

Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Education Annual Report 2021-22
Date of meeting	8 December 2022
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Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Beca Brown

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In accordance with the wishes of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, the Education Department's Annual Report for 2021-22 is submitted before the committee.
- 1.2 The Education Department acknowledges that it is no easy task to ensure effective scrutiny of a document covering a years work by the Education Department at a committee meeting, and consequently it has attempted to formulate a summary report that highlights the Department's usual main work, positive aspects, along with areas that need addressing over the next period. The Annual Report is to be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 In addition, GwE will detail what they have achieved in the field of school improvement to ensure a complete overview of the area for the committee for 2021-22.

2. THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S KEY AREAS OF WORK IN 2021-22

- 2.1 As a result of the pandemic period which started in March 2020, over the past year, we as a Department along with schools have faced the new 'normal', even though covid continues to affect learners and staff, and continues to create challenges for schools in providing education at times.
- 2.2 This new 'normal' has meant getting children and young people back to school, to support their physical and mental well-being, together with the well-being of staff, responding to behavioural challenges that are a side effect of the pandemic, with the aim of being able to provide quality education to all learners.
- 2.3 Certainly, there has been more stability during the past year, and the post-pandemic period has led to normal external assessments (namely GCSE and A Level examinations) for learners at the end of their educational career in years 11, 12 and 13 for the first time in 3 years.
- 2.4 Below attention is drawn to what has been achieved in some key areas of the Education Department's work during the past year, including:
- Safeguarding
 - ALN&I
 - Immersion Education System
 - The Welsh Language

2.5 Safeguarding

Safeguarding the welfare of Gwynedd children and young people is a key priority for the Department and the Council. The Department has created a new Welsh-medium training package for Child Protection Designated Persons in schools and education centres, in conjunction with the Welsh Government's Safeguarding in Education Group.

The Education Department and the Council's Learning and Development services have also worked together to develop a training package in the field of domestic violence. The Ask and Action pack has been jointly developed and continues to be presented to the staff of the Education Department.

2.6 ALN&I Service

The transition from the old SEN Legislation to the new ALN Legislation continues to keep momentum and on track. The use of new Criteria has been extended further in order to be able to report on children's progress more widely, as showing the progress of children and young people with ALN requires holistic methods.

The number of tribunal cases in Gwynedd remains very low, with tribunals relating to provision within Gwynedd schools having been favorable in terms of the Authority, which has given us confidence during the year that suitable provision is being provided.

The work to adapt the inclusion provision model has taken place and is now active. However, we are aware that the behaviors of some children and young people are causing concern in the post-pandemic period, and we will pay attention to this in the near future in order to support our schools.

The Services will also continue to prioritise the following in order to strengthen the provision:

- o Continue to respond effectively to the demands of the COVID-19 crisis
- o Training in the field of emotional development and well-being continues to strengthen and includes ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) training, Grief and Loss Training 'Growing Through the Seasons', strengthening training in the field of Developmental Trauma.

2.7 The Gwynedd Language Immersion System

On 6 July 2021, the Cabinet approved a new vision for the Immersion Education System in Gwynedd. Since then, the Department has been focusing on realizing the new vision, and during the year a new headteacher and deputy were appointed to the Immersion Education System. Following a consultation process a new staffing structure for the system has been confirmed which will become operational in January 2023.

An investment of £1.1m from the Welsh Government's Welsh language education capital grant has created a firstclass learning environment at our immersion education sites in Bangor and Eifionydd during the past year. The Eifionydd and Bangor buildings are now ready for the provision of progressive and contemporary immersion education in strategic areas of the county of linguistic significance.

At the Cabinet meeting on 19 July 2022, unanimous support was received to move forward to submit a full business case to Welsh Government to secure the £1.1m funding from the Welsh-medium Education Capital Grant which has already been pledged in principle to align capacity and improve the learning environment of the remaining primary Language Centres in the county, namely Maesincla, Llangybi and Dolgellau.

In addition, a lot of exciting work has taken place during the year in the context of Welsh Government late immersion revenue funding. Staff at the Immersion System have been working closely with author Anni Llŷn to write a new Immersion Plan for the language units. This new scheme is based on an imaginary village called Aberwla and incorporates appropriate language patterns within the language continuum in Curriculum for Wales. To support the scheme, we in collaboration with Animated Technologies have developed a virtual element to the village. This is an innovative project that enables our newcomers to step into Aberwla on a virtual platform to practice language patterns in the supermarket. This special project was launched in the Science Village at the Tregaron National Eisteddfod Summer 2022 in the company of the Minister for Education, Jeremy Miles. Later in August our application to evolve this project was approved and work is ongoing to develop three further locations in the village of Aberwla, namely Tyddyn Swnllyd Farm, Glampio Field, Garage and Gajets Shop.

Welsh Government officials are very keen to share this resource nationally and discussions are underway to do so in the near future. To this end they are keen to fund the development of all the locations in the village in addition to the original grant. This is recognition of our innovative vision as an Immersion System we are proud of this innovative virtual resource and proud of the opportunity to share it for the benefit of learners and support the Welsh Government's aim in Cymraeg 2050 across Wales.

2.8 The Welsh Language

During the past year, the department has been preparing for the new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) that came into force on 1 September 2022. The WESP is part of Wales's long-term vision in Cymraeg 2050. In order to support the planning process, the WESP has been arranged around seven outcomes that reflects the learner's education journey and match the Cymraeg 2050 and Our National Mission policy fields.

During Autumn 2021, the department held a full consultation on the draft version of the new WESP that came to an end before Christmas. The WESP was submitted before Cabinet for approval in March 2022, and was presented to the Language Committee at the beginning of the summer. The final version of the WESP was approved by the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language on 24 June 2022.

