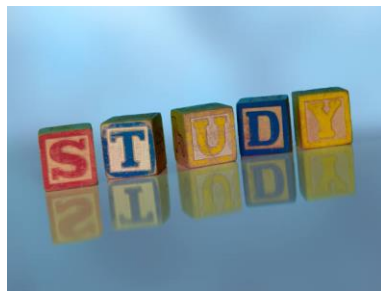




Education Directorate Self-Evaluation

Summary Report

Date: Spring 2021



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Blaenau Gwent - Context

Blaenau Gwent has 25 schools and their status is detailed below:

- 2 are Maintained 3-16 Learning Communities,
- 1 Foundation Comprehensive,
- 1 Maintained Comprehensive,
- 1 x Maintained 3-18 Special School,
- 1 x Maintained 3-16 SEBD Special School; and,
- 19 Primaries (of which 4 are voluntary aided / faith schools)

There are currently circa 9,000+ pupils on roll across all Blaenau Gwent schools.

The organisation, End Child Poverty, released new data in October 2020 with findings showing that the highest rates of child poverty in Wales are in Pembrokeshire and Blaenau Gwent. Blaenau Gwent is one of 5 counties in Wales to have seen a rise in the proportion of children living in poverty since 2015. The impact of poverty on children is well documented, with children from low-income families more likely to experience worse physical and mental health; do less well in school; and have fewer opportunities in the future. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) captures the extent of deprivation as a proportion of residents living in each lower super output area (LSOA). The eight considerations of the WIMD are: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; geographical access to services; housing; physical environment; and community safety. Blaenau Gwent has the highest percentage of its LSOA areas in the most deprived areas across Wales at 10%, for income (19.1%), education (27.7%), and community safety (23.4%).

The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals in Blaenau Gwent was almost 30% during 2010-16 and the highest of all LAs in Wales by a significant margin. The proportions declined during 2016-19, but BG remained the 2nd highest in Wales for all LA schools and highest for secondary schools during 2018-19. Given the evidential relationship between pupil performance and deprivation (using eFSM as a proxy indicator), pupil outcomes in BG would be expected to be among the lowest in Wales. However, within Blaenau Gwent we have high ambitions for all of our learners and our socio-economic standing is a challenge that we are working to overcome to the benefit of all of our children and young people.

Overall, the 2019 WIMD figures and high eFSM eligibility reflect very high levels of deprivation within the authority. They also indicate the significant consideration required to improve educational outcomes to levels within other similar LAs and to consistently match the all-Wales averages. 2018-19 performance figures show that Blaenau Gwent has achieved parity, and indeed, out-performed some LAs in a number of measures confirming the progress being made within its schools. The 2020 KS4 and Post 16 KS5 provisional results will be included in the Summary SER via the performance data pack during the Autumn term to inform the on-going self-evaluation process, however, there is recognition the outcomes were awarded via the Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and/or the awarding examination body's assessed grade.

Executive Summary:

This Executive Summary is a high-level analysis of key strategic areas of progress, and importantly, aspects of work identified for improvement across the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. There are clearly more details in the Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER), however, the Executive Summary provides a high-level synopsis to enable the Education Directorate, the Council and key partners to understand and focus on critical strands of work to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people across the County Borough. The information detailed in this document regularly features in the self-evaluation reports presented to Scrutiny and Executive Committees. 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 partners, such as the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are changes that will be introduced to the reporting and accountability framework for academic year 2020-20 linked to the COVID-19 emergency response, particularly a relaxation in the requirements for School and Council performance reporting arrangements. Clearly, the Education Directorate will need to remain focussed on self-evaluation procedures, as outlined in the review of the SE Policy 2020, particularly an analysis of the provisional KS4 and Post 16 results during the autumn term 2020. This information will only be used for the SER and not for accountability purposes.

Blaenau Gwent's 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 Summary SER 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 and improvement plans.

Key Strategic Areas of Progress

Areas where good progress has been made:

- The Education Directorate has Council approval to establish a new leadership and management structure that includes additional capacity for school improvement;
- 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;
- Secured progress against the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), including the Welsh medium new school moving to Statutory Notice stage;
- Headteacher induction and support programme 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.

