

Annual Report of the Gwynedd Corporate Parent Panel

2024/25



1. Introduction and context: The Role of the Corporate Parent Panel

- 1.1. Cyngor Gwynedd and its partners have statutory responsibilities to act as corporate parents for looked-after children.
- 1.2. Children and young people come into the Council's care under very difficult circumstances, but the Council is as ambitious for these children as anyone would be for their own children. The aim is to live life as happy as possible. Any child that is looked after by the Council has the right to expect the same from their corporate parent as any other child would expect from a good parent.
- 1.3. This means that the Council will:
 - Understand their needs, talents and dreams, and will support their interests;
 - Be highly ambitious about their future and will expect the best from them and on their behalf;
 - Celebrate their successes and support them through challenges;
 - Listen to their opinions and incorporate these in services and policies;
 - Ensure that they are part of planning their own lives and include them in decisions;
 - Acknowledge, support and respect their identity in every way;
 - Promote and support their educational attainment to the best of their ability, ensuring access to a high standard of education and extensive learning opportunities;
 - Support their health and emotional well-being;
 - Provide a safe and stable home where there is a sense of belonging;
 - Support their journey from childhood into adulthood and promote their economic potential that contributes to society as a whole.
- 1.4. To support this role, the Council has established a Corporate Parent Panel. The Panel has a specific and direct responsibility to ensure that appropriate and suitable multi-agency services are available and are of a high quality, accessible and meet their needs. There is collaboration with partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for each looked-after child.
- 1.5. Membership of the Corporate Parent Panel includes:
 - Chief Executive (Chair)
 - Cabinet Member for the Children and Supporting Families Department
 - Cabinet Member for Education
 - Statutory Director of Social Services (the role of the Children and Young People's Lead Director is also included)
 - Head of the Children and Supporting Families Department
 - Head of Education
 - Children's Services Manager, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

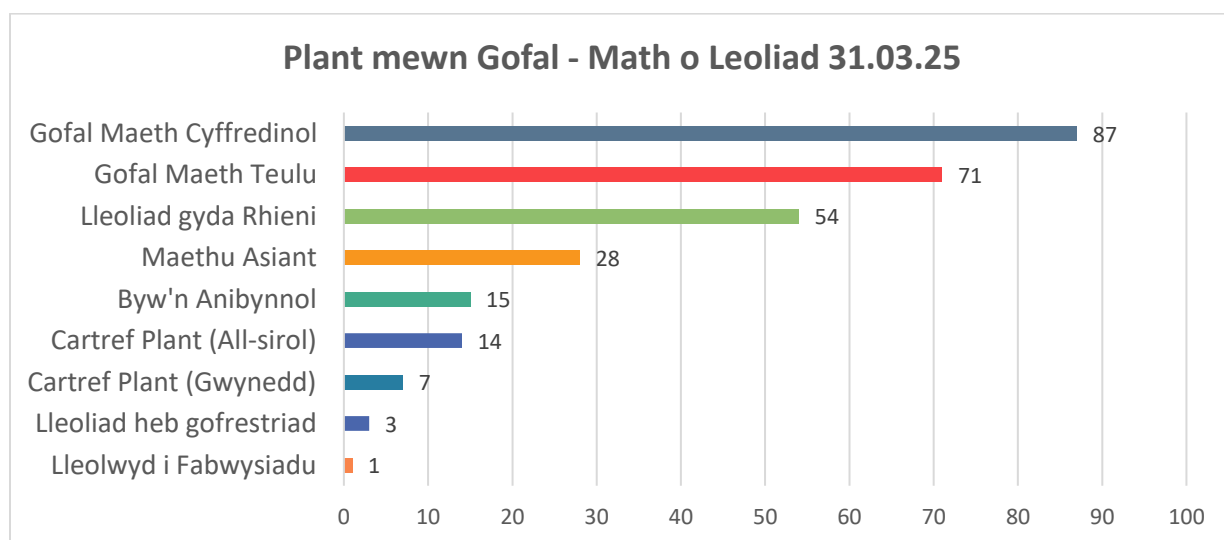
2. Data: Overview of the previous year

2.1. The following information is presented based on the end of quarter four figures (March 2025). It includes the comparative figures from the previous five years:

