

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>17 October 2024</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Progress Report - Attendance and Behaviour of pupils at Gwynedd Schools</b>
<b>REASON TO SCRUTINISE</b>	
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<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	<b>Councillor Beca Brown</b>

### **1. Why does it need scrutiny?**

1.1 This report is submitted in response to a request from members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee to receive an **update** on the progress of the Department for Education in response to the recommendations of the Estyn Report on education services at Gwynedd Council (June 2023) in relation to pupil attendance and behaviour in the county's schools.

### **2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?**

2.1 The Estyn Report on education services at Gwynedd Council (June 2023) set out the following recommendations, in the report is intended to report on actions against the recommendations in the context of learner attendance and behaviour.

- Improve monitoring, evaluation, and promotion of pupil attendance.
- Strengthen provision to respond to the needs of pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties and ensure monitoring arrangements and improve the quality of that provision.

2.2 This report is intended to report on the actions that have been undertaken against these recommendations, giving the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to consider whether there has been sufficient progress to

- Improve attendance and behaviour within Gwynedd schools.
- act on the findings of the work that has looked at the use of inclusion funding within the schools.
- Identify challenges and opportunities in the inclusion field.

### **3. Summary and Key Issues**

3.1 Estyn carried out an inspection of the Education Department (June 2023)

The inspection highlighted the need to strengthen provision to respond to the needs of pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) as well as ensuring monitoring and improving the quality of that provision.

Subsequently during November/December 2023, Mrs Caroline Rees (who had reviewed the Inclusion Service in 2019/20) was commissioned to undertake a detailed review of the Inclusion Service with recommendations on how to strengthen the provision. Caroline Rees Report's findings echoed Estyn's recommendations.

- The need for the Local Authority to work with school leaders to co-produce an effective county-wide Inclusion strategy of in-school and out-of-school provision that embraces key principles of clarity of purpose, ownership, quality assurance and continuity.
- Discover suitable locations for out-of-school provision.

A Project Board has now been set up to identify options to meet those recommendations.

#### 4. Background / Context

### IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

#### ATTENDANCE

4.1 Our key attendance guidance is the All-Wales Attendance Framework, Welsh Government Guidance (November 2012). The document provides standards and guidance to practitioners to ensure greater consistency of practice across Wales. It also aims to enable councils and schools to provide services that are consistent, accessible and of a high standard.

4.2 "Belonging, engaging and participating", which is guidance to improve pupil engagement and attendance, was published in June 2023 to support schools, pupil referral units, parents/carers, and Local Authorities to increase learner engagement and attendance levels, outlining approaches when absences worsen.

4.3 As Members are aware, improving attendance has been a constant focus for Cyngor Gwynedd. The link between good attendance and learning is clear. Significant work has been undertaken to improve attendance over the past year allocating additional Welfare Officer hours through the Welsh Government Attendance grant to target attendance improvements for specific individuals within schools, particularly year 11 pupils.

4.4 However, while there has been improvement over time, there is much work to be done to close the gap further and to reinforce improvements in a positive attendance trend, including a reduction in continued absenteeism.

RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED	IMPACT
Improving the monitoring of attendance	<p>The Department already collects data and runs reports on a weekly basis but over the last year there has been -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better sharing of data between the Authority and Schools</li> <li>• a strengthening of collaboration with other services</li> </ul>	<p>Consistency across the County</p> <p>Early identification of individuals to target.</p> <p>Schools constantly self-evaluate</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improvement in lines of accountability with schools</li> <li>• further development in strategic leadership</li> <li>• assurance that appropriate support and challenge is in place.</li> </ul>	
Evaluating pupil attendance	Over the past year Welfare Officers have been closely scrutinising school registers. An increase in Welfare Officers has enabled us to carry out targeting work and this has been a success with several schools reporting positively on this support.	56% Increase in attendance of targeted groups Ability to be proactive. Contact with families.
Promoting good attendance	Work with schools to ensure appropriate support is in place for pupils who are struggling to attend school.	Improvement in individual attendance. Co-working has been strengthened

Update

### Comparison of 2022/23 with the academic year of 2023/24

4.5 Average attendance over the 23/24 academic year is **89.1%** up from **88.7%** in the 2022/23 academic year.

#### 4.6 Percentage of attendance of specific groups

Free school meals	85.04%
Pupils with ALN	86.99%
Looked after children	90.35%

4.7 Gwynedd was slightly higher than the national percentage. Across the secondary sector, levels of authorised absences continue to be reported in relation to illness and pupils' emotional well-being.

