

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **20th April 2021**
 Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Education Services Self–Evaluation and Business Planning**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member for Education**
 Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, 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)
✓	✓	08.04.21			20.4.21	FWP 2021/22		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the findings of ongoing self-evaluation and business planning processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Blaenau Gwent Education Services are committed to self-review and self-improvement and view these processes as being fundamental to securing ongoing improvement in outcomes, quality and effectiveness. The Education Directorate has adopted a standardised approach for self-evaluation (SE) that is now embedded into the day to day practice. This has been reviewed to align with Estyn’s new inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES). This report looks at the emerging findings against the inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES), which will inform evaluations of progress against the key improvement priorities set out in business improvement plans.
- 2.2 The Summary Self-Evaluation Report (SER) attached as appendix 1 provides a high-level narrative and sets out the arrangements for effective self-evaluation. The findings from the SER are reflected as actions for improvement in the Directorate’s Business Plans at Directorate, Service and Team level. Effective self-evaluation means that the Directorate remains focussed on improving the right things.
- 2.3 Over recent months, extensive work has been undertaken within the Education Directorate to align the governance processes to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation is taking place, avoiding duplication and enabling evidence to support a number of different planning processes. This ‘golden thread’ links:
- The Well-being Plan;
 - Corporate Plan;

- Council's Recovery Themes;
- LGES
- EAS Business Plan;
- Political Priorities;
- Education Improvement Plan;
- Tier 2 Business Plans; and
- Tier 1 Business Plans.

2.4 As part of this work, a review of the Education Improvement Plan (EIP) has been undertaken, which has resulted in a revision to the priorities of the Directorate:

- Improving educational outcomes and wellbeing for pupils at all stages of development, but particularly at KS4, through effective governance arrangements;
- Delivering the vision for education based on a school-led self-improving system and to support all learners in a modern and safe environment that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Transforming education in line with curriculum, qualifications and ALN reform that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Delivering effective community based learning and recreation provision to meet need; and,
- Creating a performance/business culture for Education and Leisure that delivers continuous improvement in service delivery and value for money.

2.5 A review is ongoing to fully align the Tier 1 and 2 business plans to the EIP. It should also be recognised that the recovery implications for learners associated with 12 months of teaching and learning disruption are far reaching. The Education Directorate's top priority in the EAS business plan linked to recovery is to:

Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.

2.6 A comprehensive data set of school performance, coupled with evaluations of impact and effectiveness of Council based and brokered support feeds into the overall evaluation. It should be noted, however, that self-evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will consider the 2019-20 provisional KS4 and Post 16 results during the 2020-21, however, there needs to be acknowledgement of the relaxation of performance measures across the education sector.

2.7 A comprehensive self-evaluation process helps identify those areas where progress has been made and where further improvement is required. Emerging findings, via ongoing self-evaluation is captured every Autumn and Spring time as well as via quarterly performance and finance reporting mechanisms. Moreover, it is the high-level points only, which are presented in the narrative in this report shown under Section 6.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 This report has been approved by Education DMT and CLT prior to submission to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

Option 1: to accept the report as presented.

Option 2: Members are requested 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 This report provides the Committee with important self-evaluation, as well as opportunity to identify where progress has been made and where further improvement is required.

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

4.1 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan aims for every child to have the best start in life. Through effective self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, we seek to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress and performance is as good as it ought to be.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

- 5.1.1 The Council allocates approximately £45.1 million (2020/21) to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. The Council's total gross budgeted expenditure per pupil for 2020/21 was £6,628 which is the 3rd highest in Wales and £436 above the Welsh average of £6,192.

- 5.1.2 For 2020/21 the funding delegated to schools was 85.7% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of schools, (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2020/21). The Education Directorate has an improving position on a 'value for money' basis, in that performance and school categorisation has improved significantly and the overall central funding has reduced, in line with public sector austerity measures.

- 5.1.3 The Council commissions the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to deliver the statutory functions of school improvement. The annual financial costs being circa £350,000. Schools categorisation profile has improved over the last 5 years against a backdrop of decreasing financial contributions to the EAS: this therefore, effectively represents good value for money. 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***

5.2.1 Risk is associated with weak self-evaluation that fails to accurately identify those areas where good progress has been made and where further improvement is needed. Strong self-evaluation helps services target resources at greatest need and hence bring about improvement precisely where it is needed.