Key Strategic Areas for Improvement

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;
- Improve attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
- Improve school attendance;
- Improve 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;
- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE), which has seen an increase linked to COVID; and
- Overall, the revenue financial position of schools is favourable; however, there are a few schools with a revenue budget deficit that needs to be redressed e.g. Abertillery Learning Community.

1.1 Standards and Progress Overall - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

Foundation Phase

- Almost two-thirds of schools improved LLCE results in 2019, while a similar proportion of schools exceeded their targets in MD.

Key Stage 2

- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in:
 - NC maths was above the national figure;
 - Language was a little higher than expected in 2019; and
 - Progress in reading was seen in about two-thirds of mainstream schools (about half in 2019) and numeracy reasoning was better than expected in most schools.
- The majority of schools had similar or higher L4+ results compared to their 2019 targets.
- School categorisation and inspection outcomes have improved in recent years.

Key Stage 3

- Two out of four schools improved L5+ English outcomes and three schools improved their L5+ oracy and writing results in 2019.
- L6+ outcomes improved for English 2017-19 and particularly for 2019.
- Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English and Welsh 2nd language during 2019 and three schools improved their reading and writing results.
- At LA-level literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019 with modest improvements made in MFL & PE.
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in reading improved from the previous year.
- LA-level progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.
- Three of the four mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English.

Key Stage 4

- Capped 9 points score improved in 2019 and achieved the LA target.
- The proportion of learners gaining A*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019.
- The LA-level Welsh Bacc result was higher than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- Higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy and science. This was particularly so for the Skills Challenge Certificate result which ranked 7th out of the 22 Welsh LAs.
- The proportion of learners attaining A*-C grades in Welsh 1st language increased in 2019 with an improving trend during the last 2 years. 17% of the Welsh-medium cohort attained A*/A grades in Welsh 1st language.
- Abertillery improved outcomes in all but one performance indicator in 2019.
- The proportion of learners gaining A*/A grades in maths improved in every mainstream school in 2019 and in 3 out of 4 mainstream schools for English & capped 9 points scores.

Post-16

- At A level and AS level, the proportions of learners attaining A*-C and A*-E grades were a higher than the all-Wales means in 2019.
- For vocational courses, attainment rates in 2019 were similar to or higher than in the previous year except for L3.
- Entry level learners were 100% successful.

Youth Service

- In 2018/19, 2,010 (17%) of 11-25 year olds were registered as Reach and supported by the Youth Service (Wales 16%). Of these, 301 (15%) gained 456 nationally recognised accreditations.
- In addition, the Youth Service recorded 7,298 anonymous contacts during 2018-19 through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events, 1,000 more than previous year.
- Current data indicates 1.5% of learners being NEET (9 learners). The all Wales figure has not yet been published.

1.1 Standards and Progress Overall - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Areas identified for Improvement and Action Required

Foundation Phase

- BG and national averages at LO4+ and LO5+ fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years with the fall being greater for BG in 2019, increasing the performance gap.
- LO6+ differences between BG and national means in 2019 were greatest for PSD.
- A majority of schools attained lower than target results in 2019 indicating inaccuracy and unreliability within school target setting procedures.
- **There is a need to develop value-added procedures for Reception Year to Y2 in order to determine the progress made by pupils within the Foundation Phase.**

Key Stage 2

- Welsh and Welsh 2nd language outcomes fell to a greater extent in 2019 with the latter having a declining trend during the last 2 years.
- L4+ writing outcomes fell more noticeably in 2019.
- Underperforming schools (for NC assessments) the same as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to pupils' learning and standards achieved.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC language moved below the national figure.
- **A minority of schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores. This questions the accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within these centres.**

Key Stage 3

- L5+ outcomes fell in 2019, particularly for maths, science, art, history and geography. All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. There is a concern regarding assessment reliability at two of the four LA schools.
- A majority of schools had results below their 2019 targets at both L5+ & L6+. Results also indicate target setting as generally unreliable in schools at KS3 (as in previous years).
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in NC English and maths fell considerably in 2019 and was well below the national figure in both subjects. Progress in NC maths was barely adequate and was unsatisfactory in NC English.
- A significant proportion of pupils regressed more than 10 SAS points in both reading and numeracy reasoning during 2016-19. An inordinate number of these pupils were from one centre.
- Some schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores. This questions the accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within these centres.

