

CYNGOR GWYNEDD

# SCHOOLS STRATEGY

2026 – 2036



# INTRODUCTION

**Giving our children and young people the best possible start** is at the root of the Council Plan. Our vision is to create an education system in Gwynedd that addresses the needs of every learner and offers the best opportunities for everyone to reach their full potential.

The purpose of this strategy is to set our ambition for education in Gwynedd over the next decade. Every child has a unique opportunity to have an education, and it is our duty to create a system that enables our children and young people to follow their dreams, develop into individuals who are full of confidence, and achieve anything that they wish.

Over the last few years, we have seen important changes in our education arrangements – such as establishing lifelong schools and developing primary provision. As the numbers of pupils change, there are new opportunities to re-design the education system in a way that is robust, sustainable and prepares them well for the future.

Small schools and schools of all sizes offer valuable experiences, but with the changes in the curriculum, increasing expectations on headteachers and teachers, and the need to manage resources wisely, it is essential to set a clear direction that ensures stability and long-term success. By looking forward with a concrete plan, we can ensure that every school is part of a strong and inclusive education network.

We acknowledge the importance of schools for our rural communities and their key role when nurturing and maintaining the Welsh language. This is why it is important that we work together – parents, staff, learners and communities – to create a future that safeguards these elements and makes them stronger than ever.

This strategy forms the foundation for every other aspect of our education work – from Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion to Digital Learning and promoting the Welsh language. Through this foundation, we will build a sustainable education system that offers learning experiences of the highest quality to all our children and young people.

## Gwern

# What impacts the design of our strategy?

No strategy can stand on its own – it has to comply with a range of national, corporate and educational objectives. Behind these objectives, there are many key local and national policies and documents such as the following;

## National

- Cymraeg 2050
- Curriculum for Wales
- Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) 2018
- Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021
- Equality Act 2010
- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

## Local

- Council Plan 2023-2028
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032
- Net Zero Carbon/Climate Emergency
- Medium Term Financial Plan



# How does this strategy play a part in the Council Plan?

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.

It is noted in the Council Plan that our ambition is to ensure that every pupil taught in Gwynedd:

Is treated equally and fairly, encouraged to treat others equally and fairly, and assurance that their well-being and happiness is a priority for us.

Has an education of the best possible standard including access to a broad range of academic and vocational subjects in order to fulfil the requirements of the new 'Curriculum for Wales'.

Has access to Welsh-medium education throughout their time in education.

Is educated in buildings that are in a good state of repair, and to the best of our ability are safe and fit for purpose.

Has the opportunity to develop into rounded, happy and confident people in the world.

Has tailored support from professional services to meet their additional learning needs.

Has the opportunity for as many pupils as possible to have a nutritious meal at school, free of charge.

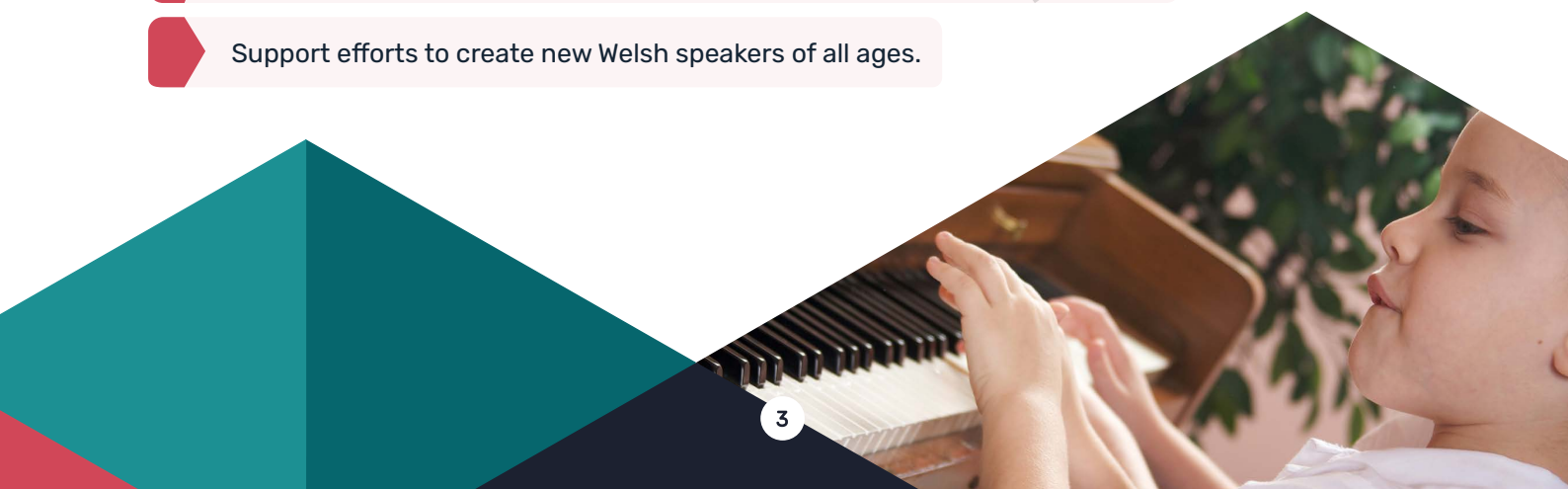
Has access to equipment and technology that promote modern and effective learning.

Has the assurance that suitable facilities and playing fields are available for children and young people in their leisure time.

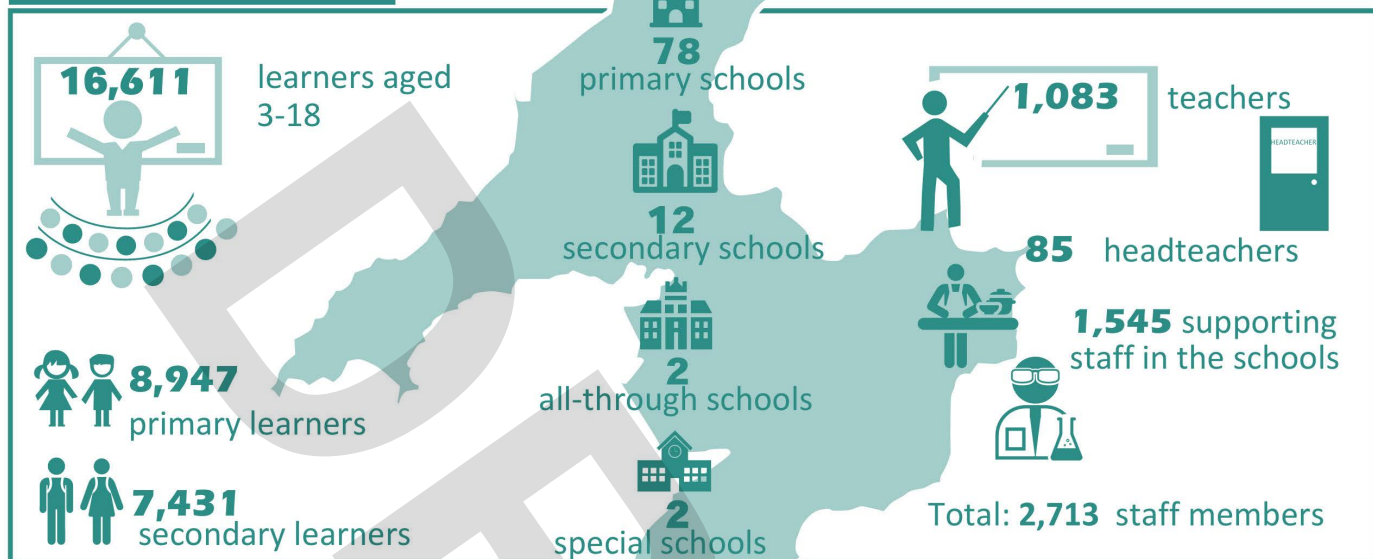
A Welsh Gwynedd highlights how we will promote the growth of the Welsh language in all parts of the county. It is noted in the Council Plan that our ambition is to:

Ensure that every child in Gwynedd can use the Welsh language confidently at school and in their social life.

Support efforts to create new Welsh speakers of all ages.



## Education in Gwynedd



 [www.gwynedd.nyuw.cymru/ymch](http://www.gwynedd.nyuw.cymru/ymch)



# What are the four purposes and how would they play a part in our strategy?

The four purposes are the foundation for the new curriculum for Wales and therefore they play a key role in our education strategy here in Gwynedd. The current curriculum is different to the previous curriculum which had stricter guidelines noting what subjects should be taught, with what content and without any defined final aims for the education.

As well as the four purposes for Wales, the traditional school subjects are replaced with Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs).

