or is proposing to act unreasonably in the exercise of any of its or his or her functions under the Education Acts.

Should the LA determine that grounds for intervention exist, the LA must issue a warning notice to the school governing body setting out:

- the grounds for intervention,
- the reasons why the LA is satisfied that the grounds for intervention exist,
- the action which the governing body is required to take
- the period in which the action is to be taken by the governing body

- the action the LA is minded to take should the governing body not take the required action or make sufficient progress.

In the case of a foundation, voluntary aided or voluntary controlled school the LA will work in partnership with the relevant bodies.

A school is also eligible for intervention where:

- the school has been deemed by Estyn to require significant improvement or special measures. (In both these cases there is no requirement to issue a warning notice prior to intervention.)

and/or,

- one or more of the grounds 1- 6 exist and/or there is a related risk to the health or safety of any person that calls for urgent intervention.

Local Authority powers of intervention

Under Section 5 of the Act, the LA is able to intervene in schools causing concern in the following ways:

1. Direct the governing body to secure advice or collaborate with another school
2. Appoint additional governors and nominating a new Chair
3. Appoint an Interim Executive Board
4. Suspend the delegated authority for the governing body to manage the school's budget
5. Direct the governing body to take certain action or to desist from taking certain action.

A school remains eligible for intervention by the LA until one of the following events takes place:

- the authority gives notice that it is satisfied that the grounds for interventions that have been dealt with or that using its powers of intervention would not be appropriate for any other reason; and/or,
- the Welsh Ministers determine that the power to intervene is no longer in effect and give notice in writing to the local authority and the governing body of their determination.

3.0 Performance Information and Data

All schools are categorised on an annual basis in accordance with the National Model for Categorisation. The process takes place at a regional level and for the last 3 years' national moderation has confirmed that the regional process is robust.

3.1 School Categorisation January 2018

Overall, in January 2018 the National School Categorisation performance indicated an improvement when compared with the previous year in terms of the number of green schools:

- The number of Red schools remained the same. One school remains categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community), one school (Ebbw Fawr Learning Community) moved to Amber, but one school (Brynmawr Foundation) moved from Yellow to Red.
- 4 schools were categorised as Amber (The River Centre, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary and St Illtyd's Primary)
- 11 schools were categorised as yellow
- 8 schools were categorised as green (All Saints RC Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Deighton Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School). This is again an improvement on the previous year.

3.2 School Categorisation January 2019

Overall, in January 2019 the National School Categorisation performance indicated further continued improvement when compared with the previous year in terms of the number of green and yellow schools:

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remained categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School).
- **2** schools were categorised as Amber (One school Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary remained as Amber with Brynbach Primary School being categorised from yellow to amber due to the need to provide additional support. Overall, this represented a reduction of 2 schools compared to the previous year.
- **10** schools were categorised as yellow (Coed- y Garn Primary, Glyncoed Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Sofrydd Primary Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, Ystruth Primary with a further 3 schools moving from Amber to Yellow, including the River Centre, EFLC and St Illtyd's Primary)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Deighton Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School with a further 3 schools moving from Yellow to Green, including Blaen-y Cwm Primary, Cwm Primary and Willowtown Primary). This is again an improvement on the previous year and over a three-year period represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

3.3 School Categorisation January 2020

Overall, in January 2020 National School Categorisation performance indicated further sustained improvement over the period.