Looked-after Children on 31 March	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of looked-after children at the end of the year	291	281	273	281	281	280
Number of children coming into care during the year	82	46	46	59	65	53
Number of children leaving care during the year	44	56	54	51	65	54
Number of children who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	1	0	3	15	14	4

2.2. On 31 March 2025, there were **280** looked-after children, i.e. one less than the previous year. However, it is important to draw attention to the fact that some children left care during the year while other children came into care, therefore the general number remained fairly consistent despite the changes within the group.

2.3. Type of placement



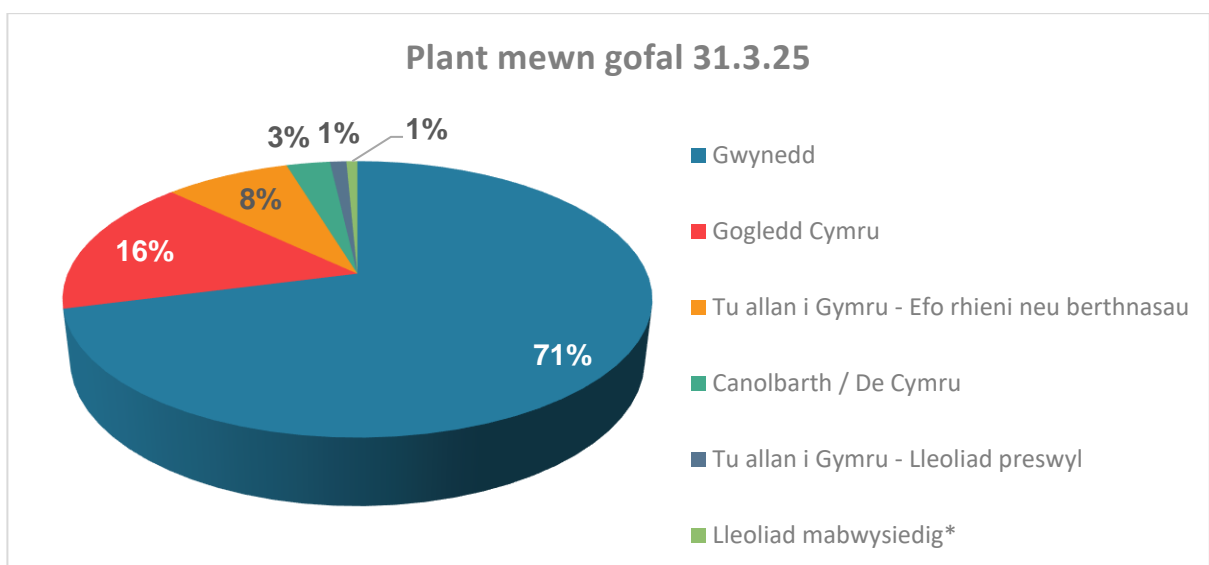
2.3.1. As the above graph shows, of the **280** looked-after children in our care at the end of March 2025, there were **186** (66%) in foster placements, **21** (8%) in residential placements and **54** (19%) placed with their parents. There was **1** child in adopted placements at the end of the quarter with **15** young people living independently with support.

2.3.2. Unfortunately, during 2024/25 unregistered placement arrangements (OWR) had to be used for **3** young people (compared with **5** for last year). Historically, the use of such arrangements has been very rare, and this increase reflects the situation nationally, due to lack of registered placements. This is especially true of teenagers with intensive and complex needs or who have experienced a placement breakdown due to challenging behaviour. The team is working hard to try to ensure registered placements for young people, and it is anticipated that the number will reduce further in 2025/26.

2.4. Geographical location

2.4.1. At the end of the year, **208** (74%) of looked-after children were placed in Gwynedd. This is an increase of **4%** since 2023/24. There were **42** (15%) of children placed in north Wales, with **26** (9%) of these children placed in neighbouring counties (Anglesey and Conwy).