Key Stage 4

- Results for the new National Measures and in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement were all lower than the national means.
- The proportion of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA targets and fell by about 2%, well below the national mean.
- L2 maths & numeracy outcomes fell in 3 out of the 4 mainstream schools in 2019.
- Learner outcomes for Tredegar fell in over one-half of performance indicators in 2019.
- KS3-4 value-added progress:
 - declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years; and
 - for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19. On average, pupils at Abertillery and Brynmawr made no progress or regressed in maths during 2017-19.
- For WG modelled estimates, all residuals were negative except for the Welsh Bacc Skills Challenge result.
- Welsh 2nd language full-course results fell for all grade indicators in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and were lower than the all-Wales figures for higher grade levels.
- The proportion of pupils achieving no qualifications doubled to 2.4% in 2019 and was over twice as high as the all-Wales average.

Post 16

- The proportion of learners attaining higher level grades (A*/A) at both A and AS level has increased in 2019, although is still below the Wales benchmark level so is an area for further improvement.
- There has been a small dip in vocational success rates in 2018-2019 and there is room for improvement at L2 courses, which is currently at 80% completion rate. Success rates across the board, however, remain relatively strong.
- Embed process initiated in October 2019, where Coleg Gwent provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals.

Risk Considerations

- The risk of failure to continue to make progress on raising educational standards in two schools (ALC and BFS) features in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and risk mitigation is monitored by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Elected Members via Scrutiny and the Executive Committees.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

Foundation Phase

- All LO6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means and particularly so for LLCE.
- Almost one-third of statemented pupils attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD. Both results were higher than the 2018 national means.

Key Stage 2

- L4+gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means.
- Mean progress scores for boys & girls (as NC levels) were higher than expected during KS2. On average, boys had lower FP outcomes in 2015 but made similar NC progress to girls during KS2.
- Boys made greater progress in both reading and numeracy reasoning during 2015-19.
- Mean progress scores (as NC levels) for eFSM & non eFSM pupils were similar to or higher than expected.
- Over one-half of ethnic minority pupils attained L5 in both English and maths. The mean NC levels were higher than for the whole Y6 cohort in 2019 and national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher.
- All but one LAC progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths during 2019.
- The mean NC progress rates for LAC during 2015-19 were similar to those for the whole cohort in both subject areas.

Key Stage 3

- L6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject, lower than the previous year for most non-core subjects and lower than the national means for about one-half of non-core subjects. L6+ English results also improved in 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap compared with national outcomes.
- On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and so reversed the gender gap.
- eFSM and non-Efsm – 2019:
 - differences were lower than the national averages at both L5+ and L6+;
 - eFSM pupils made greater progress at reading and numeracy, narrowing the performance gap; and
 - Mean progress scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected.
- Statemented pupils made, on average, very good progress in reading & numeracy reasoning throughout 2016-19.
- All but 2 of the 16 ethnic minority pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Over two-thirds of EM pupils attained L6 or better in both subjects.
- 2 pupils reached L7 in English and 5 did so in maths.

- The mean progress rates for LAC in reading and numeracy reasoning during 2016-19 were notably higher than the whole cohort.

Key Stage 4

- KS3-4 progress for eFSM pupils during 2017-19 was similar to or better than that for non-eFSM pupils.
- MAT pupils made far more progress than the Y11 cohort as a whole in both English language / literacy and in maths / numeracy during 2017-19.
- The proportions of SEN pupils attaining A*-C and A*-G grades in English language and maths was relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.
- Ethnic minority pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language.
- In English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort:
 - Young offenders generally had higher outcomes;
 - LAC had similar outcomes; and
 - Low attenders had similar or higher outcomes.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Areas identified for improvement and Required Action

Foundation Phase:

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. However, girls' higher level (LO6+) results have fallen noticeably more than for boys during the last 2 years.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in nearly all performance indicators in 2019 and the differences generally increased during 2017-19.
- Except for LLCW (attributable to just one Welsh medium school in BG), LO6+ outcomes were lower than for Wales as a whole during the last 4 years.
- BG pupils on SA and SA+ had lower outcomes than those seen nationally (in 2018).