- The number of Red schools remained the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School), as both schools are in an Estyn category.
- **2** schools were categorised as Amber (Glyncoed Primary School and Sofrydd Primary School.)
- **10** schools were categorised as Yellow (Coed-y Garn Primary, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, St Illtyd's Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Marys RC Primary , Ysgol Gymraeg Brohelyg, River Centre with a further 2 schools moving from Amber to Yellow (Brynbach Primary and Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary) and one Deighton Primary School moving from Green to yellow)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Cwm Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhwy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary, Willowtown Primary, Ystruth Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School. This is again an improvement over a three-year period represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

3.4 Schools in the Red and Amber Categories - Positive Progress (2018 to 2020)

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community (Red to Yellow)

In September 2015, the school was issued with a pre-warning notice on the grounds of insufficient improvement in standards and concerns regarding the quality of teacher assessment. Following the Estyn inspection in February 2016, and the school being placed in the statutory category of significant improvement, the Local Authority issued the school with a warning notice to improve. In April 2016, the Local Authority invoked its powers of intervention by appointing additional Governors to the Governing Body and securing a new Chair of Governors. A new Headteacher was appointed to the school in the summer term 2016 and took up his appointment in September 2016. A Local Authority Intervention Panel was established to monitor progress. An Estyn monitoring visit in Spring 2017 recognised the positive progress that had been made, particularly in relation to pupil well-being. The Warning Notice was removed in July 2018 prior to the notification of a revisit from Estyn. The school was revisited by Estyn in July 2018 and removed from the statutory category of requiring significant improvement due to the sustained and strong progress secured by the school. The school continues to be categorised as yellow in recognition of the level of support that they require.

St Joseph's RC Primary (Amber to Yellow)

In 2014 St Joseph's primary school was categorised as an Amber school, with particular concerns about the capacity for leadership and quality of governance. In the Autumn 2015, the school categorisation remained as Amber. The school had an acting Headteacher, having failed to secure the appointment of a substantive Headteacher on a number of occasions. Under the national categorisation process 2016-17, the school remained in the Amber support category, reflecting the continuing temporary leadership arrangements. The acting Headteacher was appointed to the substantive post in September 2017 and a new Chair of Governors also established. The school was categorised as Yellow in the 2017-18 national categorisation process. The school was inspected by Estyn in January 2018 and was judged to be good in all 5 inspection areas.

St Mary's RC Primary Yellow (in year) to Amber to Yellow)

In 2015 and 2016, St Mary's RC Primary school was categorised as a Yellow school. The school was inspected by Estyn in June 2016 and was placed into Estyn monitoring because of the need to improve standards in skills and in teacher assessment and tracking. Due to the adequate judgements performance and prospects for improvement, the school was re-classified in year to Amber. Following very strong progress against the recommendations the school was categorised as Yellow in the 2017-18 national categorisation process. The school was revisited by Estyn in December 2017 and removed from Estyn monitoring.

Rhos-y-Fedwen (Yellow Amber (in year) to Amber to Yellow)

The school was placed in Estyn Review in March 2017, and was subsequently re-categorised in year as Amber. Formal acting Headteacher arrangements were put in place shortly before the inspection. There are effective working relationships across the senior leadership team. The governing body has recently been strengthened although the recruitment of governors remains a key challenge for the school. The main issues during inspection were inaccuracy of teacher assessment at end of KS2 in reading and writing which have since been addressed. This had an impact on the quality of self-evaluation judgement. A new Headteacher was appointed and the then regional Education Improvement Board processes reported that good progress was being made against all recommendations. The school was revisited by Estyn in June 2018 and was removed from Estyn monitoring.

3.5 Schools who are in receipt of additional support. 2018 to 2019

Brynbach Primary School (Yellow to Amber to Yellow)

In January 2019, the school was categorised as Amber in recognition of the additional support required by the recently appointed Headteacher.

Throughout the year EIB processes have reported that there has been good progress against the school development plan priorities.

4.0 Schools Causing Concern - Update

The regional approach to School Causing Concern was amended in preparation for the 2019/20 academic year and the protocol is embedded at the end of this document. As such, these meetings form part of a wider drive by LAs and the EAS to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people. The LA and EAS roles will be principally:

- To review and evaluate pace and progress in relation to identified School Development Plan priorities.
- To challenge the Headteacher and Governing Body on the rates of progress in their school.
- To recommend and monitor actions aimed at accelerating improvement.
- To consider the extent to which the school has been successful in achieving required improvement. This will determine future actions by the LA and EAS.

