

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Cabinet Report

Date:	28 September 2021
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams
Liaison Officer:	Debbie Anne Williams Jones
Contact Number:	32489
Title of Item:	Performance Report: Cabinet Member for Education

1 DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1 Receive and note the information in the report

2 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1 To ensure effective performance management.

3 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 This report is to update you on what has been achieved in the area for which I am responsible as Cabinet Member for Education. This includes outlining the latest commitments in the Council Plan; the department's day-to-day work; and the latest in terms of savings and budget cuts.
- 3.2 We are implementing Gwynedd Council Plan 2018-2023, and here I am reporting on the progress to the end of August 2021. I will remind you that all issues have already been the subject of discussion and scrutiny by myself at a performance scrutiny meeting. I am satisfied with the Education Department's performance, and I will elaborate on the progress throughout the report.

4. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION OF RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

Council Plan's Project Performance

- 4.1 **21st Century Schools Programme**
- 4.1.1 The 21st Century Schools Programme plans and delivers innovative projects to adapt schools, or build new schools so that Gwynedd children and young people are educated in the best possible learning environment.
- 4.1.2 Despite the pandemic, Ysgol y Garnedd's new building opened its doors during October 2020 and became the new educational home for up to 420 learners in Bangor. The school's site also offers comprehensive nursery education and childcare provision in a purpose-built and well-resourced environment. A carefully designed space for specialist units to support children's development is also available on site. Excellent teamwork and clear communication were a feature of this

successful project which has kept within its allocated budget. The project has been nominated for three 2021 Excellent in Construction in Wales awards:

- *Digital Construction Award*
- *Integration and Collaboration Award*
- *Client of the Year Award*

<https://www.cewales.org.uk/cew-awards/awards-2021/>

We will arrange an official opening in conjunction with the school when it is safe to do so.

- 4.1.3 Ysgol y Faenol is also in the process of having a substantial extension. Although the timetable has lapsed as a result of the pandemic, the work is progressing well with significant parts of the extension now under construction. The school will be able to accommodate 315 learners as a result of the extension, which is an increase of 129 learners. The building is also designed to boost the local area with a new community centre being built as part of the development. It is anticipated that the work will be completed by the end of the Spring Term 2022.
- 4.1.4 To meet the growing demand for places at Ysgol Glancegin in Maesgeirchen we have secured funding to add another classroom to the building. The work is already complete, and the classroom is ready for the school's use at the start of this educational year.
- 4.1.5 Arrangements for the management of the Our Lady's School project have been agreed with the Diocese, which means that Gwynedd Council will be responsible for facilitating the project arrangements and submitting the business case to the Welsh Government. Initial feasibility work has been completed to identify the needs, and there is agreement to locate the new school on Ysgol Glanadda's site (which has now closed), and this location fits in with the community's aspirations, with conceptual plans drawn up for establishing Our Lady's School on that site.
- 4.1.6 Due to the existing building and learning environment's poor conditions at Ysgol Trefferthyr, we will build a new school in Criccieth to improve the learning environment and ensure the best resources for learners to thrive. The Cabinet has already supported the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150 learners, and relocate the school to an alternative site referred to as the A497 site in accordance with the statutory procedure. There have been particular challenges in finding a preferred site, but a planning application has now been submitted to relocate the school to the A497 site, with the hope that construction will commence on site towards the end of the year. I look forward to seeing the building work progress in the new year and to see the children taking advantage of the very best facilities from September 2023 onwards.
- 4.1.7 Due to variation in the quality of education and the experiences of learners across the post-16 education system in Arfon, the Cabinet permitted the Department to discuss the vision for post-16 education in Arfon with stakeholders. A series of virtual meetings were held with headteachers, governors, staff, parents, pupils and the wider community to present the new vision for post-16 education, as well as to gather views and ideas on how best to realise the vision. We have reported the initial messages of this engagement to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February this year.

4.1.8 One project within the C21 Schools Programme, Conditions and Suitability faces some obstacles and challenges that currently impair our ability to progress some aspects of the project with specific schools. This project's purpose is to improve the conditions of our current school buildings, by adjusting the buildings to ensure they are fit for purpose and make the best use of available space. The project's main obstacle is the impact of prices for building materials due to Covid and Brexit. This instability, and the demand for construction works due to the lockdown periods, have resulted in a lack of applications for tenders to work in our schools, or the prices of tenders received being significantly higher than the budget available to carry out the work. As a result, we have delayed implementing a number of adaptations that were due in our schools this summer, with the hope that the construction market will stabilise and the prices will decrease slightly over the coming months. There are plans to test the market with a few tenders over the coming months, but if the situation remains, it will be necessary to consider the next steps for the way forward.