Key Stage 2

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. While L5+ gender gaps closed in 2019, this was due to girls' results falling more than for boys.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in all performance indicators in 2019. The differences were higher than the national means for most indicators and increased during 2017-19.
- eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2.
- About 6% fewer BG pupils attained L5+ in English and about 7% fewer in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- Only one BG pupil was recorded as attaining L6+ (in English) in 2019.
- About 4% fewer BG pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 7% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

- The proportions of pupils attaining L4 or better in language fell for all SEN groups in 2019. All outcomes were below the 2018 national means.
- SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and, on average, made much less progress during KS2.
- SA pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and, on average, regressed in in this skill area during KS2.

Key Stage 3

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in a majority of performance indicators. While L5+ & L6+ gender gaps closed in 2019, this was predominantly due to girls' results falling more than for boys.
- Boys' mean NC progress scores were lower than for the girls in both English & maths.
- Boys made less NC progress than girls in both subjects during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in all performance indicators in 2019 (but the differences were lower than the national means).
- eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so widened the performance gap.
- L6+ outcomes in maths and particularly science fell during the last 3 years and decreased a little more than that observed nationally.
- About 10% fewer BG pupils attained L6+ in English and in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- About 7% fewer BG pupils attained L7+ in English and about 12% fewer in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- Except for stated pupils, SEN results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- On average, SEN pupils made less NC progress than non-SEN pupils during KS3 and particularly so for SA+ pupils in maths.
- On average, SA and SA+ pupils made much less progress in reading and numeracy reasoning than non-SEN pupils during KS3.
- NC and national test scores of young offenders were much lower than mainstream averages. Progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils. A significant proportion of YOs failed to progress in either NC English or NC maths during KS3.
- Both NC and national test outcomes were, on average, lower for LAC than for other mainstream pupils.

Key Stage 4

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. Where the performance gaps between boys and girls narrowed, it was usually due to a fall in girls' outcomes rather than an improvement in those for boys.
- The proportion of pupils attaining 5 A*/A grades fell by about 2% in 2019 and was well below the national mean.
- KS3-4 progress rates for boys and girls in English language / literacy during 2017-19 were just about adequate while those for maths / numeracy were unsatisfactory. The weak progress in maths was a main contributing factor to low school and LA performance at GCSE.
- River Centre pupils had lower outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort.
- Ethnic Minority pupils had lower outcomes and KS3-4 progression rates in maths / numeracy than in language. This suggest that support for language development is generally effective at KS4 but that EM pupils may find more difficulty in transposing their language skills within a mathematical context.

Risk Considerations

- The risk of failure to continue to make progress on raising educational standards in two schools (ALC and BFS) features in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and risk mitigation is monitored by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Elected Members via Scrutiny and the Executive Committees.

1.3 Well-being and Attitudes to Learning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- Standards of wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in most primary and secondary schools. High proportions of both primary pupils and their parents expressed positive views about their children's wellbeing in schools.
- All pre-schools and schools participate in effective Healthy School and Pre-School programmes with exemplar work being recognised nationally and there are effective sport and physical activity programmes e.g. swimming programmes with high levels of achievement for learners in place. The proportions of CYP attending sports centres and enjoying PE in school on a weekly basis is higher than the national averages.
- An effective 11-18 counselling service is in place with very positive feedback from attendees, with an extended service for 18-25 year olds.
- BG is one of only a few Councils to have a fully compliant 3rd School Sport Survey to inform more targeted work.
- Three out of four BG secondary schools exceeded the WG modelled figures for attendance in 2018-19.
- Relatively low rate of fixed-term exclusions compared with other LAs in Wales.
- Improving procedures for tracking Children Missing Education (CME).
- An improving trend of increased opportunities for *pupil voice* in BG schools and greater learner participation in decision-making.
- Accredited outcomes for registered young people with the Youth Services are strong and above the Welsh mean.

1.3 Well-being and Attitudes to Learning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Attendance and persistent absenteeism - Primary:

- To improve primary school attendance in BG from 94.2% to equate at least to the all-Wales mean of 94.6%.
- To improve primary unauthorised absence in BG from 1.4% to above that of the all-Wales means which is 1.4%.
- To work to reduce PA in the primary sector to well below that of the all-Wales means i.e. Wales= 1.8%, BG=2.0%.