4.1 Schools Causing Concern Progress - Judgements:

1. The school has made strong progress and will not be required to attend Schools Causing Concern meetings. *The support level of the school will be reduced.
2. The school has made *satisfactory/ *strong progress but will need to continue to attend Schools Causing Concern meetings to enable the impact of improvements to become consistent and embedded.
3. The school demonstrates limited progress. *It is advised that the local authority determine appropriate next steps of action agreed with the agreed Schools Causing Concern policy.

Scrutiny Members should note that during Wave 1 (March – August 20) of the pandemic the routine SCC meetings were suspended and replaced with check in and catch-up meetings with the formal SCC meetings restarting at the commencement of the autumn term 2020. To date, in line with the protocol there has been 1 meeting for each school held with a further meeting at which the impact of evidence presented will be quality assured by the EAS through their attendance at schools during the latter part of the autumn term. These meetings are due to take place in early December.

At the commencement of the 2019/20 academic year there were 4 schools identified as a cause for concern and below is a summary of their progress made to date:-

4.1.1 Glyncoed Primary School (Yellow to Amber)

Glyncoed Primary School was classified as Amber in January 2020 as a result of concerns in relation to leadership capacity at the school due to a number of leadership changes over a period of time. Progress was evaluated and assessed as strong and during the current autumn term the school was removed from this process, noting the evident progress that had taken place at pace.

4.1.2 Sofrydd Primary School (Yellow to Amber)

Sofrydd Primary School was categorised as Amber in January 2020 as the school development plan was identified as unsatisfactory and became part of the regional schools causing concern arrangements. During early 2020, a Leadership and Management review was commissioned which reported to the governing body of the school just prior to the initial wave of the pandemic.

The purpose of the review was to evaluate and review the current leadership standards in the school, the quality of provision and standards achieved by pupils to provide an evidence base, to support the school to identify its key priorities for improvement and enable the local authority and the EAS to provide the appropriate level of support.

The review identified 12 key recommendations for securing improvement and now informs the work programme that is being progressed. Key to this improvement agenda has been the need to improve governance arrangements, which are being strengthened through the successful recruitment of a new Chair of Governors who is working actively alongside the Acting Executive Headteacher, which in turn has begun to secure satisfactory progress against the recommendations.

4.1.3 Schools in Receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice

4.1.3.1 Abertillery Learning Community (Red)

Standards of performance in Key Stage 4 have been sustained from 2018 performance, but are still in need to improvement. Whilst at primary level performance has declined. The school is currently subject to a LA warning notice to improve and a programme of intervention. However, it is important to note that for 2019 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon.

A school leadership review was undertaken in the Autumn term of 2017, which resulted in LA intervention and when the school was inspected in February 2018 it was then placed in the statutory category of requiring significant improvement. A follow up visit was held in July 2019 and Inspectors noted the progress that had been made in respect of many of the recommendations for action from the inspection, although noted that many of the improvements are at an early stage of development and as such confirmed that the school will remain within an Estyn category. Following a

successful period of leadership by two established Headteachers the Governing Body have successfully recruited a suitably experienced Headteacher to the permanent position of Headteacher and earlier the Governing Body has appointed a new Chair of Governors. Additional LA governors remain in place to provide additional capacity to the governing body for progressing key personnel matters.

Schools Causing Concern meetings were halted during the initial wave of the pandemic but have recommenced at the start of this academic year. Progress against the school improvement priorities as identified in the Statutory Warning Notice was confirmed as satisfactory, however, during the second half of the autumn term there is a need for the commissioned school improvement service to validate the first hand evidence presented by the school's leadership team. At the time of writing this report an Estyn Improvement Conference is in the process of being arranged and this is likely to be held during the second half of the autumn term and the LA is finalising the LA statement of action, which identifies the bespoke support that is being provided to the school.