2.4.2. For some children, there is a choice for the Council to place them with general foster carers in the County or with extended family. The extended family may live outside the boundaries of Gwynedd and therefore the child will be placed out-of-county, but the placement will continue within the extended family. A total of **21** (7%) of children were placed outside Wales, with **3** of these in residential placements and the rest are either in placements with parents or relatives.



* These placements are not disclosed as it is sensitive information

2.5. Number of children entering care during the year

2.5.1. During the whole year, **53 children came into care**, compared with **65** during 2023/24.

2.5.2. The following table shows the ages of the children that came into care during 2024/25. **62%** of the children who entered care during the year were under five years old, with the majority of them having been on the Child Protection Register as part of safeguarding processes before entering care. This was a substantial increase compared to 2023/24, where **37%** of children who entered care were under 5 years old.

Under 1 years old	1 – 5 years old	6 – 10 years old	11 – 15 years old	16+
19	14	7	10	3

2.5.3. The increase in the numbers under 5 years old that enter care is not unique to Gwynedd, and the same pattern can be seen across north Wales and the whole of Wales. Some of the main reasons why children under 5 years old enter care are concerns about the parents' ability to safeguard, intentional abuse, alcohol abuse and substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health issues, and mothers whose previous children had entered care becoming pregnant and not having made the necessary adjustments in their lives to be able to safely care for the child.

2.6. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

2.6.1. Please note that the Council has received **30** Asylum Seekers through the Home Office Transfer Scheme since December 2022. The majority come from Afghanistan, although small numbers have arrived from other countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Vietnam and Egypt. **4** of these were looked-after children on 31 March 2025 (with **26** of them now having left care).

2.6.2. Asylum seekers represent **2%** of the children who entered care this year, compared with **18%** in 2023/24. Very little background information is available in these cases, and identifying suitable placements is the main challenge due to their age, linguistic and cultural needs and very often due to the serious trauma they have experienced.

2.6.3. In May 2024, the Panel received a special presentation on Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers by the Post-16 Team. Some challenges the team face were highlighted including various support requirements with the young people having experienced substantial trauma, working with a cohort at a high risk of exploitation, translation arrangements as well as the challenge of finding suitable placements. The Council has already secured an additional resource for the Post-16 Team, and two new temporary posts were created during 2023/24.

"I would like to express my thanks for the incredible support I was given. The commitment to my welfare, education and health has made a significant difference to my life..."

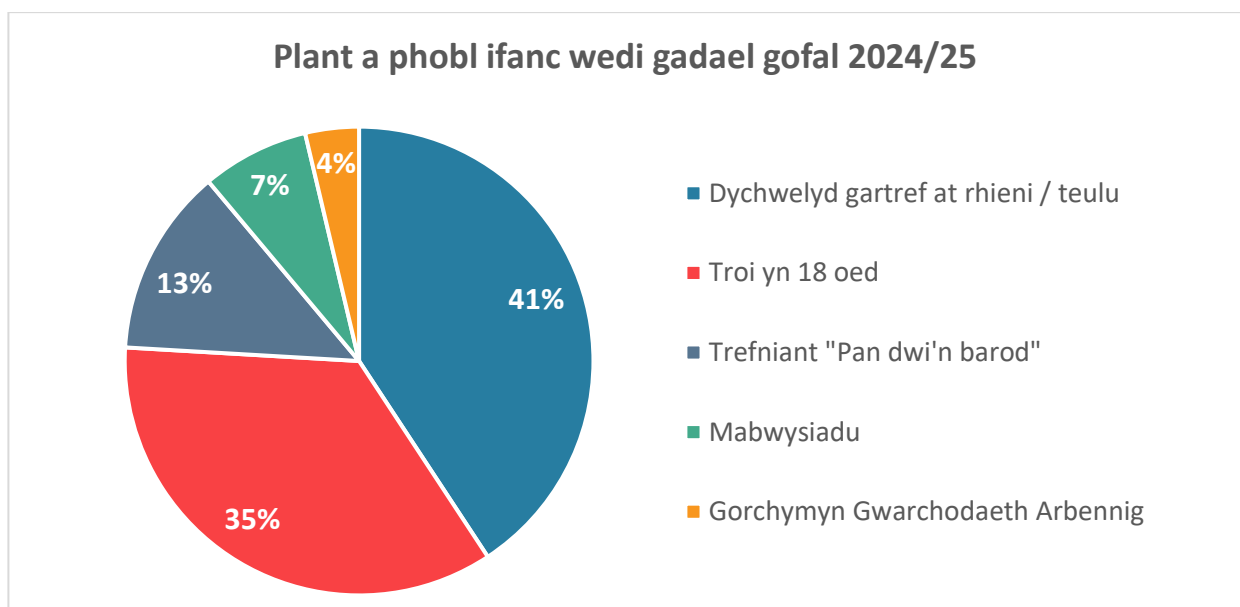
Growing up in Afghanistan, I saw and faced many challenges, but these have given me strength and have fostered hope in me. Moving to another country is never easy, but Wales has given me many opportunities to grow as an individual and an opportunity for a better future.