Six Areas of Learning and Experience have replaced traditional subjects, namely:

Science and Technology	Mathematics and Numeracy	Expressive Arts
Humanities	Health and Well-being	Languages, Literacy and Communication

The four purposes are a desire and a final aim for the curriculum planned by Gwynedd schools. The aim of every school curriculum in Gwynedd is to support our learners to become:

**ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives**

**enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work**

**ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world**

**healthy, confident individuals, who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.**

The **Four Purposes** are integral to our educational ambition, and they are the foundation of the new strategy. Our aim is to empower our schools to design and present a modern, inspirational and ambitious curriculum that ensures that every learner has the opportunity to achieve these purposes.

We welcome the new curriculum as a golden opportunity to re-design the learning experiences of our children and young people. Although such changes bring natural challenges, they also offer a huge possibility to ensure education that is more relevant, creative and inclusive than ever.



Our strategy will play a key part when supporting Gwynedd schools to make the most of this opportunity, ensuring the support, the resources and the confidence that they require to fulfil the Four Purposes – and therefore, enable every child to grow into ambitious learners, confident individuals, enterprising contributors and ethical citizens.

## What is our vision for education in Gwynedd?



**Our vision is to have a fair education system that addresses the needs of all our learners and ensures that every learner reaches their full potential.**

Your background, where you live or your circumstances should not determine your choice or your future path. We want to see a system based on equality that fosters and promotes well-being, provides the highest quality education and training, expanding horizons, nurturing skills that are required in the local economy, regionally, nationally and internationally, to ensure a robust path towards prosperity for every young person.



# What are the values that we have used to shape the education system in Gwynedd for the future?

To shape the system for the future we have determined eight core values. Whatever the changes that we will consider for the future, we want to commit to these values:

-  To offer the best possible learning experiences for our learners, ensuring an exciting and broad curriculum that motivates learning and understanding and leads to improving standards and outcomes for all.
-  To promote and support our learners' physical health, emotional needs and well-being, ensuring that our schools play a key role when planning and delivering integrated services to children, young people and their families.
-  To ensure that children and young people (aged between 0 and 25) who have additional learning needs have access to opportunities and gain experiences that are planned effectively, to allow them to make progress according to their ability.
-  To ensure a system that keeps our learners safe and protects them from any abuse.
-  To prepare young people for the world of work – ensuring that they have the correct skills for employment, especially within the local economy.
-  To create a first-class learning environment by improving facilities and buildings, ensuring that schools are designed to respond to the changes in contemporary teaching and educational learning processes and practices, especially using Technology.
-  To develop educational establishments as a hub for public and community services where appropriate.
-  To strengthen the Welsh language as an educational and social medium enabling children and young people to have access to Welsh and bilingual education and training.



1



**To offer the best possible learning experiences for our learners, ensuring an exciting and broad curriculum that motivates learning and understanding and leads to improving standards and outcomes for all.**

Education and training are the foundation to every aspect of children and young peoples' lives – a key fundamental right that can break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage and create new life opportunities. Receiving the highest quality education in modern and suitable establishments gives children and young people an excellent start in life, offering the skills, information and the confidence required to succeed and thrive. This contributes to reducing inequality and nurturing ambition in every learner, regardless of their background.



Although the performance of Gwynedd learners is already amongst the best in Wales, our ambition is to go a step further. We are determined to improve the results for every child and young person, with special focus on the most vulnerable ones and those learners who often face barriers with engaging. Addressing this inequality will be a cornerstone to our strategy.

We will ensure equal access to high-quality education at every stage – from the early years, through primary and secondary education, on to post-16 education, training and the world of work. There will be an integrated system of early years care and education that is strong, sustainable and rooted in the Welsh language, health, childcare and support for families to give every child a strong foundation. Expanding provision such as Flying Start, and the Childcare Offer ensures that our children get the best possible start to their educational journey and their life.



The **Curriculum for Wales** is a unique opportunity to achieve this. With support and vision, our schools can create learning experiences that are truly meaningful and suitable for the 21st century – experiences that nurture information, creativity, emotional resilience and strong ethics. Our responsibility is to ensure that the education workforce receives the training, resources and the support to design an innovative curriculum, assess learners' progress effectively, and offer feedback that drives high-quality learning.

We also wish to see our schools **thriving as teaching establishments**, that they work closely, share expertise and plan improvements jointly. By strengthening this collaboration, we can ensure that strengths are shared across the system, and every member of our education workforce feels confident and are empowered to further raise standards.



Ultimately, our aim is to ensure that **every pupil is given the support and the opportunities to fulfil their full potential** – nurturing ambitious, confident and inspirational young people who are ready for life and work in the future.



**To promote and support our learners' physical health, emotional needs and well-being, ensuring that our schools play a key role when designing and delivering integrated services for children, young people and their families.**

Gwynedd children and young people show strong awareness of the importance of well-being, understanding the challenges that they could face when growing up in a society that changes rapidly. By supporting their physical, emotional and mental well-being, we can empower them to stay healthy, build positive relationships and develop the skills to navigate life changes with confidence.

Good well-being is central to every aspect of a child's life – it fosters resilience, prepares learners to fully engage with their education, and ignites curiosity and a creative mind about the world around them. It offers permanent advantages, such as stronger self-confidence, better social skills, less anxiety and depression, and emotional intelligence development – valuable features that will support them throughout their lives.

A **whole-school** approach of promoting well-being is essential to create a positive environment. By embodying well-being as an integral part of Gwynedd schools' life, we will build a culture where every child and young person are supported to thrive – personally, academically and socially.

This will happen in schools where teachers and staff feel that they are also appreciated and supported. By putting well-being at the root of everything that we do, we can ensure that Gwynedd schools are a place where learners develop into confident, resilient and inspirational individuals, who are ready to fulfil their full potential.





**3**

**To ensure that children and young people (aged between 0 and 25) who have additional learning needs have access to opportunities and gain experiences that are planned effectively, to allow them to make progress according to their ability.**

In terms of learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), our clear commitment is to continue to fully implement the requirements of the new Act, alongside the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that every child and young person (aged between 0 and 25) with ALN have access to training and education experiences and opportunities that are appropriate and inclusive, enabling them to make progress, develop skills and gain confidence, to fulfil their potential in settings that are suitable to their individual needs.

We are very proud that Gwynedd stands out as the only county in Wales where every staff member of the ALN&I Service supports schools completely bilingually. This ensures that specialist support and advice is available naturally through the medium of Welsh and English, offering a rich linguistic and cultural experience to children, young people and their families.

We also acknowledge that recruiting expert staff – such as bilingual qualified Educational Psychologists, Sensory Impairment Teachers, School Assistants and other experts – is an increasing challenge across Wales and therefore sets a new emphasis on the work of fostering and attracting this skilled workforce locally. Although this is challenging, we see a huge opportunity to invest in our people, develop clear career pathways, and attract enthusiastic individuals to join the sector, to ensure continuous excellence and sustainability in provision, including in our special schools.

In doing so, our ambition is to ensure that no child or young person in Gwynedd is left behind, and that they get the education and the support they need to thrive and reach their full potential.

**4**

### **To ensure a system that keeps our learners safe and protects them from any abuse.**

Every local authority, school and college in Wales has a legal and ethical duty to safeguard and promote the well-being of children and young people under 18 years old. Due to their daily and continuous contact with learners, education settings are in a unique situation to notice any signs of abuse, neglect or harm early.

Our aim is to ensure that our schools and colleges receive the guidance, training and full support that they require to keep children safe, to respond effectively when required, and to create positive environments that promote well-being, safety and trust.

By working together as an education community, we can ensure that every child and young person in Gwynedd are not only safeguarded from harm but also get the opportunity to thrive and fully develop in a safe and supportive environment.

**5**

### **To prepare young people for the world of work – ensuring that they have the correct skills for employment, especially within the local economy.**

It is essential that we ensure clear and effective education pathways for those learners who face additional barriers and challenges – such as Looked-after Children, young people who receive education otherwise than at school (EOTAS), and those eligible for free school meals. Our aim is to open doors for rich learning opportunities and suitable experiences that will enable them to thrive, foster confidence and develop their future wishes.

Developing an integrated model of education is central to this – a model that puts the learner at the centre of the system, ensuring equal access to learning that is carefully planned around their individual needs throughout their educational journey. This will build on the strong culture of inclusion that is already a key feature in our schools in Gwynedd, ensuring that every learner is appreciated, supported and continue to be an active part of the school's life.

At the same time, we are determined to enrich the experiences of the most able and talented learners, extending their academic and creative opportunities to enable them to challenge themselves, develop new skills and reach their true potential.

By combining strong support with challenging and exciting opportunities, our ambition is to ensure that every child and young person in Gwynedd receive the support, and the experiences required to fulfil their dreams and thrive in the future.