	Attendance	Authorised	Unauthorised
Gwynedd	89.1%	8.4%	2.5%

Cymru

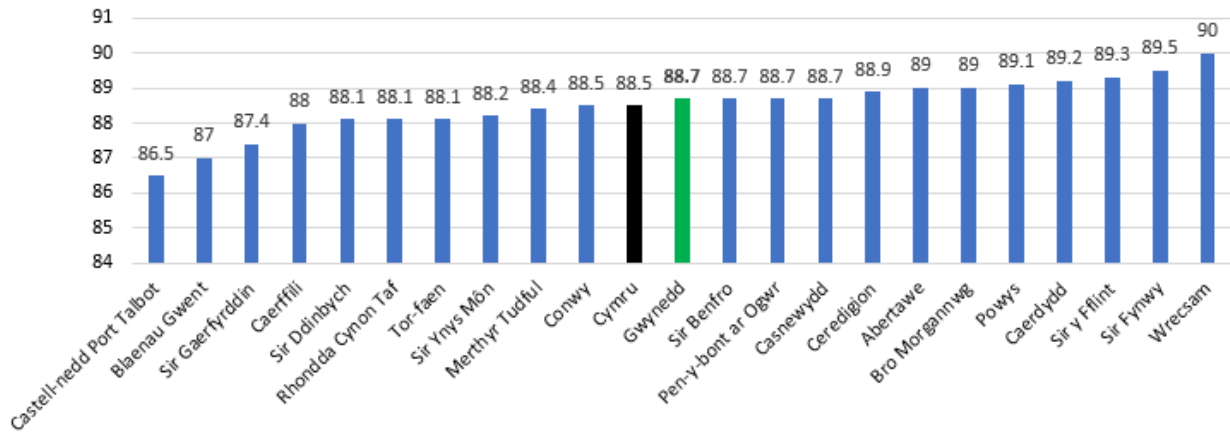
89%

7.3%

3.6%

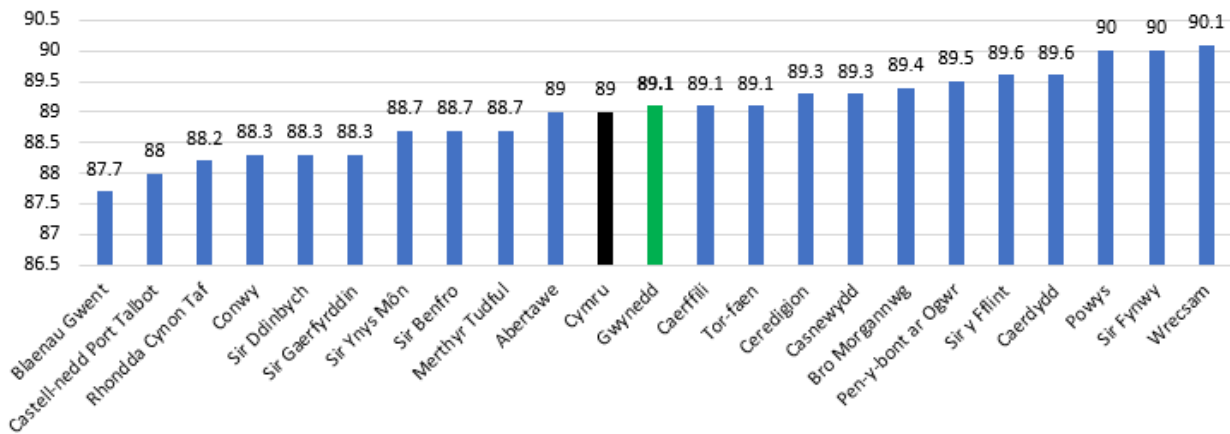
### Presenoldeb fesul awdurdod lleol (2022/3)

Canran cyfartalog sesiynau presennol  
disgyblion ysgolion a gynhelir oedran 5-15



### Presenoldeb fesul awdurdod lleol (2023/4)

Canran cyfartalog sesiynau presennol  
disgyblion ysgolion a gynhelir oedran 5-15



4.8 Across Wales, school attendance had been in decline since returning to school following the pandemic but is slowly recovering. Improving school attendance remains a priority for the local authority and its schools. Although the pandemic has had a significant impact on attendance, there are improvements in 2023/24, and we are hopeful that the Strategy and focus on attendance will support continuous improvement in the years ahead.

4.9 Excellent school attendance is key to increasing educational outcomes. In addition, schools play a central role in protecting children and young people ensuring their positive social and emotional wellbeing, which would not be possible without their engagement in education. We will continue to liaise with all stakeholders to ensure attendance remains a priority at local, regional, and national level. We will also continue in our ambitions to increase attendance through close working relationships with our schools and school communities and continue with the multi-agency approach to support the child, their family and their school.

## BEHAVIOUR

4.10 Guidance on 'Exclusion from schools and pupil referral units' (revised April 2024) is the document that provides guidance on the temporary and permanent exclusion of pupils including the responsibility of headteachers, governors, independent review panels and local authorities. This is in line with the Behaviour and Discipline in Schools guidance which advises schools on implementing behaviour policy to create a school culture with high expectations of behaviour.

4.11 A decision to permanently exclude a learner is a serious one. This is usually the final step in a process for dealing with disciplinary offences following a wide range of other strategies which have been implemented without success. It is an acknowledgement from the school that it has exhausted all available strategies for dealing with the learner and it should normally only be used as a last resort.

