

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	Gwynedd Inclusion Provision
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Dewi Jones, Cabinet Member for Education
Relevant officer:	Ffion Edwards Ellis Assistant Head of Department - Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion
Date of meeting:	10.4.25

1. Decision sought

Ensuring the best support and provision for children with behavioural needs is one of the Education Department's priorities. Children's behaviour is increasingly challenging and as a result, the number of learners who require support in school and outside school, is increasing. Fixed and permanent exclusions are on the increase, and are causing genuine concern to the Education Department, Headteachers and the Gwynedd schools' community (see Appendix 4 and 8). The need to prioritise this area was also noted as a recommendation by Estyn (see Appendix 1) and within an External Advisory report commissioned following receiving the Estyn report (Appendix 2).

2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision

The proposed changes require remodelling the service in order to improve on what is being provided currently. Financial investment is required in order to implement the proposed changes. The Department intends to fund the cost of establishing the changes in 2025/26 from current budgets. A process of reorganisation will be carried out during 2025/26, and if there continues to be a funding gap following this process, the Cabinet will need to be prepared for a probable bid for recurring funding from 2026/27.

The following decisions are sought:

1. Adopting the option of creating a Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit Model (multi site)
2. That the Cabinet accept the financial plan outlined.
3. That the Cabinet deputise the implementation timetable and implementation of the plan to the Head of Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member.

3. Introduction and Rationale

What has led us to this point?

Over the years, we have reduced the inclusion service. Back in 2012, we adopted an ambitious inclusion strategy which led to the closure of two referral units; one in Bangor and the other in Dolgellau, and the closure of Coed Menai special school.

Since then, we have allocated a sum of inclusion funding (£1.2M) to secondary schools in the form of an inclusion grant, with the intention of reducing exclusions and increasing attendance.

We have tried different models to provide for the children who cannot be included in schools with mixed results and limited impact, without the required breadth of provision. More recently, we tried a hubs model where two schools provide, instead of a central unit. Again, this was not an effective model.

All provisions have failed to provide the best experiences for our excluded learners, and this was highlighted by the Authority's Estyn inspection back in the summer of 2023, and in an evaluation carried out by external experts, which was commissioned by the Education Department.

What has already been done about this?

A report was submitted to the Leadership Team back in January 2025 and March 2025, highlighting the possible options. The report elaborated further on the favoured option.

The new plan will bring additional costs to the Department in the short-term, however, we intend to restructure and consider any savings in other areas within the ALN and Inclusion Service in order to fund the additional investment at the end of the first year. As noted in Part 2, if there continue to be gaps in funding at this point, the Cabinet will need to prepare for a probable a bid for recurring funding from 2026/27 onward.

3.1 Background / Introduction

Following the Estyn Report (Appendix 1) and Mrs Caroline Rees's External Review (appendix 2), a multi-agency Project Board was established, including Headteachers, in order to plan for this field. The board considered the reports of Estyn and the external Evaluation, as well as the impact of COVID on our children and young people. The need in this area has intensified, and exclusions have increased (Appendix 8).

It is worth noting that the Gwynedd EOTAS rate is low compared with other counties (EOTAS being the number of children who do not receive their education in a school setting), however, this picture is complicated at a national level, due to the differences in provisions.

Members of the Board visited other counties in order to see various practices, and discuss what works, and what does not work, within various inclusion provisions. There was also

collaboration with other services to map the multi-agency support available to these learners and their families.

As a result of this work, we have planned options for changing the provision, and these were submitted at the Leadership Team's meeting in January 2025 and March 2025. We have started consultation with Headteachers regarding our Strategy for Inclusion, which will give a new focus on reducing Exclusions, with Headteachers and other stakeholders being fully involved.

Appendix 5 provides information about the existing model, and the models we considered.

Equality Act 2010

The Council is subject to public sector duties under the Equalities Act 2010 (including specific Welsh public sector duties). Pursuant to these legal duties Councils must in making decisions have due regard to the need to (1) eliminate unlawful discrimination, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations on the basis of protected characteristics and having due regard to the socio economic duty under Section 1 of the Act. An equalities impact assessment has been prepared and is appended at Appendix 1. The Cabinet will need to have regard to its findings when coming to a decision. The assessment does not identify any particular negative impacts stemming from the decision.

Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

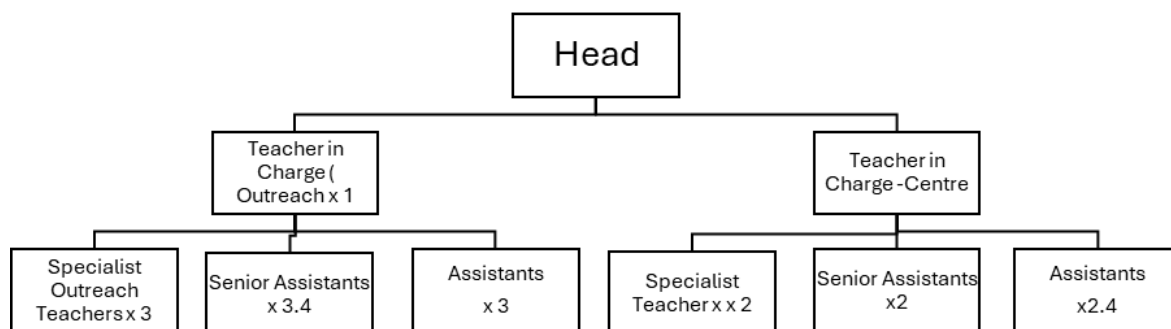
The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act places a 'well-being duty' on public bodies aimed at achieving 7 national well-being goals for Wales - a Wales that is prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, has cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and is globally responsible. The recommendations have been prepared having regard to these requirements and in accordance with the 5 ways of working.

What is the favoured option?

The favoured option is a Portfolio Registered Pupil Referral Unit (multi-location). This means that the provision will be similar to a small school on more than one site, for children with behaviour problems. We are of the opinion that this is a model that will strengthen accountability, governance resilience and will increase capacity.

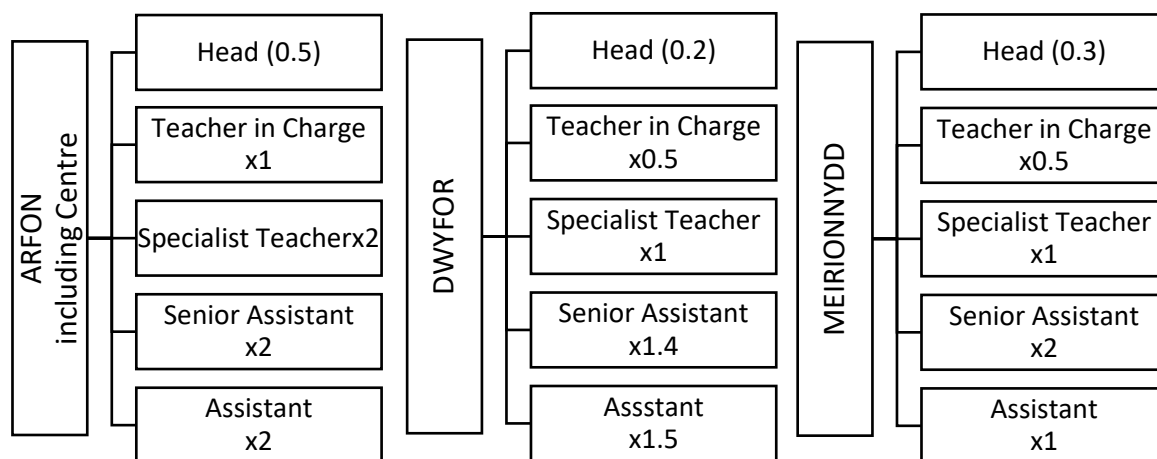
The option will increase the number of jobs in the structure, including the appointment of a leader and more teachers. In addition to creating a specialist provision, the structure would increase the modelling and training outreach for schools.

There will be an impact on some posts within the current model, where a consultation will be needed with existing staff, and job descriptions modified. The Staffing Structure of the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit will be as follows.



The staff would be distributed in the following way (but with flexibility to move staff according to needs of learners). The rationale behind this structure is:

- The need to strengthen the outreach model
- And to secure adequate staffing for the three centres to run at the same time.



The head, the teachers and assistants will all be able to support children within the provision or within mainstream schools. They will be operational, i.e., work with children and young people, and not advise others about what should be done. This is what the schools have asked for.

There will be a need to strengthen multi-agency collaboration elements to maintain the learners, in terms of their entire personal and family needs. It is critical that we work as a part of a team as there is no expectation for this service alone to have all the answers.

Where will the provision be located?

We have invested capital ALN grant money to upgrade the former Ysgol Felinwnda building; the work will be completed by September 2025. This will be a home for the service and will add to the provision in Penygroes for Arfon/Dwyfor.