5.2.2 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 Education Directorate and EAS risk registers.

5.2.3 Mitigating actions include:

- strong self-evaluation processes, which accurately identify those areas which need to improve the most;
- 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; and,
- the progress schools make towards targets is also monitored on a termly basis. School safeguarding processes are also closely monitored.

5.2.4 Holistic support packages are devised via regular cross service meetings between OD, Finance, Health and Safety, Education and School Governor Support Services. School level performance data is regularly analysed and evaluated to identify emerging trends.

5.2.5 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**

This report provides information about statutory, end of Key Stage school performance underpinned by processes set out the School Standards and Organisation Act Wales (2013) support strategic and operational activity to improve pupil outcomes.

5.4 **Human Resources**

None for this report.

6. **Performance Information**

6.1 **Performance**

Areas where good progress has been made:

- The Corporate and Education Directorate's response to COVID-19 has been effective and this is discussed in the Estyn Thematic Review commentary.
- School inspection and school categorisation profile has improved significantly with no primary schools in follow up and excellent practice identified in a number of schools;
- GCSE L2 English and Capped 9 improved, albeit the results in 2020 were provided through Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and not through external examinations;
- GCSE A*/A grades improved in English and Maths;
- Planning arrangements for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform are well developed.
- 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 and A*-E grades continue to be strong and were greater than all-Wales means;
- Value-added progress in English and Maths, reading and numeracy for our 7 and 11 year olds have improved in 2019-20;
- The Youth Service exceeded that of the all-Wales means for reach and accredited learning outcomes. The levels of NEETs at 1.5% are at their lowest levels i.e. 9 young people;
- Primary persistent absenteeism reduced to below that of the all-Wales means;
- The School Based Counselling Service provides good support;
- Permanent exclusions reduced;
- Strong progress through the 21st Century schools programme with robust programme management arrangements in place;
- Secure progress against the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), including the Welsh medium new school moving to Statutory Notice stage.
- Headteacher induction and support programme was very well received by aspiring and new Headteachers;
- The staff wellbeing survey results were good; and
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

6.2 Areas where further improvement is required:

- Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years. This will be a real focus of the recovery programme from COVID;
- Improved attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
- Improve school attendance;
- Progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
- Reviewing provision for pupils with additional learning needs e.g. Pen-y-Cwm Special School capacity requirements;
- Continuing the work with Schools Causing Concern (SCC), particularly the two schools in an Estyn category; and
- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE), which has seen an increase linked to COVID.

The Council will continue to work with partners across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also continue to work with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are changes that it is anticipated be introduced to the reporting and accountability framework for academic year 2020-21 linked to the COVID-19 emergency response, particularly a relaxation in the requirements for School and Council performance reporting arrangements.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

The Directorate's self-evaluation processes are aligned with LGES and the regional policy for monitoring, supporting, evaluation and intervention in schools through the categorisation process is derived from the National Categorisation Framework. The categorisation process will be suspended in academic year 2020-21.

6.4 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*

Analysis of individual 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. Effective self-evaluation processes ensure that resources are targeted at greatest need and secure improvement in longer term.

6.5 *Preventative focus*

Through effective self-evaluation processes, support and monitoring of school performance, early identification of emerging areas for improvement can be identified with consequent early intervention to secure improvement. The effectiveness of the Council's monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

6.6 *Collaboration / partnership working*

The Council collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of school improvement services from the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and a range of pupil support services for specific groups such as visually and hearing impaired learners.

6.7 *Integration (across service areas)*

Effective monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention are fundamental to the Council's wellbeing objectives.

6.8 *EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)*

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since there only a limited change of policy or practice. However, implementation of the Council's monitoring, support, 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 and wellbeing are improved for all children and young people.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 Monitoring of the emerging findings of self-evaluation is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Executive are sufficiently informed to enable them to make informed decisions regarding the quality of education provision and hence pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are well-established processes in place to ensure that self-evaluation is used to inform business plans to secure further improvement.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Summary SER

REF: BGESDSEF.216