

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of Item:	Schools Strategy 2026 - 2036
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Dewi Jones, Cabinet Member for Education
Relevant officer:	Gwern ap Rhisiart – Head of Education
Date of meeting:	10 February 2026

1. Decision Sought

- 1.1 That the Cabinet approves the Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026 - 2036 (**Appendix 1**), and delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Education, in consultation with the Head of Education, to make insignificant and editorial changes to the Strategy prior to its formal publication, provided that those changes do not materially affect the content, strategic direction, priorities or financial implications of the Strategy.

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

- 2.1 The current Strategy dates back to 2010. Following an extended process of stakeholder engagement, we wish to receive the Cabinet's seal of approval on the content that will underpin the direction of education in Gwynedd over the next decade.

3. Introduction and Rationale

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

3.2 Background / Introduction

- 3.2.1 The Education Department has produced the Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026 - 2036 in order to set a clear direction for school provision over the next decade. There have been far-reaching changes in education in Wales in recent years, and the new Strategy responds to national changes such as the Curriculum for Wales and the Additional Learning Needs Legislation and the Education Wales (2028) Tribunal together with increasing expectations on schools, and the need to modernise buildings and resources.
- 3.2.2 Local considerations and drivers influence the education system, and the vision and objectives of the Strategy as well. We need to make sure 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 likely to be faced by the system now, and into the future, such as:

- Ensuring the viability and resilience of our schools when learner numbers decline due to 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 provision to enable the children and young people of 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 as a result of the results of the 2021 Census.
- Ensuring excellent wellbeing support services for the children and young people of Gwynedd to help them overcome obstacles 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 the expectation for the schools estate to be carbon-free over the coming period.

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

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

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

3.2.4 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 which 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.

3.2.5 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 leadership models, sharing expertise where appropriate and building the capacity of current and future leaders, the Strategy seeks to create a more resilient system that is less susceptible to the impact of change.

2. Ensuring a sustainable and effective schools network

The Strategy considers how the schools network can be organised so that each one 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 the variances in standards between settings and improving learner experiences.

5. Emphasis on wellbeing, 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**

It highlights our new support arrangements which will offer a more rapid and uniform response to challenges, ensuring that effective interventions take place before problems worsen.

3.2.6 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.

4. **Rationale and justification for recommending the decision**

The Cabinet needs to adopt the Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026 - 2036 in order to ensure that the Council has a current and sound strategic framework to guide school provision over the next decade. The current Strategy dates from 2010 and no longer reflects the current policy, demographic or financial context.

The new Strategy responds directly to:

- significant national changes, including the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the Additional Learning Needs regime;
- local challenges such as a reduction in pupil numbers, difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, and significant financial pressure on the school system;
- the need to ensure that the school network is sustainable, resilient and able to provide education of a consistent standard to all learners.

The Strategy sets clear priorities to:

- strengthen the leadership and capacity of schools;
- develop a skilled, bilingual and sustainable workforce;
- improve consistency, inclusion and well-being of learners and staff;
- invest strategically in the school estate and learning environments.

In drawing it up, the Council has engaged with key stakeholders, including headteachers, governors, education staff and children and young people, and the Strategy has been subject to formal scrutiny by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee. The version presented to the Cabinet reflects the feedback received and strengthens the document in terms of focus, clarity and governance arrangements.

The adoption of the Strategy enables the Council to:

- operate in a coherent and transparent manner over the medium and long term;
- comply with statutory duties, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Equality Act 2010;
- provide a clear basis for making strategic decisions in the field of schools.

Delegating authority to the Cabinet Member for Education, in consultation with the Head of the Education Department, to make minor editorial changes before publishing the Strategy ensures that the final document is consistent, clear and suitable for implementation, without affecting its strategic direction or its financial implications.

5. Engagement

5.1 When drawing up the Strategy, we took the opportunity to engage with stakeholders in order to receive input and reflect the views and opinions of those who will use and implement the Strategy.

We engaged with Headteachers of Secondary, Primary and Special Schools, the Gwynedd Governors' Forum, as well as the Children and Young People's County Forum, ensuring that a wide range of professional views and learners' voices guide the development of the Strategy.

In addition, an electronic questionnaire was open for a period of eight weeks, giving relevant stakeholders, including schools, governors and education staff, the opportunity to present their comments and opinions on the Strategy.

A total of 19 responses were received, with over half of these coming from school governors, providing valuable qualitative feedback. In general, the responses showed support for the strategic direction of the document, recognising that it responds realistically to the county's demographic, financial and educational challenges, and sets a clear vision for the medium and long term. Key themes were identified such as the sustainability of the school network, the importance of the Welsh language and immersion education, the challenges of the workforce, the wellbeing of pupils, and the need for clear governance arrangements.

A specific engagement exercise was held with young people through the Children and Young People's County Forum to ensure that their experiences and views inform the Strategy. The discussions drew attention to the importance of the Welsh language as a core element of identity and school life, the need for a fair and inclusive learning experience, concerns about teaching arrangements such as the use of temporary teachers and digital learning provision, and a clear expectation that mechanisms for

young people's voice and participation in decisions that affect them should be strengthened. These findings are strongly in line with the main objectives of the Strategy and underline the importance of continuing to engage with young people in its implementation.