ARGYMHELLION	CAMAU A WEITHREDWYD	IMPACT
Strengthen provision to respond to the needs of pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties and ensure monitoring arrangements and improve the quality of that provision	In November 2023, Caroline Rees was commissioned to undertake a review of the Inclusion Service including schools' specific inclusion provision.  To address Estyn recommendations and the review, a Project Board was established in February 2024 comprising Senior Authority Officers, Secondary School Headteachers, Children's Services Manager.	Authority and Schools working more closely.  Collaborative planning  Sharing the vision
Finding suitable venues for out-of-school provision	Internal discussions within the Department to consider possible options within the Councils resource and assets	

### 4.8 Exclusion data

4.12 This report provides analysis and evaluation of exclusion data over a period of 2 years to enable members to further scrutinize the content.

#### Secondary

Year	Fixed term				Permanent
	Number of Pupils	Number of incidents	Total days	Number of schools excluding	
2022/2023	452	823	1995.5	14	44( 8 School)
2023/2024	470	869	2733	14	48( 9 School)

## Primary

Year	Fixed term				Permanent
	Number of Pupils	Number of incidents	Total days	Number of schools excluding	
2022/2023	47	67	151	23	1
2023/2024	57	118	325.5	25	3( 3 School)

### Permanent exclusions

	22/23	23/24
Girls	16	12
Boys	30	41

Schools	22/23(Number of pupils)	23/24(Number of pupils )
Arfon	36	42
Meirionydd	2	4
Dwyfor	7	5

4.13 60 % of permanent exclusions relate to persistent disruptive behaviour with the rest in relation to verbal abuse/threatening behaviour towards pupils/ members of staff, drug supply and serious attacks on other pupils.

4.14 You will note from the above information that there remain clear challenges in addressing pupils' significant social, emotional, and behavioural needs in the post-pandemic era and that no significant progress has been made but there are steps in response to the situation. This will require shared commitment, creativity, and ambition to improve the life chances of our most vulnerable and challenging learners to ensure we work together to achieve our mission as set out in the Council's Plan to give our children and young people the best possible start in life.

4.15 The Inclusion Services continue to implement a range of welfare and behaviour initiatives supported by Welsh Government grant funding (which is in addition to the core budget). In recognising the link between welfare and behaviour, grant funding has been used to deliver training to schools to support pupils who have difficulty attending school on an emotional basis, support schools in the emotional literacy field and contribute to trauma-informed school sessions.

## 5. Consultation

- Setting up a group to review the current Strategy with stakeholders.
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## 6. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 6.1 Supporting learners experiencing significant social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties to achieve the best possible educational outcomes supports the priorities in the Council's Plan 2023-2028 – Gwynedd Tomorrow - Give our children and young people the best possible start in life.
- 6.2 The Well-being Objectives are to enable our children and young people to gain the skills they need to be ethical, ambitious, and confident individuals, to promote independence, healthy and successful lives for all and enable them to fulfil their potential and thrive. This also supports the Sustainable Development principle and the Well-being Goals of the Future Generations (Wales) Well-being Act which underpins the service's vision and working practices.
- 6.3 The Sustainable Development Principles are that the proposal would protect the long-term educational needs of children and young people to maximise their abilities and gain control of their lives.

Have you **included** residents / service users? If not, why, and how do you intend to consult with them?

An attendance campaign based on consultation with pupils, schools, and parents.	October- November
Partnership with the schools works to create ownership of the inclusion strategy and the way forward.	Complete by July 2025

Have you considered **collaboration**?

- Project Board established with membership from schools (Headteachers), Children's Services (Assistant Head), Youth Service.
- In addition, at operational level, working closely with Children's Services (Manager/team leaders), Health Service, Youth Justice Service, Careers Wales, Police and College (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai).

What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems from arising or worsening in the future?

- Continue to work in a multi-agency way.

- Regular evaluation of impact.
- Identifying patterns that arise.

How have you considered the **long-term** and what will people's needs be in years to come?

- Giving our children and young people the best possible start in life.
- All take ownership.
- Collaboration.

To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?

- A range of support available in Gwynedd makes real change for children and young people and consequently contributes to reducing future worsening problems and reducing the long-term need for support.

#### 7. **Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language, and the Socio-Economic Duty**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.
- 7.2 The Protected Characteristics and Welsh Language impact are that the proposal would improve outcomes for all pupils, including those learning through the medium of Welsh.

#### 8. **Next Steps**

- 8.1 Work is about to get underway to establish an Around the School Team Protocol which will provide a more collaborative framework for addressing the concerns surrounding pupils with behavioural difficulties and poor attendance. The aim is to provide support and challenge to schools where significant concerns have been identified in relation to behaviour management and exclusions.
- 8.2 In addition, the Department has invested in an AI resource (Ed-Bot) which will analyse attendance data on a weekly basis. This will enable us in the short term to recognise a pattern of low absences in specific postcodes, changes in percentage and emerging patterns, to allow us to track on real time and to be more proactive.