When I came here, one of the first challenges was to adapt to a new culture and lifestyle. The language barrier was significant, but I was determined to learn and take part. People have been very welcoming and supportive. Their kindness has shown me, despite our different backgrounds, that common values such as compassion always makes us as one."

Feedback from an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker

2.7. Children who have left care during the year

2.7.1. During the whole year, **54** children left care. **18** young persons turned 18 years old, with **7** of them remaining with their foster carers under the 'When I'm Ready' scheme and **0** transferred to the Adults services with complex needs. **22** children returned to their parents' care following short periods being looked after. A care order was completely revoked for **12** children. A Special Guardianship Order or a Supervision Order was made for **2** children (which means that they are no longer looked-after children). Adoption Orders were made for **4** children during the period.



2.8. Support to prevent children from becoming looked-after

- 2.8.1. The Council offers different tiers of support for families – varying from the Team around the Family, which intervenes early when problems emerge to more intense support from the Trobwynt Service for children who are about to come into care. The teams work closely with families, understanding their challenges and collaborating with parents to improve their situation. This approach helps prevent placing children in care unnecessarily.
- 2.8.2. Between April 2024 and March 2025, the Trobwynt Services worked with **208** children. The team started working with **159** new cases during this period. During the year, the team's intervention ended for **163** children. A **104** of these lived at home with their parents without a care order at the start of the intervention. At the end of the intervention, **101** continued to live at home and **10** have returned home from being looked-after.

3. The Panel's actions over the year

3.1. A stable and safe home: Fostering and Adoption

3.1.1. Stable placements are essential to create a sense of belonging and security in the life of every child. When a looked-after child needs to be placed, the wish is to keep them close to their family and home area. We therefore focus on finding ways of accommodating and providing care to children and young people closer to home, so that they can continue to be part of the community and maintain their support networks.

3.1.2. Practical and professional support is provided to all local foster families. Personal examples can be seen that witness the impact and demonstrating the true value and long-term influence of fostering on the lives of children and young people.

"My foster family meant everything to me, and they still do...There was a sense of belonging and that they really wanted me, I'd never experienced that before. My foster carers chose to welcome me into their home and for me to be part of their family.

For the first time ever, I felt part of the family dynamic, this was something I had wanted all my life. Having parents who treated me like their daughter. Having relationships with siblings for the first time – although it wasn't long before we started fighting as siblings!

But it felt normal and natural. 'I was really happy. Happier than I'd ever been before.'

A young woman in local foster care

3.1.3. The Council is proud of its ability to offer foster care of the highest standard and it invests in recruiting, assessing and registering the county's foster carers. At the end of March 2025, there were **72** general foster homes registered with the Maethu Cymru Gwynedd Service. This is compared to **61** in 2024, and therefore a positive increase is seen in the numbers.

3.1.4. Practical and professional support is provided to all foster families. At the end of the year there were **9** (3%) looked-after children in Gwynedd who had experienced 3 or more moves in their placement. This is lower than the percentage for 2023/24, i.e. **7%**.

