

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	11 December 2025
TITLE	Schools Strategy 2026-2036, presentation of draft document
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	To scrutinise the draft Schools Strategy 2026-2036
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CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Dewi Jones

1. Why it needs scrutiny

1.1 In accordance with the request of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, we are submitting a draft Schools Strategy 2026-2036. The guidance of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee will enable us to refine the Strategy, ensure that the voice of stakeholders is fully reflected, and lay the necessary foundation for successful implementation.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

2.1 The forward scrutiny of the Strategy will allow the Committee to consider the content of the Schools Strategy and offer observations. An initial version of the Equality Impact Assessment has also be presented.

2.2 Observations and feedback are sought from the Scrutiny Committee on the following:

- The Strategy's Vision (p. 6).
- The eight values we have used to shape the future education system in Gwynedd (pp. 7-15).
- Principles and considerations for all sectors to realise our vision (pp. 33-38).
- The procedure for the annual review of the Gwynedd schools estate (pp. 39-41).

3. Summary of the Key Matters

3.1 The strategy plays a prominent part in the Council Plan which sets a clear direction for us as an authority until 2028 and ensures that we achieve the Council's ambition. Tomorrow's Gwynedd highlights how we will ensure the best possible start for our children and young people.

3.2 The vision of the Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026-2036 is ambitious but also solid in its foundations. Its main intention is to ensure a fair, inclusive and sustainable education regime that enables all learners to reach their full potential.

3.3 While this vision is ambitious, it can be considered realistic, as it is based on existing national and local policies such as Curriculum for Wales, Cymraeg 2050, and the Additional Learning Needs Act (2018). The Strategy reflects the direction of Welsh education policy, and therefore builds on solid foundations rather than starting over.

3.4 In addition, the Strategy sets practical and measurable priorities, including:

- investing in school infrastructure and buildings through the Sustainable Learning Communities Programme
- strengthening leadership and responding to the challenge of recruiting and retaining headteachers and teachers
- developing a skilled bilingual workforce, responding to the challenges of recruiting Welsh-speaking teachers in specialist subjects
- ensuring financial equity and support for small rural schools through schemes such as the Protection Scheme
- prioritising well-being and safeguarding, ensuring safe, inclusive and eco-friendly learning environments.

This shows that the Strategy contains realistic mechanisms to achieve its goals over time.

4. Background/Context

4.1 The original Strategic Programme Strategy *"Towards 2025": Future of Education and Training for Children and Young People in Gwynedd* was published in 2010 to set a direction for the field of education and training in Gwynedd up to 2025. The new draft Schools Strategy before us builds on the foundations of this Strategic Programme for the next decade up to 2036.

4.2 The Education Department has produced the Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026-2036 to set a clear direction for the schools' provision over the next decade. There have been far-reaching changes in education in Wales over recent years, and the new Strategy responds to national changes such as the Curriculum for Wales and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) along with increasing expectations on schools, and the need to modernise buildings and resources.

4.3 Local considerations and drivers also influence the education system, the vision and objectives of the Strategy. We need to ensure that we maintain and support what is good and unique about the education system in Gwynedd, as well as identify opportunities to respond to some of the challenges that the system is likely to face now, and in the future, such as:

- Ensuring the viability and resilience of our schools when there is a reduction in the number of learners as a result of low birth rates.
- Strengthening leadership on all levels and responding to the challenge of recruiting teachers and assistants in our schools.
- Responding to the challenge of maintaining the education system in an unprecedented period of cuts to Local Authority budgets.

- Maintaining and strengthening our education and training provision to enable children and young people in Gwynedd to reach their full potential and to develop the qualifications and skills that enable them to live and thrive.
- Maintaining and strengthening the Welsh language in all aspects of school life in the wake of the 2021 Census results.
- Ensuring excellent well-being support services for children and young people in Gwynedd to help them to overcome barriers and reach their full potential.
- Improving our school estate to ensure the best possible learning environment for our children and young people when we have so many buildings to maintain, and an expectation for the school estate to be zero carbon over the next period.