4.2 **Wellbeing and Achievement Gap**

4.2.1 As a result of the pandemic and lockdowns, the Education Department and the Council have identified the wellbeing and achievement gap as one of the top priorities due to concern that some children and young people may be left behind in terms of their educational achievement, and some would need extra help to close that gap, as well as the need for wellbeing support.

4.2.2 In response to this concern, since September 2020 all schools in Gwynedd are implementing the Accelerated Learning Programme with funding from the Welsh Government to respond to the impact of the lockdown periods on the wellbeing and achievements of certain groups of learners aged 5-16. It's been a year since the programme was announced, and I'm keen to know what impact the programme and its funding has had on the wellbeing and achievements of our learners. As a result, over the coming months I will be keen to receive a report from the Department and the schools improvement service (GwE) on the impact of the programme and the difference it has made to some learners.

4.2.3 I am also aware that the ALN&I service have created a library of resources to promote the wellbeing and mental health of learners and their families which is available on the service's website, and that the capacity has been added to the counselling service by the Department to ensure support for learners following the lockdowns and the duration of the pandemic. Monthly individual hits on the website increased from 15,000 in January 2020 to 130,000 in April 2020.

4.2.4 Outside of school, two stages of children and young people's lives have also been identified as a priority in responding to the wellbeing and achievement gap namely 0-5-year olds, as well as young people post-16 years of age. The lockdown period has certainly highlighted the vulnerability of the early years sector, with inconsistencies across the county in the range and availability of services. It is difficult to structure our services here in Gwynedd because of the range of partners involved in the national provision and the strategic direction of the field. As a result, we intend to present a strategy for the field that will centre around the needs in Gwynedd, by consulting on its content with all key stakeholders over the coming months.

4.2.5 Also recognising that the 16-24 age group were disproportionately affected by the crisis more so than any other age group, we have produced an initial report that brings all the evidence together with the intention of reconvening the trans-departmental group that was already meeting in relation to the engagement framework, with the intention that this group takes charge of the programme's work.

4.3 **Transforming the ALN&I provision**

4.3.1 This project's purpose is to transform the additional learning and inclusion needs' service to ensure that children and young adults receive the most appropriate support they need so that they can fulfil their potential. Currently, the project focuses on preparing for the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act. This Act came into effect in September 2021, with some elements of the Act being delayed in the first year e.g. there will be a delay in the post-16 period as further discussions are to take place regarding funding this aspect.

4.3.2 Although the first lockdown happened shortly after the last report, the momentum of progress in preparation for the legislation has continued. Uncertainty surrounded the release of the Final Code and what changes would have been made to the Draft Code, but the Final Code was released in March 2021.

4.3.3 The Welsh Government's ALN Act Readiness Survey show the very strong progress on the Authority's preparations for the Legislation. The necessary statutory posts have been in place since January 2021 and are operating effectively. Collaboration with the Health Service has developed well through co-working with the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO). A number of stakeholder training events have been held to detail specific aspects of the Final Code. Work has taken place on the dispute resolution routes to ensure these are operational. In the early years sector the necessary systems for early identification, and establishing clear processes have been achieved, and preparatory work in the post-16 sector is underway. The development of a working link, curriculum and assessment between the mainstream and Special Schools has also developed and continues to develop.

4.3.4 Innovative work continues on the ongoing use and development of the Individual Development Plan's online system, with the system driving the whole process for schools, parents, external agencies and other education provision (e.g. early years).

4.3.5 Before the Covid-19 pandemic period hit us, the service (which operates on behalf of Gwynedd and Anglesey) commissioned a specialist in Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion to conduct a thorough and independent review of the service and present a report on its findings as well as recommendations for action. A substantial amount of strengths was reported in this field, also noting a few fields where further strengthening is required.

4.4 **Digital Education Strategy**

4.4.1 What we are trying to achieve through the digital education strategy is extremely ambitious and a sign of how we prioritise the education of our children here in Gwynedd. Simply put, this strategy, when fully implemented, will put a suitable device for enabling digital learning in the hands of every child from year 3 to year 11. Gwynedd will be one of the first authorities to do so in Wales and it is something we can be proud of.

4.4.2 Significant work has already been completed, including upgrading the schools' network in accordance with digital education standards, as well as transforming the web filtering method. Just over £1.3m has been invested in the network over the last two years. In addition, a significant number of devices have been shared in accordance with the strategy. Enough iPads have been shared to provide one in every four learners in the Foundation Phase, with enough Chromebooks been shared so that all learners from years 3 to 6 have a device each. Windows 10 devices are also being prepared for all learners in years 7, 10 and 11. All teachers in Gwynedd will receive a standard device through the strategy over the coming months in the hope that this will spark imagination and further stimulate the innovation and effectiveness of the digital learning aspects across the sectors.