3.1.5. During 2024/25, the Panel developed a **benefits package** for Gwynedd foster carers. The benefits include:

- A 50% reduction (25% for short break Foster Carers) in the Council Tax bills of foster carers registered with the Council.
- Free annual parking permit.
- Unlimited use of leisure centres.

3.1.6. Also, the offer includes adopting a **Fostering Friendly Policy** for foster carers who are employed by the Council. The policy offers more flexibility in their work arrangements to assist them to meet the needs of the children in their care, including up to an additional 5 days of leave to enable them to undertake their fostering responsibilities.

3.1.7. The purpose of the package is to encourage and attract more to be Foster Carers for Gwynedd as well as to show appreciation of the experienced and committed carers that are already registered with the Council. By making fostering more feasible financially to some residents, and this can even attract those who currently foster with an Independent Fostering Agency to transfer to Gwynedd.

3.1.8. The package is scheduled to be formally submitted to the Cabinet in April 2025, before proceeding to implement the changes and promote the offer during 2025/26.

3.2. A stable and safe home: Small Group Homes Project

3.2.1. Sometimes individual circumstances mean that there is a need to place a child in a residential placement. This comes from a combination of factors that may include complex needs, challenging behaviour, previously unsuccessful foster placements or specialist needs that means that a placement in a family environment would not be suitable.

3.2.2. Developing residential provision for looked-after children is central to the Welsh Government's vision of creating a not-for-profit model for children's services, and is a clear priority for Gwynedd Councillors, who want to see young people supported and housed locally, rather than being located far from the county.

3.2.3. The Small Group Homes is a Project in the Council's Plan for 2023-28 that seeks to address this need. The proposal is to develop registered homes for small groups of up to two children, which will allow them to receive care in Gwynedd, attend local schools, and fully participate in the lives of their communities.

3.2.4. Over the past year, significant progress has been made with the Small Group Homes Scheme. Three new properties were purchased in 2024/25, and the first home was opened in Morfa Bychan, with two children now living there. A manager and a full team of staff have been

appointed to this home, and it is hoped to complete the official registration process with Care Inspectorate Wales early in 2025/26.

3.2.5. In addition, a second home was purchased in Dinorwig and the necessary work is underway to prepare it for registration. A third home was also purchased in Edern, with children expected to move in over the next few months.

3.2.6. During the next year, further steps are underway to explore opportunities in Meirionnydd, including an option to develop on Council-owned land.

3.3. Supporting health and well-being

3.3.1. Health Assessments

3.3.1.1. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 states that all looked-after children must have a health assessment. When a child comes “into care”, a community paediatrician should undertake an initial health assessment (IHA) within 28 days.

3.3.1.2. **43** New Health Assessments were due to be carried out during the year 2024-2025 up to 1st April 2025, with **63%** carried out within the required timeframe. Of those that were late the majority were due either to the late sharing of consent and paperwork with the Health Board, or due to placement transfers resulting in requests having to go to areas outside Gwynedd. These figures have significantly improved in comparison to what was reported the previous year (2023/24).

Year	Number of Assessments to be undertaken	Number of Assessments completed	Percentage of Assessments on time	Waiting for data
2024/25	43	41	63%	2
2023/24	55	52	18%	3

3.3.1.3. A looked-after child is also expected to receive Health Review Assessment on a regular basis (every 6 months for a child under 5 years old and every year for a child over 5 years old). There were **294** Health Review Assessments due during the year, with **64%** carried out within the required timeframe. **36%** were late due to problems with carers' illness, appointment cancellations, families on holiday and unavoidable placement changes.

3.3.1.4. The Panel's intention was to look in more detail at the health assessments' data, scrutinising the width and scope of waiting times during 2024/25 and comparing with the

rest of the children population, however, there has been delay as a result of capacity and other priorities. The Panel will revisit this during the coming year.