Attendance and persistent absenteeism - Secondary:

- To improve secondary school attendance from 92.9% to 93.8% (all-Wales means).
- To reduce unauthorised absence in the secondary sector in BG from 2.2% to below that of the all-Wales means (1.7%).
- To reduce persistent absenteeism in the secondary sector in BG from 5.0% to below that of the all-Wales means which is 4.6%
- To continue to reduce the numbers of pupils excluded in primary and secondary sectors.
- To continue to improve pupil behaviour in one school in particular and staff response to pupil concerns.

- To further enhance pupil voice activities to inform self–evaluation planning activities.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that low school attendance has an impact on pupil progression and learning, particularly in light of the COVID-19 emergency.

2.1 Support for school improvement - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The LA has established a Head of School Improvement and Inclusion post in the new structure to add capacity in this area of work.
- The LA has improved and detailed knowledge of individual, class and school performance particularly in relation to value-added progress.
- Improved coordination of support to schools via good partnership working between the LA and EAS.
- Improved School Categorisation and School Inspection profile over the last 3 years.
- Good outcomes / progress for identified vulnerable groups in recent years.
- The Council is swift in its use of statutory powers which are kept under review.
- The process for the appointment of LA Governors is now well established and there is evidence of improved governance in a majority of schools.

2.1 Support for school improvement - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- Partnership work between BG Inclusion Services and EAS Challenge Advisers needs to develop further.
- Support to improve early language acquisition and general skill development in the early years.
- Support to improve the effectiveness of learning & teaching of English / reading & maths / numeracy within KS3 & 4 with a particular focus on eFSM pupils and vulnerable groups.
- Support to improve the effectiveness of PDG grant planning and implementation.
- Increasing the number / proportions of learners who achieve higher level outcomes at each key stage, but particularly in the Foundation Phase.
- Support for assessment and target setting procedures within schools, with a particular focus on formative (assessment for learning).
- Increasing opportunities for schools to share good practice.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that the COVID-19 emergency response has impacted upon learner progression across the board, but particularly in KS4 and early year's skill development e.g. language acquisition.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

Good progress has been made through the comprehensive ALN provision:

- A report to consider Pen-y-Cwm capacity will be presented to Scrutiny Committee in the Spring 2021;
- Readiness for the implementation of the ALN reform to support learners presenting ALN is strong;
- The ALN Service has been established, providing strategic support to the Education Directorate and to schools;
- ASD provision is in place;
- The Service has undergone a review and is being reconfigured to meet the diversity of present need;
- Resource Base provision has improved, particularly for pupils who experience Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD);
- Excellent practice has been secured in Pen-y-Cwm Special School; and
- Estyn judgements in school inspections for care support and guidance remain good or better.

Practice to identify pupil progress using matched data (also for specific pupil groups) is now in its second year and is helping to identify where further improvement in provision is needed, for example:

- in KS3 in particular and in identified schools;
- in the progress rates between KS 3 and KS 4 in English and Maths; and
- to secure improved progress for all vulnerable groups, including eFSM and particularly during and between KS3 and KS4.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Areas identified for improvement and Required Action

- The quality and effectiveness of support to increase attainment of young pupils in the early years and at the end of the Foundation Phase (particularly eFSM but not solely) needs to improve so that progress rates going forward for these learners is accelerated significantly.
- The quality and effectiveness of support provided for all vulnerable learners needs to improve so that attainment and progress increases significantly both during and between KS3 and 4. The quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management of inclusion, in these Key Stages, needs to improve, particularly in identified schools and settings, and for the specific groups in this report.
- Exclusions: Monitoring of pupil level exclusion data by all Inclusion teams has improved and is effective, informing the quality of Officers' work and dialogue with individual schools. The establishment of the Safer Schools Partnership approach is beginning to support improved partnership work which will help reduce exclusions in the longer term. Work is currently focussed on two secondary settings in particular to reduce exclusions.
- Revolving Door Approach: there needs to be effective support in the River Centre provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school. Further developments are needed to develop capacity within mainstream settings to enable pupils to remain in, and return back to their host schools, particularly for KS3 pupils. There is a pre-warning notice letter in place for the school and a service agreement is required between the River Centre and the Council to formalise the arrangements.