6



**To create a first-class learning environment by improving facilities and buildings, ensuring that schools are designed to respond to the changes in contemporary teaching and learning educational processes and practices, especially using Technology.**

Over the last decade, a significant investment of over £80 million has improved learning facilities in schools across Gwynedd. Despite this, we acknowledge that there is a need to continue to modernise many buildings to ensure that they are completely suitable to support the Curriculum for Wales and learners' needs today and in the future.

Through the Welsh Government's Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, and through further investments from the Council, our aim is to create modern, flexible and innovative schools that offer high-quality learning, sports and outdoor facilities. These environments will support creative and various learning approaches, providing children and young people with the opportunities to thrive in and out of the classroom.

The Gwynedd Digital Education Strategy, adopted in 2021, is key to this vision. By ensuring equal access to high-quality technology, we empower learners and teachers to develop the digital, creative and constructive skills required for the future.

In addition, Cyngor Gwynedd is committed to be net-zero carbon and ecologically positive by 2030. Therefore, when planning new buildings, we will prioritise schools that are environmentally friendly, are efficient in terms of resources and promote a green ethos and active travel.



With a new national investment programme announced in 2023, we will set our priorities for the next nine years. Our ambition is to create a sustainable, modern and eco-friendly school estate that supports first class teaching standards and is able to respond to the County's changing social and demographic needs.





7



**To develop educational establishments as a hub for public and community services where appropriate.**

Developing educational establishments as a hub for public and community services is essential to foster stronger, more coherent and sustainable communities. Schools and colleges can go beyond their traditional role, by becoming settings that unite people and offer support and extensive opportunities to the whole community.

By working closely with local organisations, businesses and public services, schools and colleges can provide various and meaningful learning experiences that increase skills, expand wishes and strengthen social links.

As learning establishments, schools build partnerships with parents, other schools, universities, businesses and public organisations. Through this collaboration, they can respond flexibly to change, share expertise and innovation when developing new opportunities to learn and grow together.

In this manner, our schools and colleges become central spaces for community life, playing an essential part not only in supporting academic progress, but also in nurturing social cohesion, developing life skills and creating a better future for all.





## To strengthen the Welsh language as an educational and social medium enabling children and young people to have access to Welsh and bilingual education and training.



According to the

**2021**

Census,

**70.9%** of children  
aged 3-4 years

in Gwynedd can speak Welsh  
– evidence of the strong  
foundation that already  
exists in our communities.

Setting this foundation as early as possible is essential to ensure that children are prepared for Welsh and bilingual education in our schools in due course.

It is encouraging that a high proportion of three-year-olds receive nursery education through the medium of Welsh, but we acknowledge that there are recruitment challenges in the field. To maintain the standards and the best opportunities for children to develop their Welsh skills from an early age, there is a need to plan carefully to ensure that our workforce continues to have the necessary language skills and receive opportunities to develop further.

We acknowledge that the same bilingual and Welsh medium opportunities are currently not available in every school, especially the three transitional schools in the county. However, joint plans between these schools and the Education Department are already bearing fruit, and progress can be seen. Time will be needed for the Welsh language to fully embed into these schools, but we are committed to ensure that every learner gets the same opportunity as their peers in Gwynedd. This will continue to be a priority for this Strategy, our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, and it directly contributes to the national vision of Cymraeg 2050.



**97.3%**

of

**primary teachers**

and

**86.3%**

of

**secondary teachers**

in Gwynedd are confident to teach through the medium of Welsh – which is a unique  
fundamental strength in the county.



Yet again, recruiting Welsh-medium teachers continues to be a challenge, especially in specialist subjects and some specific areas. Retaining and recruiting school assistants is also an increasing challenge.

Our response will be to continue and expand the opportunities for the workforce to develop their Welsh skills, provide training and language lessons to staff, and promote attractive careers through the medium of Welsh in Gwynedd schools. In doing so, we will ensure a future where every learner benefits from education that nurtures their bilingual skills and empowers them to live and work fully through the medium of Welsh and English.

# When we reach September 2035, how will we know that this strategy has succeeded to put the needs of all our learners at the centre of our provision and ensure that every learner reaches their full potential?



Our ambition is to give the best possible start in life to every child and young person in Gwynedd. We believe that every child deserves to feel safe, appreciated and to get the necessary support to thrive. We will foster their physical and emotional well-being, protect them from harm, and offer early life experiences enabling them to grow into confident, enthusiastic and creative individuals.



We will ensure that every learner has access to first-class learning opportunities – opportunities that develop their knowledge, skills and values to enable them to reach their full potential. We wish to see our learners grow into responsible global citizens, ready to face the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that belong to the 21st century. This will mean operationally addressing the gaps in opportunities and inequalities, ensuring that no one is left behind.



We will promote and develop learners' skills further – not only the academic qualifications, but also key life skills such as creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, resilience and perseverance. We will ensure that every young person in Education, Employment or Training, is supported to follow lively and purposeful pathways that lead them to productive and fulfilling lives.



We will support Gwynedd schools to develop a local curriculum that reflects our history, our language, our culture and our unique environment. This will foster pride in our communities and create a deeper understanding of their responsibilities towards the planet. We will also promote the Welsh language as a central part of our vision, ensuring an equal opportunity for everyone to benefit from, and will be innovative in the way we support latecomers to master the language.





We acknowledge that our staff is our biggest asset. We will respect and empower our teachers and wider education workforce, ensuring their well-being and offering opportunities to develop professionally. This will enable us to create a culture where learning, innovating and supporting each other is central.



The voice of the learner will be at the root of every decision we make. We will actively promote the Rights of the Child, and include children and young people in planning work, monitoring and evaluating the services that impact their lives.



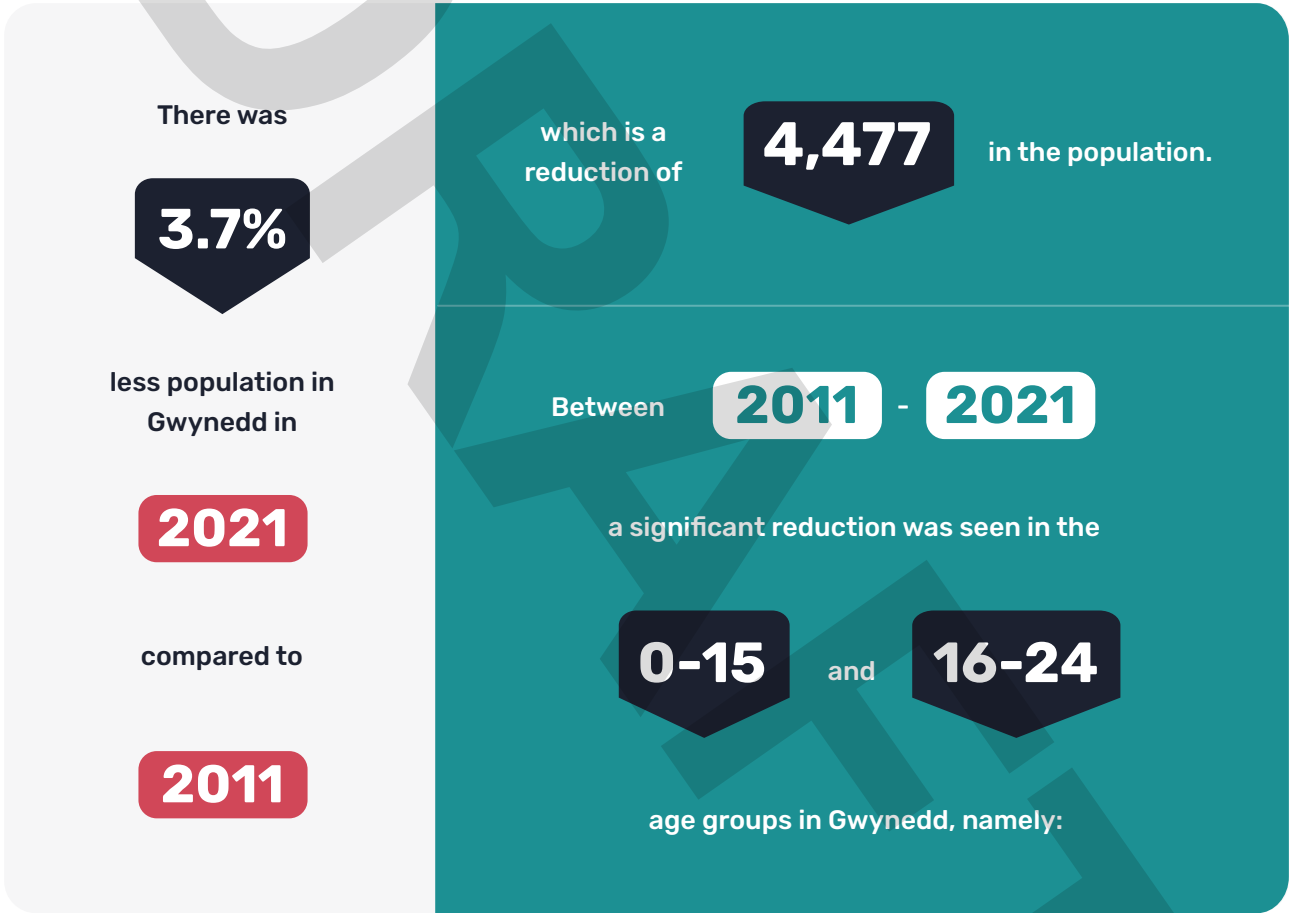
By providing high education standards in modern, flexible and eco-friendly environments, and by using technology creatively to support learning, we will build an education system that prepares our children and young people for life and work in the future. Working in partnership with other departments, agencies and the local community allows us to offer services that are fair, inclusive and offer good value for money.