3.3.1.5. Despite the delay in looking at the data as a Panel, the Health Board has worked on the scope of health assessments. The Quality Improvement measures for health assessments has shown an improvement and an increase in the information included within health assessments. Clearer reporting of indicators such as dental health, vision, height and weight measures and general social/ physical and mental well-being is shared, with timely sign posting to specialist services as required.

3.3.1.6. The Health Board has also incorporated the children and young people's Health Passport information into the last Review Health Assessment before a child becomes an Adult. These reports are well received by the young people and have provided them with a wealth of Information about their own health and how to access and transition to adult services, if required, in the future.

3.3.2. GP and Dental Registration

3.3.2.1. Numbers of children in care, registered with a GP, remains high at **99%**. **86%** are registered with a dentist and are receiving regular follow-up and treatment. The remaining **14%** are mostly babies under the age of one, who do not yet require dental registration.

3.3.2.2. The Health Board has worked closely with Community Dental Services to maintain the Dental Care Pathway for Children in Care – maintaining access to specialist dental services until the age of 25, a service not available to the general public.

3.3.3. Mental Health

3.3.3.1. Looked-after children are more likely to experience mental health issues due to their circumstances and experience of trauma. Currently of those in care in Gwynedd, **18** are open to the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (CAMHS) with a further **13** waiting to be seen. Additionally, **107** children have emotional or behavioural issues, and receive services from Action for Children, or Children in Care CAMHS Consultation services.

3.3.3.2. CAMHS practitioners and the Children Looked After Health Team collaborate closely with carers to identify and provide appropriate support. Previous pilot work identified the need to offer a 'Carers Report' as a baseline when there are emotional issues that do not reach CAMHS specialist threshold for interventions. The intention is to identify problems earlier,

based on reports from carers, and to offer timely intervention when necessary, with more appointments being offered by the CAMHS Children Looked After Consultation service for advice, support and signposting.

- 3.3.3.3. There is continued close collaboration between the Local Authority 16+ team and the looked after children health team, particularly during the transition to adult health services.

3.3.4. Neurodevelopmental Services

- 3.3.4.1. There are currently 34 Children Looked After accessing Neurodevelopmental Services.
- 3.3.4.2. During 2023/2024 discussions began with Welsh Government to improve accessibility to Neurodevelopmental Services, with planned developments in North Wales for a whole systems approach aligned with the Nyth / Nest Framework and 'The Right Door' initiative to improve the child and family's journey and access to services, support and advice. This work is led by the Children's Regional Partnership Board, and the Local Authorities and Health Board work together collaboratively to develop and implement a service based on the need.
- 3.3.4.3. In addition, the Gwynedd Autism Team provides information, advice and assistance (IAA) to help autistic individuals and their families to make informed decisions and have access to appropriate services.

3.3.5. Training and Feedback

- 3.3.5.1. The Health Board aims to have all the Children Looked After Nurses be trauma aware through the Trauma Informed Schools training, to support and maintain the excellent work in supporting families, children and young people (see 3.5.1 for more on the trauma informed approach).
- 3.3.5.2. Children in Care Nurses continue to provide training to newly qualified school nurses and health visitors. Training has also been provided to acute hospital services to clarify the steps to take when a child in care is admitted to hospital. The Health Board continues to work closely with Cyngor Gwynedd and provide information sessions to social workers and foster carers to raise awareness of its role. The team has attended health information events across the area which were well attended and received very positive feedback from foster carers.

3.3.5.3. The Health Board has also been integral in developing electronic feedback questionnaires to ensure voices of Children Looked After and their carers are heard. They have opportunity to complete the questionnaires following each health assessment with the QR codes being shared widely. To date the results have been very positive, with comments from children, young people and their carers. Further details will be shared as this service user feedback service matures.

3.4. High-quality education

3.4.1. As the National pilot phase has concluded, the role of the Virtual Head of Looked-after Children has been included in the responsibilities of the Education Department's Safeguarding and Well-being Service. The Safeguarding and Well-being Leader, as well as the Looked-after Children Coordinator, ensure the best provision for looked-after children, looking at outcomes from the beginning of their time at school to post-16.