In addition, the feedback received through these engagement activities was considered alongside the comments of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee, in order to refine and complete the Strategy before presenting it to the Cabinet.

Taken together, this engagement has provided a solid evidence base to inform the Cabinet's decisions regarding the implementation of the Strategy.

More details about who we have engaged with can be found in the Composite Impact Assessment at **Appendix 2**. The results of the engagement can be seen at **Appendix 3** – Questionnaire results, and **Appendix 4** – Engagement with the County Children and Young People's Forum.

6. Comments from the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

6.1 On receiving the recommendations of the Members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 11 December 2025, the Head of Education, together with the Cabinet Member for Education, have carefully considered the full range of comments submitted by the Members when formulating the Strategy. As a result of this scrutiny process, the Education Department has drawn up a revised draft which reflects the feedback received and which significantly strengthens the Strategy in terms of clarity, focus and governance arrangements.

Safeguarding – safeguarding is firmly set as a central priority throughout the Strategy, and is clearly reflected in the values and priority areas. In order to underline its importance, the information relating to safeguarding and well-being has been moved to more prominent positions within the document, ensuring that the duty to safeguard children and young people is clear and core to all aspects of the educational provision.

Poverty and social equity - these principles are rooted in the values that form the basis of the Strategy, with the aim of ensuring that every pupil, regardless of their background or circumstances, receives the support and opportunities to realise their full potential. This area is further supported through a specific project within the Council's Plan 2023 - 2028 which focuses on promoting the wellbeing of children and young people and reducing the costs associated with sending children to school, including work such as conducting an audit in schools and developing a family-friendly cost Charter.

Access to the voice of parents - meaningful engagement with parents has been incorporated by sharing the Strategy with the Governors' Forum, as well as engaging with schools in order to reflect the views of parents, ensuring that their views guide the development and implementation of the Strategy.

Inclusion – inclusion receives specific attention through the Education Department's Inclusion Strategy launched in 2025, which supports the vision of providing a fair and accessible education system that meets the diverse needs of all learners.

The Welsh language - the Welsh language is a cross-cutting theme throughout the Strategy and one of the core values that shapes and guides the development of the education system in Gwynedd, reflecting a continuous commitment to strengthening the language and its use within education and school life.

School staff wellbeing - the importance of staff wellbeing is recognised as a key element of a successful education system, and there is a clear commitment to developing a School Staff Wellbeing Strategy by the next academic year in order to support and maintain the education workforce.

Faith Schools - the important contribution of faith schools to Gwynedd's educational provision is recognised, and the unique role they play in supporting the spiritual, moral and community needs of pupils. When implementing the Strategy, the Council will continue to work constructively with the governing body of faith-based schools and their relevant partners, ensuring that any developments respect their religious character, while fitting in with the wider vision for a fair, inclusive and high-quality education system.

In addition, in accordance with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee, a new chapter on Governance has been added to the Strategy. This chapter strengthens accountability, supervision and decision-making arrangements, explaining key roles and responsibilities and ensuring that the governance arrangements are robust, transparent and suitable to support the vision for education in Gwynedd.

7. Composite Impact Assessment

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council is required to consider the impact that a change in any policy or procedure (or the creation of a new policy or procedure) will have on people with protected equality characteristics. The Council also has additional general duties to ensure fairness and to foster good relationships. The Composite Impact Assessment can be found at **Appendix 2**. The Strategy has been prepared taking into account the findings of the assessment which had not identified issues that would outweigh moving forward with the Strategy.

8. Contribution to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The aim of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

The Act places a well-being duty on public bodies and aims to fulfil the seven well-being goals by following the five ways of working.

The Act places a well-being duty on the Council to carry out sustainable development work by working in alignment with the 'sustainable development principle'. This means that the impact on people in the future must be considered when making decisions.

The Composite Impact Assessment can be found at **Appendix 2**, 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.

9. Observations of the Statutory Officers

9.1 Chief Finance Officer

I welcome the Schools Strategy which sets out a clear vision for the school system over the next 10 years, explaining with evidence the envisaged situation, and the challenges the Council faces over the period to ensure that our schools remain sustainable. Schools have a total budget of over £100 million, so adopting a strategy and vision for the area is a key milestone.

9.2 Monitoring Officer

The significance of the adoption of this Strategy for Gwynedd Schools is highlighted in the report. It allows Cabinet to set objectives for its responsibilities in relation to the organisation of schools within the county with a clear vision. The preparation of the Strategy has already received legal input. The steps and engagement that have taken place in the preparation of this document are explained along with the input of the Scrutiny Committee. I am satisfied with the propriety of the decision sought.

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026 – 2036

Appendix 2 - Composite Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 - Gwynedd Schools Strategy 2026 - 2036 Questionnaire Results

Appendix 4 - Engaging with the County Children and Young People's Forum