Above all, we will celebrate our learners' successes and appreciate every achievement, big and small. Through collaboration, we can ensure a future where every child and young person in Gwynedd thrives – creating communities that are stronger, more coherent and full of hope for the future.

# Why do we need to look at modernising schools here in Gwynedd?

## Impact of Demographic Change on the Number of Learners:



Age Group	2021	2011	+/-
0-15 years old	19,423	20,951	-7.3%
16-24 years old	14,260	16,723	-14.7%
All ages	117,397	121,874	-3.7%



Over the same period,  
the number of births in  
Gwynedd has reduced

by

**25%**

with a steady decrease every year  
between 2012 and 2022 from 1,327  
in 2012 to 997 in 2022. For the first  
time, we have seen the number of  
births in Gwynedd reduce under

**1,000 per year.**



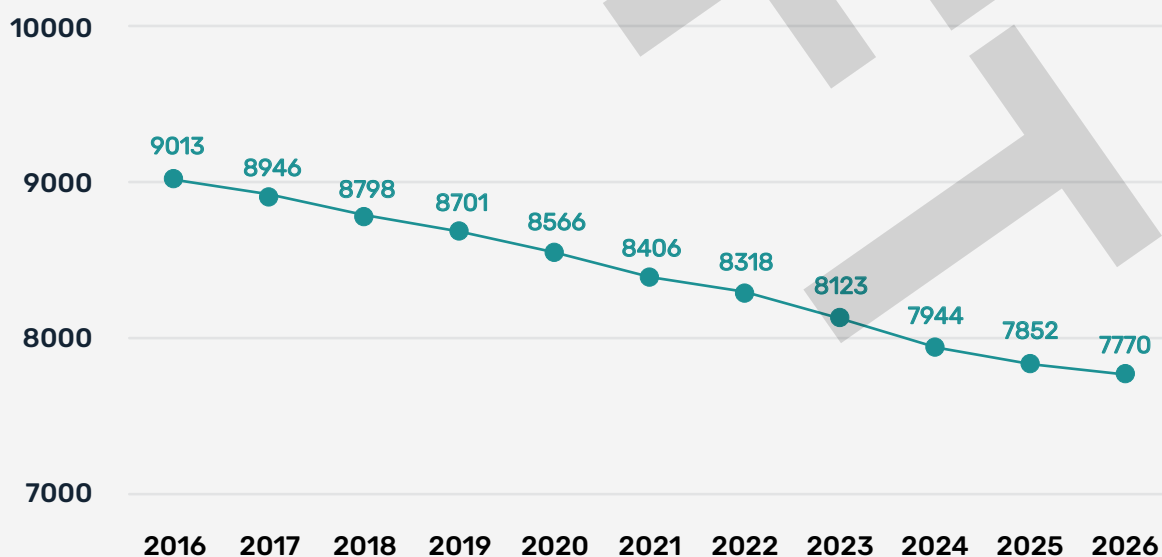
The steady decrease in the number of births in Gwynedd over the last decade has had a clear impact on the number of children in the above age groups, and as a result, has also had an impact on the number of children in our schools. The table below shows the number of learners in Gwynedd primary schools between 2016 and the numbers anticipated by 2026, which is a reduction of 1,243 (-14%):

A reduction of

**1,243**  
(14%)  
is anticipated

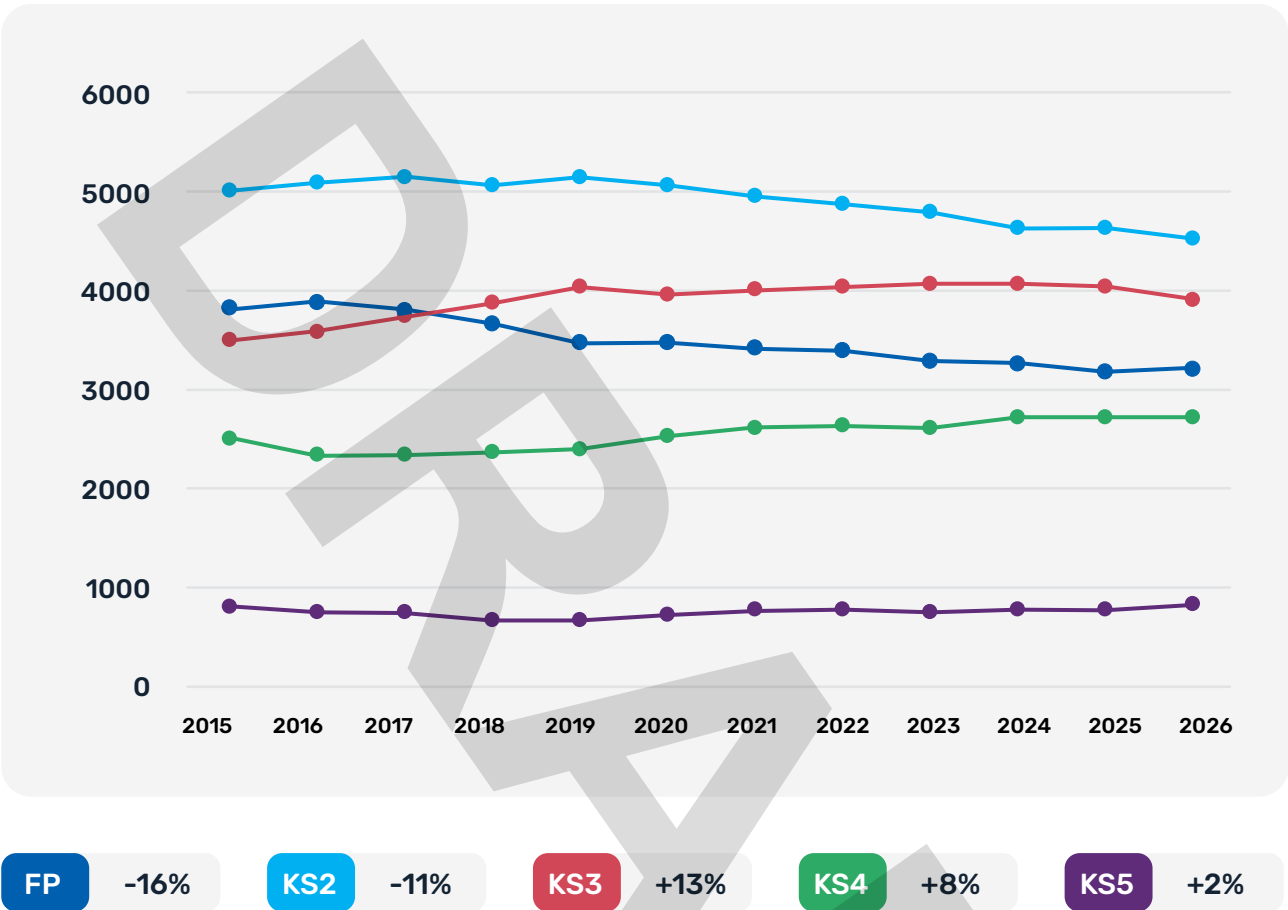
in the numbers of  
learners in  
Gwynedd primary  
schools by

**2026**



## 2016-2026 Numbers

Currently, we are seeing the impact of this reduction at its worst in the primary sector in Gwynedd, with the biggest reduction seen in the Foundation Phase as shown in the table below:



We are also aware that the impact of the demographic change and the reduction in the number of children is seen more intensely in some areas and catchment areas in Gwynedd. Given the primary system in its entirety, from the 78 primary schools in Gwynedd, one lifelong school and 5 Ysgol Bro Idris primary sites, there are 25 of them with less than 42 learners.