3.4.2. During the year, every Personal Education Plan has been evaluated using a bespoke Audit. Training and guidance are provided to schools who require further support to ensure that the plans' Targets and content are standard and reflect the voice of the pupil.

3.4.3. There are arrangements in place to receive regular information about the progress and attainment of Looked-after Children through an online system. The schools upload reports and plans to the system to ensure that every supporting agency has access to them. The performance results at the end of Key Stage 4 (year 10 and 11 pupils) are analysed against the pupils' individual targets annually, this allows us to evaluate the performance of individuals and identify good practices to share.

3.4.4. The Looked-after Children grant is part of the Annual Learning and Development Grant from the Welsh Government. The grant was successfully apportioned in its entirety this year. Further improvements have been implemented to the process of applying, evaluating and providing grants with every pupil who is a looked-after child being able to make an application of up to £700 to support their well-being and/or educational development.

3.4.5. A full exam series for GCSE qualifications was introduced in summer 2024. The results for Looked-after Children showed that:

- 19 of Gwynedd pupils were looked-after children in their last year of statutory education (year 11) and were pupils who had been in care for over 12 months.
- Every pupil has had the opportunity to sit a wide range of external exams such as GCSEs, BTEC, Entry Level and the Welsh Baccalaureate in accordance with their interests and ability.

- The majority have successfully progressed to suitable college courses or on to Year 12 in schools.
- Results vary from pupil to pupil, reflecting the unique abilities of each learner. While one child achieved excellent results with 10 A*, it is important to recognise that success should be evaluated based on individual circumstances and attainment.

3.5. Other matters of the Corporate Parenting Panel

3.5.1. **Trauma-Informed Council**

- 3.5.1.1. In September 2025, the Panel had a presentation on becoming a “Trauma-Informed Council”, looking at what would need to be done to ensure that we are aware of the impact that trauma could have on people. This would include building awareness, ensuring that the workforce understands how to acknowledge and address trauma in a supportive way.
- 3.5.1.2. Whilst becoming trauma-informed is important for all residents who receive services from the Council, the risk of trauma amongst the cohort of looked-after children is higher, which makes it essential to ensure that our methods and policies reflect this reality and provide the most effective and coherent support to them.
- 3.5.1.3. “Trauma-Informed” training has already been provided in schools, with over 1000 school staff having attended standard training. In addition, almost half of Gwynedd schools have trained 1 or more staff members to *a level 5 diploma in mental health and trauma-informed communities and schools*, which means a training course of a 6-month period.
- 3.5.1.4. During the year, members of the Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board have also undertaken “Trauma Informed” training. In the coming months, the Council will consider expanding the training to include other departments of staff who are in direct contact with the public, including Social Services, teams, Housing teams, the contact centre’s customer contact offices, and Siopau Gwynedd.
- 3.5.1.5. Becoming a trauma-informed Council requires significant commitment in terms of time and resources. More detailed consideration will be required of the financial cost and the time required to complete the accreditation to become a “Trauma-Informed Council”.

3.5.2. **The Welsh Government Parenting Charter**

- 3.5.2.1. The Welsh Government Parenting Charter is a promise to support and promote the role of corporate parenting amongst public sector workers. It is intended to formally present the Charter to the Cabinet in April 2025.
- 3.5.2.2. To strengthen the commitment to give a central place to the voice of the child and those who have experienced care, consideration will be given to inviting a foster parent or an individual with first-hand experience to join the Corporate Parent Panel. It is strongly believed that lived experiences are essential in policy-making and strategic decisions and the creation of services that are truly responsive and sensitive to the needs of those who have experienced care.

4. Priorities for 2025/26

4.1. During 2025/26 it is intended to:

- Scrutinise the length and scope of the waiting time for health assessments, looking at the main reasons or barriers for any delays;
- Conduct further “Trauma-Informed” training for Council staff and look at the steps that will need to be taken to become a “Trauma-Informed Council”.
- Invite a foster parent or an individual with first-hand experience to join the Corporate Parent Panel.
- Promote the benefits pack for Gwynedd foster carers further to attract more carers.