

MEETING OF	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	11 December 2025
TITLE	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Education
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	To ensure effective performance management
AUTHOR	Gwern ap Rhisiart – Head of Education
CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Dewi Jones

1. Why is scrutiny required?

To ensure that Committee Members undertake scrutiny of performance matters within the Department.

2. Background / Context

2.1 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 implementing the Council Plan 2023-28, and herein I report on the progress up to the end of September 2025, recognising that it is still early days in respect 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 me at a performance challenge meeting, and I am satisfied with the performance of the Department.

2.2 Rationale and justification

2.2.1 Performance of Pledges in the Council Plan Projects

I am very satisfied with the work carried out during the period in question, and **Appendix 1** provides updates on all of the Education Department's Council Plan projects. I would like to draw your attention to the following projects:

2.2.2 Modernising buildings and the learning environment

There are 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 to upgrade the area and create parking spaces for Ysgol Hiracl staff so that the school is a car-

free site. The tendering process for appointing contractors to design and make improvements to Ysgol Hiraël is still ongoing.

There are also plans to build a new school for Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes on the site of Ysgol Glanadda (now closed) in Bangor. The construction work is still underway with the aim for the new school to open in the Summer term of 2026.

2.2.3 Transforming education for children in their early years

The admissions policy for Gwynedd schools has been operational since September 2025 and notes that children attending Nursery class in Gwynedd schools are expected to be fully toilet-trained before they start. We continue to share resources with parents and share information through social media.

The work of rolling out the childcare provision for two-year-olds to new areas is underway, with 30 childcare settings providing a service for two-year-olds through the medium of Welsh or bilingually since September 2025. 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 that standards can be raised to meet Flying Start requirements.

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

Following the receipt of almost 800 survey responses in 2024 from 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 times (secondary schools) and the findings of the surveys reflect 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 a number of measures for schools to attain to be recognised as a 'Cost Friendly' School.

The Cost Friendly School Audit planned by the working group was shared with schools in November. All schools will receive a copy of the responses in the form of a plan so that they can implement the aspects which they have identified as needing attention.

3. 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, please see below some of the highlights. For full details of performance against the Department's measures, refer to **Appendix 2**.

Catering

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

During 2024/25, Cyngor Gwynedd served 902,160 free school meals, compared to 896,083 in 2023/24. A total of 71.3% of Gwynedd primary school children have taken up the offer of free school meals during September 2025. I am extremely proud of this achievement, and I am also eager for the Department to further promote the offer amongst children and families to encourage more take-up by families.

The Sustainable Schools Challenge

Following the success of the bid to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Schools Challenge, it is a pleasure to report on the progress of a project in which the input of all stakeholders is central to the vision of building an eco-friendly school and community facilities. The project aims to meet the Welsh Government's ambitious carbon target of 350 kgCO₂/m² by 2030 by focusing on the Circular Economy principles with the re-purposing of building materials from other buildings that are no longer in use in a new building.

Learners at Ysgol Bontnewydd have now settled at the temporary school which is on the site where the new building will be built. During the next phase, a range of construction and environment related activities and STEM subject learning resources will be developed with the school, to include Mathematics in Construction and Environmental Workshops, to ensure that all learners are fully involved in the construction process from the outset.

Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion service

There has been an increase in the demand for the Counselling Service due to the number of referrals being made, particularly primary age learners. We are trying to respond to this demand by adapting counselling time for the primary, and monitoring waiting lists carefully.

We continue to look at the capacity of our special schools and centres. Additionally, the work of adapting some classrooms at Ysgol Pendalar has been completed, and a 'pod' has also been installed to promote learners' life skills and independence. This has been an excellent development and much welcomed by learners.

Attendance

Attendance is still a high priority for us and 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 91.92% (the Welsh average was 91.9% in October 2025). There has been an upward trend in the last three years but we acknowledge that work is still ongoing to raise attendance to pre-pandemic levels.

There is a particular focus on vulnerable groups (e.g. pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils with Additional Learning Needs and Looked After Children), and a range of strategies are implemented to uphold this positive trend, including support from the Welfare Officers.

Exclusions

Another area that has received attention over the past year is fixed-term and permanent exclusions as a result of challenging behaviours within our schools. Following an in-depth review of the Inclusion Service, work has been carried out to strengthen the provision which has involved moving forward 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.

Pupil Referral Unit - Camu i'r Copa

I am delighted to report that the Pupil Referral Unit located on the former Ysgol Felinwnda site in Llanwnda, is now operating as a registered provision and has started to support learners. This Centre will be an essential resource for young people in the area who require tailored educational support, helping them to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment and which is responsive to their individual needs.

As a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), Canolfan Felinwnda - known as *Camu i'r Copa* - offers a specialist provision for pupils who may be experiencing difficulties in mainstream education. The Centre offers small classrooms, personalised learning plans, and comprehensive emotional, social and behavioural support.

Our mission is to restore pupils' confidence, build their resilience and equip them with the tools that they need to reintegrate into mainstream education where possible, or to make a positive transition to further education or vocational pathways. By offering a broad curriculum, therapeutic support, and with a dedicated team of staff, our aim is to ensure that all pupils reach their potential and improve their well-being alongside their academic attainment.

Located in the heart of the community of Felinwnda, the centre also underpins our commitment to inclusion. By delivering a local provision, we are reducing barriers in terms of access and ensuring that young people do not have to travel far for specialist support. This aligns with Cyngor Gwynedd's wider vision for modernising education.

Youth Service

The Youth Service provision offered involves community work with local partners, along with support in secondary schools and the community to promote personal and emotional well-being. The Service also provides support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) including advice on employability, health and housing matters.

Between April 2025 and September 2025, there were 3,240 participants in the project for 11–19-year-olds. Over the past few months, the Service has continued to roll out and strengthen its community provision with a marked increase compared to data for the previous year, including four new community youth clubs at Ty'n Llan (Llandwrog), Trawsfynydd, Tywyn and Mynytho, and a further two clubs to open in the new year in Aberdyfi and Bala.

There are currently 32 projects and community clubs running on a weekly basis across Gwynedd; 16 are located in Arfon, 9 in Meirionnydd and 7 in Dwyfor. This provision includes 10 clubs funded by local councils, three Friendly Clubs in co-operation with Derwen, 18 mobile community clubs and one Neuro club, which ensure a balanced mix of general provision and specialist provision to meet the various needs of young people in the county.

In addition to the mobile service, ten fixed community clubs are still operating regularly with funding from local town councils, providing a total of 12 evenings per week. These are located in Bethesda, Caernarfon, Bethel, Rhiwlas, Llanrug, Deiniolen, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Penygroes. These clubs play a central role in fostering a sense of belonging to the community and providing young people with opportunities to socialise, develop new skills and partake in positive activities.

Looking to the future, two new community clubs have already been confirmed for the new year, along with the intention to open a further two clubs in the next academic year. This reflects the continuous growth and increasing demand for a community-based youth provision across all parts of Gwynedd, further strengthening the capacity of the Youth Service to respond to the needs of young people at a local level.

4. Consultation

The report has been created based on the information and content of the Education Department's latest performance challenge meeting, with the Chief Executive, Head of Department, Service Managers and I attending this meeting.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report on the Council Plan projects 2025-26

Appendix 2: Education Department Performance Measures