

Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Estyn report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd
Date of meeting	9 November 2023
Relevant Officer	Debbie A W Jones, Assistant Head: Education Corporate Services
Cabinet Member	Councillor Beca Brown

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Estyn carried out an inspection of education services at Cyngor Gwynedd during the week commencing 26 June 2023. The report on Estyn's findings following the inspection was published on 20 September 2023. The report can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to present the Estyn report on education services at Cyngor Gwynedd for discussion before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

2. A SUMMARY OF THE ESTYN REPORT. (June 2023)

- 2.2 The summary of the Estyn report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd states that:
 - education is a clear priority in the Council's plans;
 - the Authority's staff embrace the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd and strive to embed these principles in their day-to-day work;
 - the inspection outcomes of Cyngor Gwynedd's schools and other education settings are strong;
 - authority and GwE officers have a good knowledge of providers who can support them;
 - intervention to support schools that are a cause of concern is very effective, but in a very few cases, it has not been timely enough;
 - the well-being of children and young people in Gwynedd benefits from the support provided by the Youth Service, this is especially true for vulnerable pupils who are at risk of not being in education, employment or training after they leave school;
 - Gwynedd's school attendance rates do not currently compare favourably with national rates;
 - provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs has strengthened, however, neither the status of, nor the steps for accessing the behaviour support hubs, are wholly clear;

- promoting the Welsh language is a clear priority for the authority and the education service;
- the immersion centres are particularly successful in enabling latecomers to the language to acquire Welsh, together with developing an innovative virtual resource to practise language patterns and vocabulary and dedicated podcasts on the benefits of learning Welsh;
- a strong feature of the authority's work with regard to the Welsh language is the range of valuable Welsh-medium resources that the authority's staff have developed for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and their families;
- the authority provides a wide range of post-16 courses that respond to the linguistic and economic needs of the county, however, the process of reviewing Arfon's post-16 education arrangements has been slow;
- positive examples of leaders implementing beneficial strategies that have led to improvements e.g., the authority's digital strategy, work on modernising schools and strengthening immersion provision;
- safeguarding arrangements within the education service are generally sound;
- the local authority has a good understanding of the financial situation within the education service.

3. GOOD PRACTICE - CAMEO OF ESTYN'S REPORT

3.1

Cameo – The Well-being Festival

In response to the wishes of young people, youth workers supported them to lead on planning a well-being festival to promote the mental health and well-being of young people and provide access to information and support from a range of services. The festival developed to become a week-long event across the county. There were 31 organisations involved with the festival and 49 varied sessions were held during the week. More than 700 well-being boxes were also distributed to young people.

3.2

Cameo – Using digital technology to encourage use of the Welsh language

Leaders and teachers are working with a local commercial company to create an innovative virtual resource based on their new Welsh language immersion scheme. The scheme is based on the imaginary village of Aberwla and the virtual equipment provides an excellent experience for pupils to practise language patterns and vocabulary. They also make effective use of promoting the benefits of learning Welsh and share good practice through dedicated podcasts, for example by interviewing former pupils from language centres and their families to share their experiences of learning the language.

4. CASE STUDY - ESTYN REPORT

4.1 Cyngor Gwynedd's work in developing Welsh-medium resources for pupils with additional education needs and their families, and for language immersion.

Information about the Local Education Authority

Gwynedd Local Education Authority has a clear vision in the context of Welsh-medium education for learners throughout their time in education. Gwynedd's Welsh Language Policy aims to develop confident bilingual learners and citizens. In Gwynedd, the Welsh language belongs to everyone, and the policy sets a direction and clear accountability for all schools.

Cyngor Gwynedd's Education Department is committed to contributing to national strategies and legislation in terms of promoting and increasing the use of the Welsh language. To this end, the department has prepared and introduced a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, which outlines the vision for Welsh-medium education within the authority over the next ten years. In line with the statutory requirement, under section 44 of the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011, the Council has produced and published county-wide strategies which outline how they will contribute to the national aim set in the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy, Cymraeg 2050, to increase the number of Welsh speakers across Wales and increase the opportunities for people to use the Welsh language on a daily basis. Gwynedd's county-wide Welsh Language Strategy (Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd 2018-23) sets the commitment and vision for the whole county, and the work of the Education Department and the aims of the WESP contribute to the objectives of that county-wide strategy.

4.2 Developing Welsh-medium resources for learners with additional learning needs and inclusion.

The Authority, in partnership with Cyngor Ynys Môn, have invested in a central Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion (ALN&I) service. This service is available to all education providers within the county to provide support and advice for learners with ALN&I needs or to prevent these needs from developing. This is by providing resources, training and direct input for schools and learners.