There are 15 schools in Gwynedd in financial protection, with less than 30 learners, and from those, 6 have less than 20 learners.

The substantial reduction in the number of pupils mean that Gwynedd has high levels of empty spaces in our Primary and Secondary schools. In 2024, 24% of Gwynedd's total capacity was unfilled, namely the highest percentage in Wales. This is equivalent to over 4,700 empty spaces between our Primary and Secondary schools.



# Financial Fairness

The Gwynedd school funding system is based on allocation per pupil, which is a fair and transparent way of distributing resources according to the number of learners. However, we acknowledge that this alone is not enough to ensure consistency and fairness for every child, especially in smaller schools or rural areas where the number of pupils is low.

This is the purpose of the protection scheme – a unique mechanism that ensures that every school can maintain the minimum level of staffing to provide high-quality education. Without it, some schools would be in a situation where it was not possible to provide a teacher for a whole class.

Through this scheme, up to **8%** of Gwynedd's children benefit from additional resources,



with a contribution of approximately

**£1m**

in **2024/25**

Currently, 23 primary schools and one lifelong school are part of the scheme, and it is likely that this number will increase over time. This reflects the ongoing deterioration in the number of pupils and means that more schools will rely on this support to ensure high-quality educational provision. Although this is positive for the schools receiving the direct support, it is important to note that the resources are funded by reducing the allocation to the rest of Gwynedd schools.

This situation can lead to clear differences between schools. For example, there is a difference of over

**£10,500+**

per capita between the allocation of primary schools receiving protection and a school without it, and approximately

**£1,500**

per capita in the secondary sector.

Three small schools



**66**

children

**6**

teachers

Individual school



**66**

children

**2**

teachers

In some cases, this leads to situations where three small schools with a total of 66 children can employ 6 teachers, whilst an individual school with the same number of pupils but without protection support would only be able to afford 2 teachers.

We understand that this can be frustrating for headteachers and larger schools, creating a sense of inconsistent work circumstances. This is why we are committed to review and evolve the funding arrangements continuously, with a focus on ensuring:

Consistency and fairness for every child, regardless of the size of their school.

Sustainable support for small schools that are an integral part of our rural communities and contribute significantly to maintaining the Welsh language and local culture.

Transparency and an open dialogue with headteachers and schools of every size to ensure that everyone understands the rationale and the principles behind the allocations.

The protection scheme is therefore a reflection of our commitment to ensure that every child in Gwynedd has the same opportunity to receive high-quality education, but also reminds us of the need to find a fair and meaningful balance when sharing resources across the county. By working together – large and small schools, communities and headteachers – we can ensure a funding system that is fair, sustainable and enables every learner to thrive.

# Leadership

Strong and inspiring leadership is essential to ensure a successful future for our children and young people in Gwynedd. While there are many challenges facing the education system at the moment – such as recruitment, leader retention and workload management – we see this as an opportunity to reshape and strengthen the way we support school leaders at all levels.

We recognise that headteachers, senior and middle managers need to be given more non-contact time and support so that they can focus on what matters – leading effectively and inspiring their teams. It is also important for us to make the journey between the role of middle leader and the position of headteacher more attractive, clearly demonstrating the personal and professional development opportunities available.

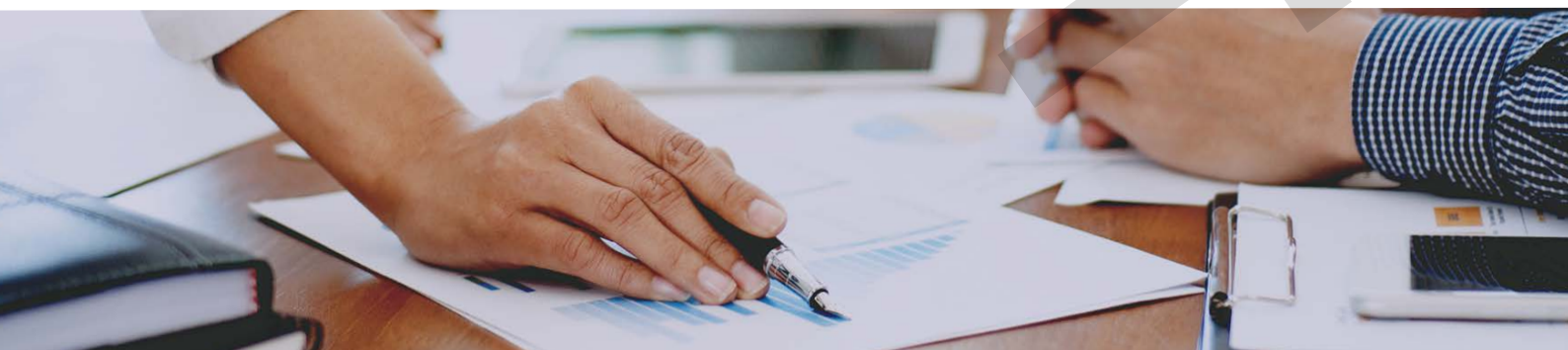
To ensure robust succession arrangements, we will strengthen the collaboration between the Authority, governors and headteachers. This will include identifying talented individuals early, offering mentoring and development opportunities, and creating clear pathways to leadership. This will enable us to nurture young leaders who are confident, skilled and ready to step up to senior roles when needed.



We are aware that the age profile of our current leaders means that we will need to invest in the next generation of leaders over the next few years. By working proactively and offering opportunities to develop leadership skills, we can ensure continuity and stability for our schools and communities.

Currently, the number of candidates for leadership positions is relatively small. However, we are determined to change this by creating a system that attracts, retains and nurtures world-class leaders, making school leadership in Gwynedd an attractive and valuable career option.

Ultimately, our goal is to build a sustainable leadership ecosystem that offers support, opportunities, and collaboration. This will ensure that every child and young person in Gwynedd benefits from an education that is led by enthusiastic, skilled and ambitious individuals who set high standards and inspire success.



# Safeguarding

Safeguarding children and ensuring the well-being of staff is an ongoing priority for us in Gwynedd. Our internal arrangements and the guidance given to schools are robust, creating a strong foundation to ensure a safe and supportive system for all.

We recognise, however, that the size of some schools can create practical challenges. In situations of staff absence or a supply teacher shortage, it can be difficult to maintain the ideal adult-to-child ratio, and sometimes this can mean closing classes or schools for a short period. While challenging, this underlines the importance of proactive planning and developing more resilient systems to ensure safe staffing levels in all schools.

The use of digital systems to record well-being concerns is already excellent practice in the vast majority of our schools. This approach ensures that information is shared quickly and accurately, and enables the Authority to monitor effectively remotely. We recognise that the cost of software can be a barrier for some smaller schools, and therefore there is a clear opportunity for us to consider more sustainable ways of ensuring that all schools benefit from the same support and level of technology.

As well as these practical arrangements, we understand that a positive school culture is the key to ensuring lasting well-being for pupils and staff. Any negative culture, wherever it arises, can have an adverse effect on the entire school community. That is why we are determined to create environments that promote respect, trust and support, ensuring that every child feels safe and valued.

Physical safety requirements are also increasing. Secure access arrangements need to be ensured, infrastructure upgraded and fencing installed where appropriate. While managing so many schools across a large area means budgets are tight, we are determined to prioritise investing in modern and safe infrastructure.

Looking ahead, our ambition is to ensure that every child and young person in Gwynedd can learn in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, where well-being and safety are at the foundation of everything we do. By strengthening staffing, expanding digital access, promoting a positive culture and upgrading our facilities, we can be confident that our schools will continue to be places where all learners and staff thrive.