- ALN: the LA and EAS need to work more closely to support schools in improving analysis of pupils with SEN who perform below expected levels to ensure that all pupils show good progress in line with their ability from their individual baselines, particularly for those pupils in KS3 at SA and SA +level. Such analyses are to include the impact of targeted interventions
- ALN in Early Years: Panel arrangements are effective in providing support for EY pupils with ALN. However, developing ALN capacity-building in EY is in the early stages of development and needs to be accelerated.
- EHE practice by schools for those on the cusp of EHE needs to be more targeted.
- Young People who offend: all children involved with YOS to have access to 25 hours of education. At KS3 and 4, teachers and schools need to improve levels of support for pupils in line with required improvements for mainstream pupils. Schools and the LA will review their current methodology for SEN categorisation in KS4 to ensure pupils receive the required support necessary for them to attain outcomes aligned to their ability, with a particular emphasis on improving progress and outcomes of pupils in GCSE maths. Ensure the YOS fully implement their Literacy & Numeracy Strategy. Ensure that the recommendations made by ESTYN via their thematic report are fully implemented.
- EPS Service: to secure further improvements in blended working with Children's Services, exploring how the EPS can work more effectively within Early Years settings and with the Early Years ALNLO. Work with colleagues in the wider Inclusion team and regionally to continue to provide support and challenge for schools in line with the ALNET Act. In particular, this will need to look at developing ALNCo's role to become more strategic, while also building the skills of the wider workforce to meet the needs of vulnerable learners. Work to develop more consistent practice within and between schools around behaviour management, in its widest sense, to include a clear focus on the high quality research undertaken by the EPS around SEBD, literacy and assessment as well as developing schools' understanding of the ACEs agenda (with awareness training provided via EAS on a cluster-basis) and further attention to schools supporting the work of their ELSAs.
- Pregnant School Girls and Young Mums: To ensure that as an LA we are made aware of these pupils in a timely basis, so that exclusions, attendance, support and any alternative provisions are monitored and reviewed on a monthly basis and in compliance with the policy.
- Review the Pen-y-Cwm capacity to meet the increasing demand for places.

Risk Considerations

- The strategic risk relates to meeting the increasing demand for places in Pen-y-Cwm and provision at the River Centre.

2.3 Support for Other Services - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The Council's 21st Century Schools investment objectives are clearly aligned to the Vision for Education in improving educational standards and this is evidenced in a positive Gateway Review in 2019. Preparations for the Band B programme are well structured and deliverable.
- The Youth Service is good, taking account of its statutory duties and meeting them effectively, providing a wide range of universal and targeted opportunities for young people aged 11-25. NEET's levels are at their lowest levels i.e. 1.5% (9 young people). Effective participation structures are embedded across the Youth Service. The Independent 11-18 Counselling Service is very effective. The service is line managed by the Youth Service, which allows a co-ordinated approach to wellbeing between all projects.

- The Council has an enhanced knowledge of school capacity linked to the effective annual monitoring processes that are in place; along with an on-going facilities review/management protocols and effective admissions processes. This is evidenced by the annual review and publication of the School Admissions Policy.
- Strong progress is being made in relation to surplus places reduction, with the Council seeing an overall reduction in both the primary and secondary sectors over the last 6 years; with a continued decrease projected for both primary and secondary over the next 2 years, taking the primary percentage to 11% and secondary to 9%, by the 2021/22 academic year – with the overall combined projected status as 12%. There are very few sufficiency issues within Blaenau Gwent schools at present.
- Blaenau Gwent's Post 16 provision is provided in partnership with Coleg Gwent at the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone in Ebbw Vale. The Learning Zone's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) recognises that there is an effective partnership approach between the Council and Coleg Gwent, which is resulting in improvements to the participation rates of Post 16 learners, a broadening of the learning offer and increasing attainment levels for both academic and vocational learners. The 'A' Level A*-E pass rate is approaching 99% and well above the national average and the vocational learning success rate (retention/attainment) is over 80% against all levels. The ALIS tertiary benchmarking data places the Learning Zone in the top 8% of Post 16 learning institutions for added value across the UK.
- The Council have a highly effective system in place linked to forecasting and monitoring pupil place requirements; this is evidenced pupil projection accuracy, which was at 97% for primary and 94% for secondary during the 2019/20 academic session and has been continually high over the last 3 academic years.
- The Council has good arrangements in place to support the co-ordination of early years, childcare and play to ensure sufficiency. Childcare is a rapidly developing sector in Blaenau Gwent and has grown from 142 registered places in 2002, to 1332 places currently. The sector continues to develop in response to emerging needs.
- The Welsh medium proposal is at Statutory Notice stage (Spring 2021).