4.1.3.2 Brynmawr Foundation (Amber to Yellow, to Red)

In December 2013, Brynmawr Foundation School was inspected by Estyn and placed in Estyn monitoring; with an adequate judgement for its performance and prospects for improvement. Recommendations included improving the school's performance and improving quality in teaching and learning. The school was categorised as Amber in 2014 and 2015. The school was issued with a statutory Warning Notice in 2015 to improve standards, particularly in Maths. Support was put in place and Key Stage 4 outcomes improved significantly in 2016. The Warning Notice was subsequently lifted.

Due to the improvement secured, in 2016 the school was classified as Yellow, having made strong progress against Estyn's recommendations and with improved performance at the end of KS4.

However, following an unexpected decline in KS4 performance in 2017, particularly in Maths and the outcome of an EAS review of the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school, the school was categorised as Red in the 2017-18 in the national school's categorisation process and invoked the LA powers of intervention. Today, the school continues to be subject to a LA statutory warning notice to improve and after a period of support, intervention is now in place. Governance has significantly improved and the additional Governors that had been appointed have been removed evidencing the cultural growth that is now demonstrable within the Governing Body. The Governing Body have appointed both a new Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and now two Assistant Headteachers, who will continue to set the direction of leadership and management across all areas of the school. Performance in Key Stage 3 improved, which bodes well for future performance. Performance at Key Stage 4 in the Capped 9 in 2019 also improved, but not in line with predictions. Although again, it should be noted

that there are no comparative performance measures that can be relied upon.

In the autumn term 2019, the school was inspected by Estyn and was placed in a category of Special Measures and Members will already be aware from a previous report to this committee that the inspectors awarded a judgement against all four inspection areas of “unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement” and against the inspection area of care support and guidance a judgement of “adequate and needs improvement” were recorded

Estyn made four recommendations for improvement and these are summarised below:

- R1 Improve pupils’ standards across the school, including their literacy and numeracy skills
- R2 Improve pupils’ behaviour and their attitudes to learning
- R3 Improve the effectiveness of teaching to motivate, engage and challenge pupils to make good progress in lessons
- R4 Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders’ ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement

The report recognises that “Since 2018, the Headteacher has worked positively with staff and pupils to create stability following a period of uncertainty and change. He has instigated a programme of change across the school that focuses appropriately on strengthening leadership at all levels and developing teaching. Staff are engaging enthusiastically in professional learning. However, these changes have not had a sufficient impact on important areas of the school’s work such as teaching and pupils’ standards. Although pupils make strong progress in a few lessons, in a majority of lessons, many pupils do not make enough progress.

The school has a supportive and inclusive ethos. Many pupils are confident in their social interactions. However, many pupils are not suitably resilient or motivated in their lessons, and this hinders their learning. “

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Estyn were of the opinion that, that special measures were required in relation to this school. Subsequently, the school has drawn up a Post Inspection Action plan that details how it is going to address the recommendations and the Local Authority and EAS has drafted a statement of Action as to how it will support the school. In line with agreed procedures for schools in an Estyn Category a meeting took place on 27th February 2020 at which the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) was reviewed and feedback provided by Estyn as to how the action plan may be furthered strengthened. Moving forward, Estyn will monitor the school’s progress on a termly basis. However, given the present pandemic the approach to a return to business as usual activities is planned to recommence at the start of the spring term and as such this will be the first monitoring visit that the school will have received, which will be in excess of a year since being placed in Special Measures, although routine Estyn contact with the school are being made.

Progress against the school improvement priorities as identified in the Statutory Warning Notice was confirmed as satisfactory, however, during the second half of the autumn term, (Covid restrictions allowing), there is a need for the commissioned school improvement service to validate the first hand evidence presented by the school's leadership team.

Appendix 1a - Operational Appendix for Meetings for Schools Causing Concern