

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	19th June 2025
TITLE	Education Department Performance Report
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	To ensure effective performance management
AUTHOR	Gwern ap Rhisiart – Head of Education
CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Dewi Jones

1. Why does it need to be scrutinised?

So that Committee Members can be satisfied that I, the Cabinet Member for Education, have a grasp on performance matters within the Department.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

The purpose of this report is to present the Education Department's performance report to the attention of Cyngor Gwynedd's Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in order to ensure effective performance management.

3. Background / Context

3.1 Background / Introduction

The purpose of 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 with the pledges in the Council Plan and the Department's performance measures.

We are acting on the Council Plan 2023-28, and herein I report on the progress to the end of March 2025, recognising that it remains early days in the context of some of the pledges that are new in the document since April 2024. Nevertheless, all matters have been the subject of discussion and have been challenged by myself at a performance challenge meeting, and I am satisfied with the performance of the Department.

3.2 Rationale and justification

3.2.1 Performance of Pledges in Council Plan Projects

Updates on all the Education Department's Council Plan projects can be found in Appendix 1; however, I would like to draw your attention to the following projects:

3.2.2 Transforming education for children in their early years

The admissions policy for Gwynedd schools will change from September 2025 as children attending the Nursery class in Gwynedd schools will be expected to be fully toilet-trained before they start. We continue to share resources with parents and share information through social media.

The expansion of childcare provision for two-year-olds to new areas is underway, with 21 childcare settings providing a service for two-year-olds through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. The team of Advisory Teachers and the Childcare Officers are supporting the new settings through visits, support and start-up grants to invest in bespoke resources to ensure they can raise standards to meet Flying Start requirements.

3.2.3 Modernising buildings and the learning environment

It is pleasing to be able to declare that the new building and campus for Ysgol Treferthyr in Cricieth opened its doors to learners at the start of September 2024. This follows years of work, and an investment of over £8m to secure the highest quality learning environment and resources for up to 150 learners in the area. In addition, there is childcare provision on the site, as well as an ABC Unit.

There are also plans to build a new school for Our Lady's School on the site of Ysgol Glanadda (now closed) in Bangor. The former Ysgol Glanadda building has been demolished to allow construction work to begin for the new Our Lady's School. Following the demolition, development and construction work has begun and the frame for the new school is already in place.

There are also plans to make significant improvements to Ysgol Hiracl, with the first phase of the construction work having commenced on the site of the Bangor Byw'n lach car park in March 2025, in order to upgrade the area and create parking spaces for Ysgol Hiracl staff so that the school is a car-free site.

We have also committed to making significant improvements to Ysgol Tryfan in Bangor and have appointed an architect for the project who is working with the Department and Ysgol

Tryfan to try and deliver the vision for this investment. An Outline Strategic Case has been drawn up and submitted to the Welsh Government in December 2024. This is the first stage of a 3-stage business case to be submitted to the Welsh Government. The Design Team has been appointed, but there is no agreement on a design yet, as there is further work to be done on several aspects.

3.2.4 Promote the well-being of children and young people and reduce the cost of sending children to school

Following the receipt of responses to a questionnaire in 2024 from a large number of parents, learners, staff and school headteachers, the financial challenges of sending children to school have been clearly highlighted. Every day, families face the costs of school uniform, school trips and the costs of dinner/break (Secondary schools) and the findings of the questionnaires highlight this.

The individual Schools have received a detailed breakdown of the findings, and a working group has met to establish a Cost Friendly School Charter. This Charter will include several measures for schools to follow to be recognised as a 'Cost Friendly' School.

As part of the evaluation of individual schools' arrangements, a Cost Friendly School Audit will be formed by the working group and by completing the Audit the schools will be able to identify actions that will enable them to meet the requirements of the charter.

3.2.5 Modernising and extending the immersion provision for teaching Welsh to children

On 6 July 2021, the Cabinet approved a new vision for a modern Immersion Education System in Gwynedd. This new vision also includes a capital investment of £1.1 million from the Welsh Government for the purpose of establishing new immersion education sites in Bangor and Tywyn, as well as improving existing facilities at the Eifionydd site in Porthmadog. The work has already been completed on the Eifionydd and Bangor sites, and the new Language Immersion Unit at the Tywyn Secondary School site has now been completed and has opened its doors to newcomers to the area since January 2025.

After receiving confirmation of the success of the Business Case for the second phase of capital funding worth £1.1m, we will be investing in the 3 primary immersion education sites located in Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Dolgellau. The construction work in Pwllheli has already been completed and construction in Caernarfon and Dolgellau is on track to be completed in the summer term.