# Geography

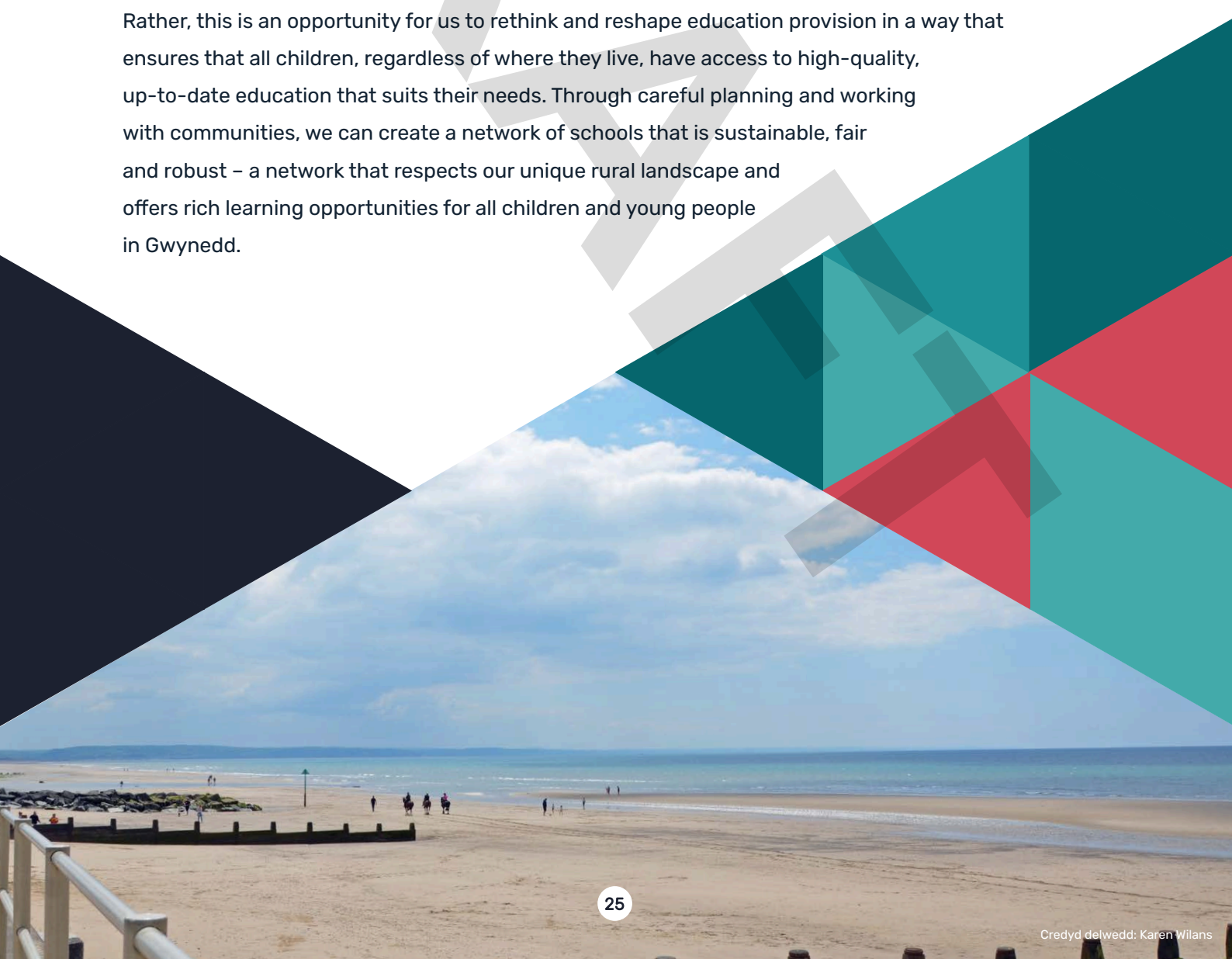
Here in Gwynedd, the close link between our population and our unique countryside creates a special pattern that has a great influence on the education sector. The county is home to vast natural landscapes and strong rural communities, as well as more populous towns such as Bangor and Caernarfon. This mix is part of our character, and offers opportunities and challenges to how we organise and deliver education for our children and young people.



In rural areas, a lower population and dispersed communities can result in a smaller number of children in the school catchment areas. There are even examples of primary schools where there are no longer 10 children living in the catchment area. This change is not just being seen in rural communities – some wards in Bangor and Caernarfon are also experiencing a reduction in the number of children.

We recognise that schools play a central role in rural communities – not only as places of learning, but as centres that foster the Welsh language, culture and social cohesion. However, it is clear that we cannot continue to provide education just as we currently are in communities where there are not enough children to sustain a sustainable system.

Rather, this is an opportunity for us to rethink and reshape education provision in a way that ensures that all children, regardless of where they live, have access to high-quality, up-to-date education that suits their needs. Through careful planning and working with communities, we can create a network of schools that is sustainable, fair and robust – a network that respects our unique rural landscape and offers rich learning opportunities for all children and young people in Gwynedd.



# Transport

The provision of education transport is an essential part of the way we support learners in Gwynedd, particularly due to the rural nature of the county and the dispersed distribution of the population. The Council is responsible for organising and funding transport for eligible pupils, ensuring that they are able to travel safely from their homes to the designated school. This includes a variety of transport, from buses to taxis, and pays special attention to those with special educational needs.

In 2024/25, it is anticipated that Gwynedd will invest around £8.5 million in pupil transport – which is 7.25% of the county's Education budget. This is testament to our commitment to ensuring equal access to quality education for all children and young people, regardless of where they live.

We are also aware of the environmental demands and rising costs associated with transportation. That is why we are working to create a more efficient and sustainable system, including planning more cost-effective transport routes, reducing emissions, and promoting alternatives such as walking buses and cycle schemes where feasible.

When making decisions about the future of education provision in Gwynedd, the impact on transport will always be considered as a core part of the process. This ensures that learners not only receive quality education, but also that the system supports a greener, more sustainable future and compatible with our commitment to net zero by 2030.



# Standards

It is difficult to directly measure the impact of the structure of our education system on standards, but it is encouraging to see that education standards in Gwynedd are robust, and Estyn reports consistently reflect this across all sectors and school sizes. This is testament to the strength of our schools, to effective leadership and to the dedication of our teaching staff.

However, we recognise that standards are fragile when any weakness appears. In a county like Gwynedd, where there are many smaller organisations, a lack of structural resilience can mean that any change – such as the loss of a subject leader or headteacher – has a significant impact. It is often challenging to find a successor for specialist or senior roles, and this highlights the need to build capacity and plan for succession.

This is the main risk to future standards – not a lack of teaching quality or existing robustness, but a lack of long-term resilience if this is not intentionally formulated.

This challenge is also an opportunity: an opportunity to create a more flexible and collaborative leadership system. By fostering stronger expertise networks between schools, sharing subject leaders and developing shared leadership models, we can ensure that expertise is available to everyone, not just one school. Continuous professional development will be key to preparing more individuals to step into leadership roles, ensuring continuity and stability.

Looking ahead, our strategy will focus on reducing the risk of leadership gaps and on strengthening resilience across the county. Through robust succession plans, ongoing support and a commitment to collaboration, we can ensure that Gwynedd's education standards are not only maintained but also raised further. This will provide reassurance to our communities and parents, and ensure that every child and young person in Gwynedd benefits from the highest quality education.





# Catchment Areas and Communities

Each school has its own unique catchment area and community to serve. Since the 1990s, parents have been able to express their right to choose a school for their children, and this has led to an increase in the number of people choosing schools outside their traditional catchment area. There are many reasons for this – from ease of travel, the availability of a pre- or after-school club, and an impression on the quality of learning experiences, to an extended family setting or social network.

As a result, almost every school in Gwynedd now contains a mix of children from its catchment area and neighbouring catchment areas. In some cases, this has led to significant depopulation in certain catchment areas, to the extent that there are not enough local children to sustainably run a school.

Despite this, schools continue to be seen as the heart of Gwynedd's communities. In many villages and communities, the school is often one of the few public institutions that remains operational, and the effort to secure its future is seen as synonymous with safeguarding the future of the whole community. This shows how central schools are to our local identity, to maintaining the Welsh language, and to fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion.

As the connection between families and their catchment areas changes, so does the relationship between schools and their communities. We therefore see an opportunity to redefine the idea of a catchment – not just as an administrative boundary, but as a solid foundation that provides the best learning experiences while focusing on the well-being and success of each child.

Our ambition is to ensure that every school, regardless of location, is part of a sustainable network that reflects its community and offers high-quality education. By doing this, we can ensure not only that Gwynedd's schools continue to thrive, but also that our communities remain alive, strong and ready for the future.





# Property

Gwynedd has a high number of schools compared to the numbers of children attending, and this creates a significant demand in terms of the maintenance of the buildings. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that the state of our schools' reports are generally positive, reflecting the investment and care work that has taken place over the last few years.

We are aware that inflationary pressures and constraints on revenue budgets are likely to make it difficult to maintain all buildings to the highest standard at all times. However, this is an opportunity for us to examine the issue more strategically and on the long term. Careful planning will enable us to make the most effective use of the resources available, prioritising those projects that bring the greatest benefits to our learners and communities.

Significant investments have already been made – with over £73 million of capital expenditure over the last decade combined with Welsh Government grants such as the community schools grant and the ALN grant. These have improved the infrastructure of many schools, strengthening the learning environment and ensuring more modern facilities. These are clear examples of how capital investment has transformed learning experiences in many communities.

Looking ahead, we must recognise the reality that some new buildings may be more expensive to maintain than the old ones, but the benefits to learning and to the health and well-being of our learners are significant. We will need to be critical of our investment decisions, and that will mean, in some cases, not investing in certain schools over an extended period of time to ensure that resources are focused on the places where they have the greatest impact.