As the WESP will begin being implemented now, the Welsh Government and the Minister will continue to monitor progress and actions taken annually. However, our aim in Gwynedd is that the WESP is a live and ambitious document that drives our actions in favour of Welsh medium education in the county and reflects the unique position of Gwynedd.

3 THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S PRIORITY PROJECTS

- 3.1 During the last year, the education department had a number of priority projects in the Council's strategic Plan which the department was expected to implement during the year.

- 3.2 The plan's priorities address the Department's main risks, together with investment to adapt schools, or build new schools so that the children and young people of Gwynedd are educated in the best possible learning environment.
- 3.3 Although the department's priority projects have been going in the right direction during the year, it must be recognized that there have been challenges in carrying out the department's capital projects during the year due to the challenges of the pandemic and an increase in the costs of building materials. Below, some of the department's priority projects are detailed.

3.4 Sustainable Learning Communities Programme

Bangor Catchment Area

Ysgol y Faenol has had a major extension to accommodate 315 pupils. Although the timetable has slipped as a result of the pandemic, the extension was completed during the year, and the pupils can now take advantage of their new learning environment. Nevertheless, discussions continue in relation to land transfers and consequently, it is not possible to complete work on the school's car park at present. The building has also been planned to be a hub for the local area, with a new community centre built as a part of the development.

Initial feasibility work has been completed to identify the needs of Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes, and there is agreement to locate the new school on the site of Ysgol Glanadda (which is now closed) and this location is in accordance with the aspirations of the community.

The department is aware of the poor condition of the building and existing learning environment at Ysgol Tryfan in Bangor, and as a result the department has begun the process of considering possible opportunities to ensure a first-class learning environment there, ensuring suitable progression to the investment already achieved in the primary schools in the Penrhosgarnedd area of the city.

Cricieth Catchment Area

Following the support of the Cabinet to increase the capacity of Ysgol Treferthyr to 150 learners and build a new school due to the poor condition of the current building. As part of the process of submitting a planning application to relocate the school to the A497 site, two technical issues have arisen regarding the site, and in response to that, work has been commissioned, and by now the archaeological work has been completed, and a safe route to school survey has also now been completed and a report has been submitted to the Planning Department.

Post-16 Education in Arfon

As a result of the varying quality of education and learner experiences across the Post-16 Education System in Arfon, the Cabinet gave permission to the Department to contact stakeholders to discuss the vision for Post-16 education in Arfon. A series of virtual meetings were held with headteachers, Governors, staff, parents, learners and the broader community to present the new vision for post-16 education, as well as gather views and ideas on the best way to realise the vision. We reported on the initial messages from this engagement to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February last year, and we are now in a position to press on with this project following the delay seen over the past year.

Linked to the post-16 education field, during the year the Council succeeded in abolishing the fee for the post-16 travel ticket for all learners from September 2022 onwards. This is particularly important to ensure that as a Council we do not place any obstacles to enable

our young people to continue their education after the age of 16, and even more important these days considering the tremendous increase in living costs.

Condition and Suitability

During the year, as with the previous year, the impact of building materials prices due to Covid and Brexit affected our ability to realize some of our plans to improve the condition and adapt our school buildings. However, we managed to complete the investment in the condition and suitability of Ysgol Bethel, Ysgol Glan y Môr and Ysgol Cymerau with work continuing on the sites of Ysgol Llanrug and Ysgol Botwnnog.

Free School Meals

In December 2021 Jeremy Miles MS, Welsh Government Minister for the Welsh Language and Education, announced that £25m of capital funding would be invested in kitchen and dining infrastructure in Welsh schools as part of plans to introduce free school meals to all primary school children in Wales over the next three years. The policy is part of the co-operation agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

Following the original announcement, from January onwards, kitchens and dining spaces in all primary schools in Gwynedd were inspected in order to identify which kitchens required upgrading of their large appliances such as ovens and dishwashers as well as lighter apparatus. We gathered parents' opinions to see how many intended to take advantage of the scheme so that we had an overview before making adaptations to our infrastructure. In terms of the large appliances, 28 new combi-ovens and 17 dishwashers have been installed, with more to be installed early in the new year.

It became clear that several sites would need an extension to cope with the possible increase in the numbers who would be eating a hot meal, as either the kitchen or dining space were unsuitable or too small. The following schools received an extension over the summer holidays, namely Ysgol Hendre, Ysgol Bethel, Ysgol Bro Lleu and Ysgol Maenofferen.

Transforming the ALN & I Provision

During the past year, this project has focused on preparing for the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. This Act came into force in September 2021, but with some elements of the Act delayed in the first year e.g. post-16 period.

During the year a Welsh Government ALN Act Readiness Review showed very strong progress in terms of the Authority's preparations for the Legislation, with the requisite statutory posts in place since January 2021 and operating effectively. Collaboration with the Health Board developed well by collaborating with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO). A number of stakeholder training events were held in order to specify particular aspects of the Final Code. Work on the dispute resolution routes to ensure that they are operational have been completed. In the early years sector the necessary systems for early identification, and establishing clear processes have been completed. Preparatory work in the post-16 sector is continuing. Also, the work of developing a work, curriculum and assessment link between the mainstream and Special Schools has developed and continues to develop.

Innovative work is continuing to be done in terms of the use and continuous development of the on-line Individual Development Plan system, with the system driving the entire process for the schools, parents, external agencies and other education provisions (e.g. the early years).

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The members are asked to present any observations on what the Education Department has achieved during the year which is outlined in this covering report and the Annual Report in Appendix 1, together with any observations on the Department's priorities for the next period.