4.4.3 This is what was said in Estyn's thematic report regarding the Authority's digital learning field:

Cameo: Digital learning as a legacy of the pandemic

The authority has accelerated its strategic plan to provide a laptop for all learners in years 5-11, with the first allocation being distributed in Spring for those in key stage 4. This strategy also includes the provision of a new laptop for all teachers to facilitate digital learning. As a result, schools are able to plan for a future where learners have greater access to IT, therefore ensuring that new digital skills learned during lock-in periods are embedded in future teaching and learning.

4.5 Meirionnydd collaboration

4.5.1 The purpose of this project is to look at ensuring that the quality of education is consistently good and sustainable for the future in Meirionnydd's secondary schools. Progress on the subject has been slow and has been affected by the obvious challenges of the pandemic and the busy nature of secondary schools towards the end of the summer term.

4.5.2 However, we have gathered the views of headteachers and representation from the governors of each secondary school on the potential challenges they face in providing quality secondary education in the area, such as the recruitment of teachers, middle managers and leaders. However, the opinion does not yet highlight obvious concerns, although some aspects need attention. Our intention now is to move on to gather the views of learners and parents on the quality of the experiences the young people have in schools, as well as the views of staff, and in order to ensure a fair comparison, we will ask staff, parents and the children of Arfon and Dwyfor schools the same questions too. Nevertheless, I believe that there are some things we can do immediately in response to a shortage of staff in some subjects, and the Department will be working with schools to seek a solution to this challenge over the coming months.

4.5.3 Additionally, the findings of the questionnaires that we have shared with Meirionnydd schools have identified specific needs to support learners' linguistic skills, and have enabled us to gain a full picture of the standard and linguistic needs of the education workforce in Meirionnydd. The Department will use the information to ensure that school support plans and Welsh Cluster Schemes respond to the identified needs

4.6 Encouraging the use of Welsh language amongst Children and Young People

- 4.6.1 Following the extended period of learning from home, along with the national concern expressed regarding the detrimental impact of Covid on Welsh language standards, we have designed a specific questionnaire to gain a better overview of learners' Welsh language skills in Gwynedd schools.
- 4.6.2 Questions were asked to enable consideration of how children's linguistic skills are impacted by extended periods away from school. We asked about any specific support / training needs that the workforce may need to support the development of the skills to achieve the expected progress, and asked about the involvement of pupils and the work set for them during the lockdowns, and any obvious obstacles.
- 4.6.3 All headteachers were interviewed, along with representatives from the six Learning and Experience Fields in each secondary school, as well as representatives from the Foundation Phase. The vast majority of respondents agreed that learner's language skills were affected as a result of the periods of home teaching. The data collected shows that the main concerns are learners' social use of Welsh, learners' willingness to speak Welsh, as well as the standard of their oral patterns. We have therefore identified oral skills as the main concern across the county. The next steps will be to share a report individually with the head teacher of each school which will include a possible plan to target the weaknesses identified and to ask them to refine and confirm the action plan in response to the final findings by 6 October 2021.
- 4.6.4 The Secondary Language Strategy Co-ordinator and the Language Charter Co-ordinator will arrange a follow-up meeting with every school to discuss the report and how to facilitate any support they might need, whether through the Authority's officers, the Language Co-ordinators or GwE. The intention is to re-submit the questionnaire at the end of the educational year to measure the impact of any measure.
- 4.6.5 The baseline data of the questionnaires distributed to the schools have also been used as a foundation for formulating priorities of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for Gwynedd. WESP is a 10-year statutory planning document for Welsh-medium and bilingual education adopted by Cabinet on 27 July 2021.

4.7 **The Department's day-to-day work**

- 4.7.1 Safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young adults in Gwynedd is a key priority for the Department and the Council, and of course is of increasing importance due to the pandemic and lockdown periods when the majority of our learners (apart from vulnerable learners and children of key workers) had to stay home. The Department has recently created a new Welsh language training pack for Designated Child Protection Persons in schools and education centres in conjunction with the Welsh Government Safeguarding in Education Group. The course was piloted in Gwynedd in 2020, and is now being delivered as part of a regular training programme. Gwynedd schools have also received information about the Welsh Child Protection Procedures that were introduced by the Welsh Government in April 2020. The new procedures have been introduced digitally in the form of an App, and key staff from the Department and Gwynedd schools have received basic procedural training provided by NSPCC Cymru through agreement with the North Wales Safeguarding Board.

- 4.7.2 Here is a cameo of the thematic report by Estyn on the Department's work in the Safeguarding field:

Cameo: Additional safeguarding training for schools

The local authority provided useful training in safeguarding and child protection issues during the lockdown period. Around 230 school staff undertook training on domestic violence issues as part of the newly established local authority partnership, Operation Encompass with North Wales Police. In addition, Inclusion Officers provided important guidance for leaders on e-safety for vulnerable pupils at risk of exploitation and training on how best to support young carers.