Work has commenced on identifying a suitable location to maintain a satellite site for Meirionnydd; a location that will work for the majority. Where transport costs are substantial, we will look at temporary locations that will address the needs and make better use of funding. As can be seen in Appendix 8, the need for this type of provision is smaller compared to Arfon/Dwyfor, therefore the provision will be smaller in size.

What would the difference be for the learners within the provision?

The learners attending provision will need an alternative to mainstream classroom provision. The focus will be on more practical activities, therapeutic input, and alternative curriculum and qualifications, with a view to improving their pathway to work, healthy relationships, and community engagement.

What does this mean for the secondary inclusion grant?

As a key part of the plan, there will be a need to formalise the monitoring around Secondary Schools' use of the £1.2 million investment, which has been allocated to create inclusion provision within the schools. At present, this amount is not formally monitored and this must change.

Who will be responsible for the quality of the children's experiences within this provision?

The role of the Head of the Portfolio will be to manage the provision, the quality of the provision, and prepare for scrutiny, e.g., Performance Challenge, Estyn Inspections. The provision would be governed by a 'Management Committee' which is similar to a school's governing body.

Positive Features:

- Strengthen the impact of outreach input - modelling, training, consultation.
- Provide in specific suitable locations with a high-quality learning environment from a qualified and skilled workforce.
- Robust staffing and Governance structure (e.g., Management Committee, Estyn Inspection).
- Specialist central provision for learners with high-level needs.
- Also being able to prepare for other situations, e.g., circumstances where a learner is between schools following the exclusion, to assist with the transfer.
- Specialist provision for Yr 10 and 11, i.e., the most challenging years.

Negative Features:

- A possibility that Transport Costs could increase.
- Successful Schools Inclusion Strategy essential to be able to provide - e.g., monitoring the use of inclusion funding at the schools is an essential part.
- Need for extra funding during the establishment period (see below) and possibly in the long term.

What will be the cost of the favoured model?

A revenue cost of £189,554 will be *additional* to the current expenditure.

In addition, £157,000 in ALN grant funding is being used within the current model. Should the grant be terminated, the future of this service would have to be considered.

We will look at savings in other areas within ALN&I in the future, in order to fund any gap. We will need time to realise these savings; we ask for this to be considered. If a funding gap continues to be present following the restructuring process, there is a risk that the Cabinet will need to prepare for a bid for recurrent funding from 2026/27 onward.

Does this provide the capacity that is genuinely needed?

A discussion was held regarding the capacity of the provision at the last Leadership Team. The need levels we experience in this area are increasing, so there is also a need to be planning for the future.

We will be progressing with our Inclusion Strategy, to describes how the broader graduated response would also be strengthened, to reduce the need for a placement at the Pupil Referral Unit, with Units' staff offering to model, train and provide outreach.

We believe that the model provides sufficient places outside of school. Most learners should be supported within their own mainstream school, with the central provision for a small number of learners requiring provision outside of the mainstream.

3.2 Rationale and justification for recommending the decision

The information presented within this report describes the current situation. We need to work in a different way, and the Project Board present the favoured model following a period of research and modelling to look at improving the offer for Gwynedd learners with significant needs in the areas of social skills, emotional and behavioural skills.

4. Next Steps and Timetable

Consultation with staff and Unions	April – May 2025
Advertise for Head of Portfolio	April – May 2025
Identify location for Meirion/Dwyfor Satellite	March to July 2025

Consulation with Stakeholders	July 2025
Registration of Portffolio Pupil Referral Unit and Establishment of Management Committee	July – Sept 2025
Provision in place	September 2025

5. Observations of the Statutory Officers

5.1 Chief Finance Officer

Finance officers have cooperated with the service with the financial figures presented in the report, and I can confirm their accuracy. We will continue to assist the department over the next year to identify opportunities to fund the cost increases so that any permanent bid commitment for the 2026/27 onwards budget can be avoided or reduced.

5.2 Monitoring Officer

The importance of this issue is underlined in the report. I am satisfied with the propriety of the decision sought

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Cyngor Gwynedd Estyn Report
- Appendix 2: External Evaluation (Author: Mrs Caroline Rees)
- Appendix 3: ALN&I Principles Document
- Appendix 4: Need Data for Gwynedd, 2019 and 2024 compared
- Appendix 5: Current Staffing Models and Options
- Appendix 6: EOTAS Data (Education other than at School) for Gwynedd
- Appendix 7: Impact Assessment
- Appendix 8: Exclusion Data by area