By adopting a long-term planning approach, integrating our use of revenue and capital budgets, and building on the strengths of our current investment programme, we can ensure that our schools continue to offer modern, safe and inspiring environments for our children and young people. This is not just about maintaining buildings, but about creating a sustainable future for our entire education system.



# Energy

Energy use plays a key role in the sustainability of our schools, and is an opportunity for us to lead positive change. Wales and Cyngor Gwynedd are committed to reducing our carbon footprint and achieving ambitious environmental targets. In this context, Gwynedd's schools are in a strong position to make an important contribution – not only by reducing their energy use, but also by fostering sustainability awareness and skills among the next generation.

Currently, Gwynedd schools use around

**17,000,000 kWh**



of energy each year, with a combination of electricity, gas, oil and biomass. This equates to around

**3104 tonnes**



of carbon emissions – a level that would require around 147,000 trees to be planted each year to offset.



**147,000**

**It is clear that newer and modern schools are already much more efficient – almost twice as good – and that use per pupil is significantly lower in larger schools. This highlights the great opportunity to improve efficiency as we plan for the future.**

The positive impact of reducing energy use goes far beyond carbon targets alone. Effective energy management creates more comfortable and healthy learning environments, avoiding rooms that are too cold or too hot, and helping pupils to concentrate and succeed academically. In addition, the financial savings from managing energy wisely free up valuable resources that can be reinvested in what matters most – rich learning experiences, new resources and support for the well-being and development of our children and young people.

There is also a key educational aspect: by implementing energy conservation practices, our schools become living models of responsible behaviour, showing pupils how to live sustainably. This strengthens their understanding of the world around them and empowers them to take positive steps towards a better future.

**To deliver on our commitments to reduce our carbon footprint, we will need to consider energy use when strategically planning for the long term. By investing in more efficient buildings, promoting renewable energy, and encouraging a culture of sustainability in all schools, we can create an education system that is responsible, sustainable, and inspires the next generation to do the same.**

# MODERNISING EDUCATION

In order to plan and manage change effectively, it is essential that we have a clear, robust and practical strategy that sets the direction for the future. This should not be just an administrative document, but rather a roadmap that offers vision and creates momentum for improvement. The strategy must clearly reflect our desire to create a range of schools that offer the highest quality educational experiences, ensuring that they are suitable for today's pupils and flexible enough to respond to the needs of future generations.

We have already set out our core principles, but the next step requires clear and coherent strategic objectives that inform all decisions and investments. These objectives will act as pillars to sustain the modernisation of the education system in Gwynedd, ensuring that all sectors – from early years to secondary and on to post-16 education – move forward with a common purpose.

This means creating a structure where all decisions about schools are based on values such as equality, inclusion, sustainability, and collaboration. It is not only about ensuring modern buildings and suitable resources, but also about fostering an ethos in which strong leadership, high-quality learning, and pupil well-being are placed at the heart of every step.

In practice, such a strategy will define priorities by sector, offer clear solutions to the challenges we face, and put in place mechanisms to monitor progress and measure success. In doing so, we can ensure that modernisation is not a short-term reaction to pressure, but a long-term plan that prepares our schools to thrive in an ever-changing social, economic and environmental context.

Ultimately, a clear and inspiring strategy will give confidence to our communities, provide concrete leadership for our schools, and offer reassurance to our learners that they are part of an education system that is being shaped with their future at the heart of it.



# What are the strategic objectives guiding the modernisation of the education system in Gwynedd?

Develop a network of schools that are educationally excellent and resource efficient and sustainable, ensuring a secure future for our education provision in the long term.

Create a pattern of provision that enables all learning settings to offer high-quality education to all their learners, whether as an individual school or as part of a federation or collaborative arrangement with other settings and providers.

Ensure school environments that inspire learners to access a rich and stimulating curriculum, encouraging them to achieve their full potential, alongside a programme of extra-curricular activities that promote health, well-being and personal development.

Develop a modern infrastructure in all schools that supports high-quality education in the 21st century, and enables academic standards to be raised, maintains excellent performance and creates vibrant learning experiences.

Strategically invest in capital and integrate this with plans to rationalise and strengthen provision across the school network, ensuring a flexible and effective response to demand.

Rebuild, remodel, refurbish or modernise schools that are to be maintained in the long-term, so that they meet the highest possible design standards and offer an attractive, up-to-date and effective learning environment.

Contribute positively to wider policy objectives – such as community regeneration, promoting healthy lifestyles, and increasing well-being opportunities – by developing modern and inclusive infrastructure that supports these aims.

Improve the efficiency and quality of provision by reducing the number of empty places to a reasonable level, responding flexibly to demographic changes and supporting parental choices where possible.

Ensure that the infrastructure of our schools is fully accessible, enabling all learners, whatever their individual needs, to access high-quality and equal education.

Develop creative and innovative solutions, whether individual or collaborative, which strengthen the whole education system across Gwynedd and ensure a sustainable future for our learners and communities.



## What will be the principles we will follow in order to realise our vision in the primary sector in Gwynedd?

Each school will have enough pupils to ensure sustainable and sound leadership, with leaders who are free to focus on leading and managing effectively, inspiring learners and staff.

Schools will be financially sound and operate confidently in the long term, offering stability and certainty without relying on protection schemes or additional budgets.

All schools will have access to attractive and bespoke outdoor facilities that enhance learning experiences and support physical health, emotional well-being and connection with the environment.

The schools will be fully inclusive and accessible to all, ensuring equal opportunities for all learners regardless of their background or individual needs.

Modern and state-of-the-art facilities will support creative digital learning, ensuring that all learners develop the skills needed for life and work in the 21st century.

Learning environments of the highest quality will foster the well-being, confidence and progress of all learners, supporting outstanding achievements across a wide range of skills, subjects and curricular experiences.



## What can we consider to enable this?

### 1. Strong and sustainable leadership

Prioritise the creation of flexible leadership models, including the sharing of leadership across more than one site, to ensure headteachers and managers have the time and resources to lead effectively.

Develop a succession programme to identify and support future leaders at an early stage, ensuring continuity and innovation.

## 2. A sustainable and effective school network

Consider the future of all schools supported through the protection scheme, looking at long-term solutions that offer greater stability to communities and pupils.

Where necessary, close some schools, and where possible, consider creating new provision while ensuring fair access for every community.

Ensure that all sites are financially viable, with sufficient pupils and facilities to provide high-quality learning experiences.

## 3. Modern and inclusive learning environments

Invest in buildings and infrastructure that are contemporary, flexible and suitable for the Curriculum for Wales, including full access to quality digital facilities and outdoor spaces.

Ensure that all sites are fully accessible and offer inclusive experiences to all learners, regardless of their individual needs.

## 4. Well-being and broad learning opportunities

Foster a culture of care and well-being where the school environment supports physical and emotional health.

Offer a rich curriculum and extracurricular opportunities that inspire learners to reach their potential.

## 5. Financial and environmental sustainability

Manage resources effectively by integrating capital investments with plans to rationalise the school network, ensuring value for money in the long term.

Reduce energy use and strengthen the ethos of sustainability across all schools, contributing to Gwynedd's commitment to be net zero by 2030.

## What will be the principles we will follow in order to realise our vision in the secondary sector in Gwynedd?

Create education sites that are suitable, flexible and viable for the needs of Gwynedd today, and ready to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Ensure sufficient pupils to enable strong and sustainable leadership, with our leaders free to focus on leadership and inspire, raising standards across the system.

Offer enough pupils in each school to ensure that all subjects are taught by skilled and specialist teachers, providing a rich learning experience for all.

Provide a wide and consistent range of learning opportunities from the beginning to the end of statutory education, providing clear pathways for all learners to reach their potential.

Enable schools to be financially viable, operate sustainably in the long term, and be able to invest in their learners rather than relying on protection schemes.

Ensure all learners have access to quality physical and outdoor education facilities, fostering health, physical and emotional well-being while supporting creative learning.

Create schools that are fully inclusive and accessible to all, celebrating diversity and ensuring equal opportunities for all children and young people.

Develop state-of-the-art facilities that support digital learning, preparing learners to thrive in an ever-changing technological world.

Ensure high-quality learning environments that support the well-being of all learners, fostering progress, attainment and a wide range of skills across the curriculum.

## What can we consider to enable this?

### 1. Strong and sustainable leadership

Prioritise the creation of flexible leadership models to ensure headteachers and managers have the time and resources to lead effectively.

Develop a succession programme to identify and support future leaders at an early stage, ensuring continuity and innovation.

Modernise the school pattern by merging and strengthening, so that fewer more viable schools operate on the same number of sites, ensuring stronger resources and better opportunities for learners.