The Welsh Government's Late Immersion revenue grant has also enabled us to modernise the immersion provision in our centres. This differential scheme that bridges the Primary and Secondary has been operational in all Immersion Units from January 2025 onwards. To

accompany the scheme, the digital innovation project known as Aberwla has also been completed. This is a valuable educational resource to normalise the Welsh language on the virtual platform.

3.2.6 Review of the Gwynedd Education Language Policy

I am delighted that we have appointed Meirion Prys Jones as a freelance consultant to work with the Department to review the Education Language Policy. The engagement meetings with key stakeholders took place during the autumn term of 2024 and we presented the findings to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February 2025. By now, we have also submitted a Draft Education Language Policy to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in April 2025, with a view to submitting it for the Cabinet's consideration shortly.

4. The Department's Performance

The Department's Services are performing well, and I confirm that I am satisfied with their current performance. The following information does not refer to all Services in the Department, see below some of the highlights. For full details on performance against the Department's measures, see Appendix 2.

Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion

The Additional Learning Needs Service is pleased to confirm that the waiting time for the Counselling Service has continued to fall, despite the challenges faced by so many young people these days, from 51 days to 10 days. There has been an increase in the number of Primary learners being referred, and we are trying to respond to this demand by adjusting counselling time for the Primary sector. This might possibly affect the waiting time in the future. We have also extended the type of provision being offered. We continue to look at the capacity of our special schools and centres. To this end, the work of adapting some classrooms in Ysgol Pendalar to ensure there is sufficient capacity for those learners who require admission to a special school in Arfon has been completed.

Attendance remains a concern for us and the levels have not returned to what they were before the pandemic. The Authority's attendance percentage is increasing, with the average for the academic year to date being 91.1% (the Welsh rate was 91% in March 2025). The trend of the last three years has been going upwards, but we recognise that work is still ongoing to raise attendance to pre-pandemic levels.

Over the past few months, work has been done with the Education Data Unit to develop a live system that identifies trends with absences, reports on the attendance of specific groups and identifies pupils of concern to enable us to intervene sooner.

We are continuing with the targeting work with specific groups of pupils which is proving successful and contributing to the increase in attendance levels in the County.

Encouraging behavioural change to attendance and raising levels remains a priority for the Service. Over the coming months, there will be a campaign to encourage change in behaviour towards attendance, as well as continuing targeting work.

Another area that has received attention over the past year is the increase in fixed and permanent exclusions as a result of challenging behaviours within our schools. Following an in-depth review of the Inclusion Service, work is underway to strengthen the provision which includes moving ahead to develop a Pupil Referral Unit, working with schools on a new Inclusion Strategy and remodelling the outreach provision which is the support available to schools. I am pleased to report that this work is on track to be operational from September 2025 onwards and I look forward to reporting on the progress in my next report.

Catering

Since 1 September 2023, I am very proud that every primary-age learner from Reception to Year 6 in Gwynedd can receive free school meals, a year ahead of the national timetable.

In March 2025, on average, 4,879 free school meals were provided on any given day. I am extremely proud of this achievement, and I am also eager for the Department to further promote the offer further amongst children and families to encourage more families to take up the offer.

The Youth Service

Cyngor Gwynedd's Youth Service is structured in three key streams - Community Youth Work, Youth Support Work aged 11-16, and Youth Support Work aged 16-25, to respond effectively to the needs of young people throughout the county. The provision, which is offered, includes community work with local partners, together with support in Secondary schools and the community to promote personal and emotional well-being. The Service also provides support to young people who are out of education, training or work including advice on employability, health and housing issues. Gwynedd Youth Service's 'Llais Ni' project is an initiative that has been developed in 2024-25 which gives young people voices and an opportunity to tackle the themes that are important to them. Through creative activities, discussion sessions and practical workshops, the project promotes using their voice, confidence and participation among the County's young people.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, there were 24,618 participations from young people across the projects, with 1,125 individuals completing accreditations, and over 200 completing Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The community provision has evolved over the last 12 months, where we have allocated over £60,000 of funding to third sector organisations to develop community provision, co-finance the Urdd Youth Worker to work across the County, work together with 10 parish councils to provide community clubs and lead on projects in 48 locations across Gwynedd. The 16-25 year old provision has seen an increase in the need for the Service, with over 230 young people receiving support in 2024-25, with

38 individuals progressing to education with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, 26 directed to employability programs and 12 starting new jobs.

5. Consultation

The report has been created based on the information and content of the latest challenging and supporting performance meeting of the Education Department, with the Chief Executive, Head of Department, Service Managers and myself attending this meeting.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Report on Council Plan projects 2024-25

Appendix 2: Education Department Performance Measures