4.4 The title of the document has been changed from Education Strategy to Schools Strategy to recognise that this document does not cover post-16 or early years provision. However, it does include the Primary, Secondary and Special sectors, which are the core of the school network in Gwynedd.

In producing it, the Education Department has considered a wide range of relevant policies and factors, such as:

- Nationally: Cymraeg 2050, Curriculum for Wales, the ALN and Tribunal Act 2018 and the Code 2021, The Equality Act 2010, and the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.
- Locally: The Council's Plan 2023-2028, the Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032, the Council's commitment to Net Zero Carbon, and the Medium-term Financial Plan.

4.5 The Vision for Education in Gwynedd.

Our vision is to ensure a fair and inclusive education system that meets the needs of all learners in the County, and gives them the opportunity to reach their full potential. Family background, location, or personal circumstances should not be an obstacle on life's path or to choosing opportunities.

We aim for a system that:

- nurtures and promotes well-being,
- provides world-class education and training,
- broadens horizons and develops skills relevant to the local, regional, national and global economy,
- creates firm paths to ensure prosperity for every child and young person in Gwynedd.

4.6 The Strategy clearly recognises that the current system contains several weaknesses that can have an adverse impact on the quality of education. These include significant variances between schools in terms of resources and curricular opportunities, recruitment challenges leading to a lack of consistency in teaching, and the vulnerability of smaller schools in relation to leadership and sustainability. These factors can create an inconsistent experience for learners and reduce their chances of reaching their potential.

To respond to these challenges in a positive way, the Strategy sets out a series of clear actions to improve the quality of education and ensure consistency across the county:

1. Strengthening school leadership

By promoting flexible leadership models, sharing expertise and building capacity among current and incoming leaders, the Strategy seeks to create a more resilient system that is less susceptible to disruption.

2. Ensuring a sustainable and effective schools network.

The Strategy considers how the schools network can be organised so that each can offer a broad curriculum, appropriate support and quality provision, minimising the inconsistencies seen in the current system.

3. Developing a skilled and bilingual workforce.

By investing in training, promoting staff retention and attracting new teachers, the Strategy addresses the recruitment challenges that weaken the quality of teaching in some settings.

4. Investing in modern learning environments

The Strategy prioritises buildings and infrastructure that support contemporary education, reducing variances in standards between settings and improving learner experiences.

5. Emphasis on well-being, behaviour and inclusion

By developing a whole-school approach that supports emotional health, positive behaviour management and inclusion, the Strategy builds the foundations that enable learners to thrive.

6. More cohesive support for schools

New support arrangements offer a more rapid and uniform response to challenges, ensuring that effective interventions take place before problems worsen.

As a whole, the Strategy responds to the weaknesses of the current system by creating a fairer, more sustainable and more robust system that enables all learners to benefit from the highest quality of education.

5. Consultation

5.1 In drawing up the Strategy, the opportunity was taken to engage with stakeholders in order to receive input and reflect the perspective and views of those who will be using and implementing the Strategy.

5.2 Further engagement sessions have been arranged with Headteachers of Secondary, Primary and Special Schools, as well as meetings with the County Young People's

Forum and the Gwynedd Governors' Forum during December 2025. The Equality Impact Assessment will be updated following these sessions.

6. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 6.1** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 seeks to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act places a well-being duty on public bodies which is aimed at delivering the seven well-being goals by following the five ways of working.
- 6.2** The Act places a welfare duty on the Council to carry out sustainable development work by working in conjunction with the 'sustainable development principle'. This means that the impact on people in the future needs to be considered when making decisions.
- 6.3** In Appendix 2, the Equality Impact Assessment can be seen, which sets out exactly how the Strategy meets the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act by implementing the five ways of working, and responds to the 7 national well-being goals.

7. Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-economic Duty

- 7.1** An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in draft form to accompany the Schools Strategy, and a final copy will be submitted when the Strategy is presented to the Cabinet.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1** The Schools Strategy 2026-36 is scheduled to be presented to the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet on 10 February 2026.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Schools Strategy 2026-2036

Appendix 2 – Draft Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – Scrutiny Committee Questions – Question and Answer