Ensure that all sites are financially viable, with sufficient pupils and facilities to provide high-quality learning experiences.

Share leadership at different levels across multiple sites, fostering a flexible and collaborative leadership team that shares responsibility and expertise.

Share subject expertise across sites, so that all learners – regardless of the size of their school – have access to teaching from experts.

Move staff between sites rather than learners, reducing the need for children to travel and ensuring continuity and consistency in their educational experience.

## 2. Modern and inclusive learning environments

Delve deeper into the use of distance learning, including innovative technologies such as VR, to expand the range of GCSE subjects and upgrade learning experiences.

Invest in buildings and infrastructure that are contemporary, flexible and suitable for the Curriculum for Wales, including full access to quality digital facilities and outdoor spaces.

Ensure that all sites are fully accessible and offer inclusive experiences to all learners, regardless of their individual needs.

## 3. Well-being and broad learning opportunities

Foster a culture of care and well-being where the school environment supports physical and emotional health.

Offer a rich curriculum and extracurricular opportunities that inspire learners to reach their potential.

Ensure that all schools offer inclusive provision, which can respond to the diverse needs of every child and young person, fostering positive behaviour, respect and a culture of care in all school communities.

## 4. Financial and environmental sustainability

Map and plan budgets over a longer period than a financial year, creating greater clarity, predictability and financial stability for schools and the authority.

Manage resources effectively by integrating capital investments with plans to rationalise the school network, ensuring value for money in the long term.

Reduce energy use and strengthen the ethos of sustainability across all schools, contributing to Gwynedd's commitment to be net zero by 2030.

## What will be the principles we will follow in order to realise our vision in the special sector in Gwynedd?

We will ensure that our most vulnerable learners have access to the highest quality educational and care provision, in environments that reflect respect, dignity and care. Our decisions will be guided by the following principles:

Create sufficient appropriate space and resources to provide specialist education and care that meets the full range of learners' needs, ensuring that they are supported to thrive.

Ensure that all special schools and specialist provision are fully inclusive and accessible to all, giving all children equal opportunity to access high-quality educational experiences regardless of their individual needs.

Invest in modern facilities and digital technology, creating innovative and flexible learning opportunities that support independence, creativity and life skills development.

Develop warm, safe and caring learning environments that support learners' physical and emotional well-being, building resilience and self-confidence, and create the best possible conditions to improve progress and achievement across a wide range of skills and curriculum areas.



## What can we consider to enable this?

### 1. Strong and sustainable leadership

Specialist capacity and space planning – ensuring sufficient physical space and resources to meet the growing demand, including space for therapies, individual support and flexible provision. This may include building or modifying purpose-built learning spaces.

Share expertise across sites – develop models where specialist staff (e.g. therapists, ALN teachers, support workers) work across more than one school, sharing knowledge and skills to consistently raise standards across Gwynedd.

Collaborate with the mainstream sector – strengthening links between special schools and primary and secondary schools to facilitate learner involvement in appropriate activities and sharing good practice.



Prioritise the creation of flexible leadership models to ensure headteachers and managers have the time and resources to lead effectively.

Develop a succession programme to identify and support future leaders at an early stage, ensuring continuity and innovation.

Invest in leadership and succession plan – ensure that every special school has a strong leadership team, with opportunities to develop new leaders through mentoring, training and networks across Gwynedd.

Strategically plan for a sustainable workforce – attracting and retaining specialist staff through the provision of ongoing training, well-being support and attractive career options, including opportunities to develop further expertise in the field.

## 2. Modern and inclusive learning environments

Use digital technology and distance learning – widening access to digital resources, innovative approaches (e.g. VR, interactive apps) and communication support to enable all learners to access up-to-date learning experiences, whatever their needs.

## 3. Well-being and broad learning opportunities

Foster a culture of care and well-being where the school environment supports physical and emotional health.

Access to community and health resources – strengthening partnerships with health, social care and third sector services to offer integrated provision that supports learners and their families.

Accessibility and sustainable energy – ensuring that all special school buildings are fully accessible to all, and in line with eco and net zero standards, creating modern, healthy and green learning environments.



# IDENTIFYING GWYNEDD SCHOOLS

In the face of constant change in our society and population, we have a unique opportunity here in Gwynedd to reshape the future of our school network for the benefit of all children and young people. Our ambition is to ensure that every school is a place where learners are inspired, supported and empowered to achieve their full potential, while remaining at the core of their local communities. Through regular and transparent review, we can make wise evidence-based decisions, invest wisely in our schools, and create modern, inclusive, and sustainable learning environments fit for the 21st Century and future generations.

## **How** will we come to a decision on whether the future of a school or catchment area needs to be reviewed?

Before considering the future of any particular school or catchment, we must look carefully at a wide range of factors. At the beginning of each calendar year, we will undertake a comprehensive review of the educational situation in Gwynedd. This gives us the flexibility to keep the programme current and sensitive to changes in education policies, while ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. In the current climate, where the number of learners is falling significantly in some areas, this approach is even more essential to ensure that our decisions are fair, transparent and sustainable for the future.

## **Who** will consider the current situation of the schools?

The panel will include Education Officers along with representatives from Headteachers and Governors of Gwynedd schools. There will be Officers from other Council departments including Finance, Property and Economy.

## **What** will be considered before reviewing a school or catchment?

Each school is evaluated against a set of evidence-based criteria, which allow for an assessment of the school's operational viability, and decisions to be made based on each school's relative investment need.

This will enable us to objectively set a programme for the strategic review of the school network and invest in the modernisation of the school estate in a transparent and fair manner.

Each school will be put in a category in terms of viability, to confirm the position for that school. A summary of the viability assessment shall form the basis for identifying modernisation projects and rationalisation proposals within the overall programme.

A viability assessment and conclusion for each school will be based on mainstream provision and other modes of provision such as early years, additional learning needs, behaviour and post-16 will be informed by separate strategies.

# What will be the criteria that will be used by the review panel?

## Quality and Standards in Education:

Prioritising high standards for all learners through clear measures and Estyn inspections. Where additional support is needed, that will be a trigger to strengthen provision to ensure excellent learning experiences for all.

## Leadership:

Ensure strong and sustainable leadership, with our leaders free to lead and possess the appropriate skills and qualifications to lead schools to long-term success.

## Number of Pupils:

Maintain pupil numbers that enable sustainable and effective provision, ensuring that all schools have the capacity to maintain robust staffing structures and a rich learning environment.

## Trends in Pupils:

Analyse longer-term patterns to ensure we plan proactively, responding promptly to changes and protecting learning opportunities for all children.

## Projected Number of Pupils:

Ensure long-term planning by anticipating demographic trends, so that each school can remain viable and relevant to its community in the years to come.

## Empty Places:

Using spaces efficiently to ensure resources are used wisely, creating a network of schools that is sustainable and able to offer high-quality learning experiences.

#### **Financial Viability:**

Strengthen the financial stability of schools, ensuring that they are able to operate effectively within a national funding framework and plan confidently for the future.

#### **Condition of School Buildings:**

Invest in buildings that are safe, comfortable and suitable to create an engaging learning environment that inspires children and young people.

#### **Suitability of School Buildings:**

Ensure that school buildings and sites are fully suitable for the Curriculum for Wales and are a valuable resource for the wider community.

#### **Collaborative Funding/Regeneration Opportunities:**

Welcome partnerships and engage with external funding to strengthen schools, support community regeneration, and promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles.

# What guidance and legislation will we follow when reviewing the future of a school or catchment area?

Any transformational change to the school estate depends on the following:

**School Organisation Code (2018)** – statutory guidance setting out the Local Authority's responsibilities in relation to school reorganisation and the formal requirements for regulated changes.

**The Federation of Maintained Schools in Wales** – statutory guidance on the establishment of school federations and the relevant governance arrangements.

**The Welsh Government's Sustainable Learning Communities Programme** – a national capital investment programme that provides collaborative funding opportunities through a formal business case process.

**Local Authority Capital Programme** – a five-year funding plan that defines the resources available to schools and the Education Department.

**The Democratic Decision-Making Process** – Cyngor Gwynedd's formal process for deciding on school organisation proposals; the County Council is the final decision-making body.

**The Education Act 1996 and the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013** – the statutory framework that sets out legal duties in relation to the organisation of schools.

**The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** – to require any change to promote sustainable development and contribute to national well-being goals.

**The Children and Young Persons (Wales) Act 2004 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** – ensuring that children's rights and welfare are central to all decisions.

**Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code (2021)** – ensure that any new arrangement complies with learners' rights and provision with ALN.

**Local Planning and Policy Guidance** – including a local development plan and any guidance on sustainability and environment that may affect school sites.





CYNGOR  
**GWYNEDD**

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