2.3 Support for Other Services - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- The delivery of the WESP targets is dependent upon the Welsh medium seedling proposal.
- The ET and Youth Services are very dependent upon external funding and sustainability is a key consideration. Therefore, continued monitoring of team capacity is required in order to assess capacity requirements and secure/ sustain the positive progression of service priorities. The ESF Inspire funding risk is escalated.
- There is a need to consider the management of the home to school and college transport operations and/or how the Environment/Regeneration and Education Directorates develop procedures, and agreements that are able to more effectively address identified gaps in reviewing the policy.
- A review of online admissions is required, in order to further improve parental engagement with the admissions process, and address the current ineffective online system. A business case is under development, in line with the use of Capita One's online module, which is the system used within current neighbouring and other Councils throughout Wales. This will require investment, which will be beneficial in the long-term and could enhance partnership working and data monitoring with other Council.

Risk Considerations

- There are risks associated with the revenue implications associated with the Youth Services Inspire initiative, which is currently funded through European (ESF) funding.
- Responding to the COVID-19 emergency to ensure that learner progression is maintained in safe and blended learning settings.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The improving School Categorisation and School Inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates the increased effectiveness of leaders and managers in Local Government Education Services in Blaenau Gwent.
- The Council considers all evidence and implements its full use of statutory powers, where applicable.
- The impact of good, effective leadership is demonstrated through programme completion for example, the opening of Six Bells. There is strong progress through the 21st Century Schools Band A programme and approval of Band B programme for 2019 to 2025 period.
- Regional leadership is being exercised well by senior officers.
- Appointment of a Corporate Director of Education post during the autumn term 2020. This has been followed with a review of the Education Directorate's structural requirements, including securing school improvement capacity.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- To continue to develop officer expertise through the Professional Learning offer.
- To further develop member led self-evaluation activity across key service areas located within Local Government Education Services, for example via the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.
- To continue to develop Member understanding and effectiveness via the Member Development Programme.

Risk Considerations

- There are risks associated with securing appointment to the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion role for the Education Directorate, with recruitment initiated in the Spring term.

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The Self-Evaluation Policy (reviewed September 2020) and the SE Toolkit clearly sets out the ongoing cycle for self-evaluation processes and reporting. The FADE approach to writing evaluations is now embedded into routine practice. Processes are totally aligned with corporate

policy. The Education Directorate is confident in its SE processes and their ability to sustain continual improvement. The Council is swift in its action and use of full statutory powers where applicable, to secure the improvement required.

- Partnership working between the Council and the EAS is strong and is subject to significant joint working and quality assurance. Impact evaluations reveal that the EAS and direct work of Challenge Advisers is having a positive impact on outcomes, provision and the quality of leadership. The School Categorisation and School Inspection profile has improved significantly over the last 3 years effectively evidencing the effectiveness of our self-evaluation processes. Improvement has been secured in EFLC (out of SI), in Glyncoed Primary School and to a certain degree in ALC (ESTYN monitoring visit summer term 2019). Progress in ALC will continue to be monitored.
- The Post 16 Partnership Board established formally during the Autumn term 2020.

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- To continue to engage Members in meaningful self-evaluation activity, for example the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.
- To continue to ensure that business plans bring about the improvement required.
- To continue to engage with a wider stakeholder group when undertaking evaluations, particularly Headteachers and Children and Young people.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that self-evaluation and improvement planning fails to deliver improved outcomes for learners.

3.3 Professional learning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- Senior Officers now hold Chair positions across a number of all Wales groups; this supports their ongoing professional development.
- 121 coaching sessions are embedded as routine practice.
- PDR underpinned by an effective 360 process is now also an embedded process. This also includes contributions from Headteachers for senior Officer's PDR i.e. the Corporate Director for Education and Head of Education Transformation.
- New Headteacher and aspiring deputy induction learning offer is in place and led by an experienced Headteacher.