- 4.7.3 The purpose of the Catering and Cleaning service is to provide nutritious and healthy food for school pupils in Gwynedd and to maintain safety and cleanliness in the educational establishments in order to help the pupils reach their potential. This service has been instrumental and integral throughout the pandemic to ensure a regular daytime cleaning service so that there is a safe environment for pupils and staff in our schools, as well as ensuring the provision of school lunches. After the schools re-opened, the percentage of children receiving school lunches remained stable at around 50% between April-July 2021, which is roughly equivalent to the percentage of children receiving school lunches before the pandemic.

- 4.7.4 As a result of the pandemic, staff at the Language Centres had to adapt and transform the way they supported newcomers in acquiring the Welsh language. Indeed, Language Centre staff were the first to pilot live learning sessions during the Summer 2020 Term, in order to maintain the Welsh oral skills of newcomers, and the practice of blended learning, namely face-to-face and remote learning sessions remains a key part of the Language Centres' provision with the schools. To enhance this new way of supporting newcomers, on 6 July 2021, the Cabinet approved a new vision for a modern immersion education system in Gwynedd that centres around the learner in supporting them and the county's newcomers in acquiring the Welsh language. This new vision also includes a £1.1million capital investment from the Welsh Government to establish new immersion education sites in Bangor and Tywyn, as well as improving the facilities at the site in Eifionydd, Porthmadog. Conceptual work for the designs of the new immersion education sites in the three areas is currently in the process of being approved. The hope is that the new-look immersion education system will come into effect on 1 September 2022.

Here is a cameo from the thematic report by Estyn on the Department's work in the Welsh field:

Cameo: Supporting learners who are new to the Welsh language

One example of the conformity of the local authority and GwE is their approach to supporting schools in developing pupils' Welsh language skills. Some coastal areas of Gwynedd experienced a significant influx of non-Welsh speakers during the lockdown period. The challenge of providing for their linguistic needs increased with the reopening of schools in September by the difficulties of maintaining Welsh language units in their traditional form. To counter this, in order to assist primary schools, the local authority arranged for the specialist teachers to provide a cluster-based outreach service, while the cluster improvement support officer worked with the schools to create and adapt Welsh schemes of work.

- 4.7.5 The Schools Business Centre was established in September 2019 to offer services to the schools in the county. The centre offers a number of services including financial management, appointment administrations, arranging supply teachers, and ensuring that the SIMS system is up to date. The centre has identified three priorities for the year, and is currently on target to deliver in accordance with the Business Plan. It is very positive that all primary schools in Gwynedd are buying into the service, and see the value in ensuring that processes are followed correctly. The centre is continually evolving to be able to offer more services to schools in the future.

It must be acknowledged that this report is merely a summary of all the Department's and school's work over the last few months, and I wish to acknowledge and note my appreciation to the heroic work undertaken by both the Department and schools in response to the pandemic with the focus consistently remaining on our children's education alongside the safeguarding, health and wellbeing of all our learners and staff.

In this context, I also refer to Estyn's thematic report on Gwynedd (January 2021), a commission to Estyn by the Welsh Government to undertake a review of the work of local authorities to support their school-based learning communities and pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales from March to October 2020, together with a national overview report of the progress Gwynedd has made in relation to the recommendations in the general thematic report, and these reports are quoted above. In both reports, the Department's response to the pandemic and its support for schools, learners and staff at an unprecedented time was recognised.

5. FINANCIAL SITUATION / SAVINGS

- 5.1 The Department had an underspend of £100k at the end of the 2020/21 financial year. A detailed review of the Departments 2021/22 financial situation is held as part of the revenue review for the whole Council at the end of August, and this will be reported to Cabinet on 12 October 2021. Following the initial review, it is foreseen that the Department will have underspend by the end of the year, which is a combination of underspend in a number of budget headings which are reduced by overspend in headings such as transport and catering and cleaning schools.

The Education Department has £65k worth of savings for 2021/22 that have already been realised.

6. STATUTORY OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance:

I note in part 4 of the report that there are significant developments with financial implications in the field of Education, including the 21st Century Schools Programme

capital investment mentioned in section 4.1 of the report. The report highlights a number of ways in which the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Department's performance measures and this, along with Brexit, has led to a delay in some schemes, such as the Condition and Suitability Scheme identified in 4.1.8.

I can confirm that the Council has received an Accelerated Learning Program grant in 2020/21 and 2021/22 for the purposes outlined in 4.2.1 and 4.2.2

The report presents a fair picture of the Education Department's situation in terms of their savings programme, with all the savings schemes already realised.