The ALN&I service provides a fully bilingual service, with all members of staff within the service being able to provide through the medium of Welsh. The need for provision through the medium of Welsh is emphasised within the recruitment process.

Developing resources through the medium of Welsh is an integral part of this work and the training provided by the team is available through the medium of Welsh. There is a wide range of appropriate resources that are developed continuously to correspond to

the identified need and to align with the provision that is offered. This includes areas of behaviour, well-being and mental health support, specific learning needs (literacy and numeracy), communication and interaction, and sensory, medical and physical needs. A specific website has been set up to be used by parents and carers, and a specific website for school staff which enables them to download resources, in addition to an online classroom for specific learning needs resources. Everything on the website is available bilingually: www.adyach.cymru. The online Individual Development Plan is also fully bilingual so that it can be completed in the family's preferred language.

The above means that ALN&I provision aligns with the ethos and teaching provision within the county and promotes learners' skills and bilingualism from the outset. It also means that parents and carers can contribute to their children's person-centred discussions through the medium of Welsh or English with staff who are able to speak both languages.

4.3 The Immersion Education System

In order for the authority's Welsh language policy to be inclusive, a specialist service is provided within the county, namely the Immersion Education System. Since being established in its new form in January 2023, there are six strategic settings across the county, which provide a service for latecomers to acquire the Welsh language.

To ensure modern and up-to-date opportunities for learners to practise vocabulary and language patterns in our immersion centres, staff at the Immersion Education System have worked with individuals and an external company to create an innovative virtual village. This project has been developed with Welsh Government revenue grant funding. This new scheme is based on an imaginary village called Aberwla and it incorporates specific language patterns within the language continuum in the Curriculum for Wales. It is a scheme that is relevant to the twenty-first century and reflects modern day Wales. The project enables latecomers to step into Aberwla on a virtual platform to practise language patterns in various locations around the village. On this digital platform, learners are given an opportunity to play games with each other e.g., when filling their basket in the supermarket or by reading instructions and following a shopping list. They also meet different characters and creatures from the usual at Tyddyn Swnllyd Farm and stay at the Glamping Ground for a couple of nights. They can also spend time at the leisure centre, the museum or help Ceri the mechanic at the garage. It is also possible to borrow a drone from the gadget shop to fly above the village to practise command patterns and directions e.g., right and left, forwards and backwards.

Welsh Government officials are very keen for Gwynedd to share this resource nationally and have released funding to facilitate this. The local authority is proud of the opportunity to share the resource for the benefit of learners and to support the Government's aim in Cymraeg 2050 across Wales. All authorities in Wales are welcome to use the resource by contacting canolfaniaith@gwynedd.llyw.cymru.

Multimedia resources to reinforce language patterns and vocabulary are valuable, particularly virtual digital resources that appeal to children and young people. This resource is a means to reinforce the skills necessary to enable learners to use the Welsh language in a formal and informal context.

What is becoming clear is the interest learners have in the resource. It is very appealing to latecomers from primary to secondary schools. The virtual element is a means of enabling learners to immerse themselves in the activity and, when they step onto the platform, they are happy to try to communicate through the medium of Welsh. The element of fun and enjoyment attached to the resource certainly has a positive influence on their development and is a means of normalising the Welsh language and making it contemporary in the virtual and digital arena.

Another innovative resource that is worth sharing nationally in the context of Welsh-medium education is the podcast 'Am filiwn', which deals with aspects of the world of a teacher that leads to increasing and developing pupils to become Welsh speakers and aims to create a million Welsh speakers. This podcast goes under the skin of immersion education and what happens in our language centres within our Immersion Education System. In the podcast, some learners and their parents share their experiences of attending the Welsh language immersion units in Gwynedd to learn Welsh. In addition, an experienced teacher also talks about the main immersion principles that have proved successful within the Immersion Education System in Gwynedd. This is a valuable resource for students following a teacher training course, for newly qualified teachers or for teachers at the beginning of their career to raise awareness and learn about effective immersion principles and strategies. The 'Am Filiwn Podcast' (ypod.cymru) was developed in a series of podcasts for ITE, Bangor University in collaboration with Initial Teacher Education institutions in Wales, sponsored by Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

5. ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Ensure that leaders act strategically on all aspects of their work and that they have suitable oversight and full consideration of risk regarding important aspects that have arisen during the inspection.
- 5.2 Improve arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and promoting pupils' attendance.
- 5.3 Strengthen provision to respond to the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and ensure arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of that provision.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:-

- provide observations on the contents of the Estyn report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd;
- consider any arrangements to scrutinise the progress against the report's recommendations in a timely manner.