3.3 Professional learning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- To engage in more formal evaluations of the impact and effectiveness of CPD for Directorate officers.
- To develop further cost neutral ways in which officers can continue to engage in professional development activity set against a backdrop of Council austerity measures.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that there is less resources to support professional learning and this impacts on the Directorate and schools' improvement journeys.

3.4 Safeguarding - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- All education services including commissioned services have an up to date safeguarding policy in place, as appropriate the safeguarding policy is cross referenced in other policies
- In all school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils' needs meet statutory requirements
- A review of school inspections for the last three years demonstrated that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirement and give no cause for concern.
- The matrix has been instrumental in collating data on safeguarding
- There is an effective working relationship in place between the Corporate Director for Education, Strategic Safeguarding lead, Deputy Strategic Safeguarding lead, and Professional Lead for Community Safety in discharging the PREVENT duty and emergency planning procedures
- Established and effective systems are in place to monitor vulnerable groups e.g. gypsy traveller, EHE, pregnant mums, MARAC, EHE and monitoring child performance
- The Operation Encompass work has progressed very well and supports schools in this regard.
- The 360-degree safe Cymru Policy has been agreed by the Executive and is in the process of being implemented in all schools
- The training offer for education settings is now embedded as part of a corporate professional learning framework

3.4 Safeguarding - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- Continue to develop policy and practice that is responsive to emerging school concerns in line with the Vision for Education of school led improvement in a contextual safeguarding approach.
- Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability, including the roll-out of MyConcern now that the Council has secured a revenue budget.
- Provide greater flexibility in the training offer to increase the uptake of safeguarding training by school governors with specific reference to the COG and Safeguarding Governor
- Reinvigorate business as usual practices to inform routine business working arrangements such as the collection of data to inform performance reports to Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny

Risk Considerations

- There is a risk that the roll-out of the safeguarding package MyConcern is not implemented fully across the school estate.

3.5 Use of Resources - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The school's Individual Schools Budget (ISB) has been prioritised. Schools have been given a 3.6% uplift for 20/21. Capital has been secured to match fund the 21st Century Schools Programme. Overall, schools have healthy balances across the school estate.
- Strategic Education Improvement Manager and Service Manager for Inclusion now in post and fully functional.
- Staffing review of officers without line management responsibility completed.
- Financial Efficiency Savings: devised, approved and budget agreed for 2019/20. No savings are required for FY 20/21.
- SENCOM Review completed – BG contributed extensively to the review and supports the findings.
- GEMS provide good value for money.
- Arrangements with the regional Education Achievement Service (EAS) provide good value for money.
- There is good engagement of Blaenau Gwent elected members in the governance arrangements of the EAS; thereby effectively holding the EAS to account.
- Use of resources i.e. Education staffing have been significantly streamlined to ensure greater value for money.
- 21st Century Band B Programme has been approved.
- The Education Transformation, Youth Service and Inclusion Services provide good value for money.
- Schools have worked strategically with the Directorate to establish a Premature Retirement Contribution budget for staff terminations.
- Majority of schools have signed up to the 3 year SLA arrangement for support services with the Council.

3.5 Use of Resources - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- The corporate 'Bridging the Gap' programme continues to facilitate greater effectiveness and efficiencies, where available.
- To review the Education Directorate Professional Learning Programme so that it provides an effective, overarching strategy; which links professional learning with the findings of self-evaluation and the broad aims of the Directorate.
- Continue to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of staff professional learning on outcomes, wellbeing, provision and the quality of leadership of LGES e.g. FADEs.
- The viability of other SEWC regional services needs to be kept under close review to ensure sustainability and value for money going forward.
- Schools' deficit balances in the secondary sector have increased in one school and needs to be kept under close review going forward; timely support to be provided by the LA through the ALC Corporate Group.

- To escalate the risk level for Youth Service's funding position as ESF comes to an end in 2022. The Shared Prosperity Fund is being explored.
- There will need to be close monitoring and support for schools predicting surplus and deficit budgets, particularly for the two all-through schools.
- Effective monitoring of the out of county placement revenue budget is required.
- Facilitating robust Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and partnership arrangements with key partners, such as the EAS to ensure effective and sustainable provision for schools.

Risk Considerations

- The revenue financial position of Education is likely to be impacted by the continued response to the COVID-19 arrangements.