

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	8 February 2024
Title of Item:	Estyn Inspection of Cyngor Gwynedd Education Services
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Estyn carried out an inspection of education services at Cyngor Gwynedd during the week commencing 26 June 2023. The report on Estyn's findings following the inspection was published on 20 September 2023. The report can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to present the Estyn report on education services at Cyngor Gwynedd for discussion before the Governance and Audit Committee. The Governance and Audit Committee has a duty to review and assess the Council's risk management arrangements, internal control, performance management and corporate governance and as part of that duty, there is an expectation to consider the reports of external review bodies such as Audit Wales, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).
- 1.3 A discussion has already taken place at a meeting of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 8 November 2023.

2. A SUMMARY OF THE ESTYN REPORT. (June 2023)

- 2.1 The summary of the Estyn report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd states that:
- education is a clear priority in the Council's plans;
 - the Authority's staff embrace the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd and strive to embed these principles in their day-to-day work;
 - the inspection outcomes of Cyngor Gwynedd's schools and other education settings are strong; authority and GwE officers have a good knowledge of providers who can support them;
 - intervention to support schools that are a cause of concern is very effective, but in a very few cases, it has not been timely enough;
 - the well-being of children and young people in Gwynedd benefits from the support provided by the Youth Service, this is especially true for vulnerable pupils who are at risk of not being in education, employment or training after they leave school;
 - Gwynedd's school attendance rates do not currently compare favourably with national rates;
 - provision for learners with social, emotional and behavioural needs has strengthened, however, neither the status of, nor the steps for accessing the behaviour support hubs, are wholly clear;

- promoting the Welsh language is a clear priority for the authority and the education service;
- the immersion centres are particularly successful in enabling latecomers to the language to acquire Welsh, together with developing an innovative virtual resource to practise language patterns and vocabulary and dedicated podcasts on the benefits of learning Welsh;
- a strong feature of the authority's work with regard to the Welsh language is the range of valuable Welsh-medium resources that the authority's staff have developed for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and their families;
- the authority provides a wide range of post-16 courses that respond to the linguistic and economic needs of the county, however, the process of reviewing Arfon's post-16 education arrangements has been slow;
- positive examples of leaders implementing beneficial strategies that have led to improvements e.g. the authority's digital strategy, work on modernising schools and strengthening immersion provision;
- safeguarding arrangements within the education service are generally sound;
- the local authority has a good understanding of the financial situation within the education service.

3. ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 As part of its Inspection, Estyn noted the following recommendations:

- Ensure that leaders act strategically on all aspects of their work and that they have suitable oversight and full consideration of risk regarding important aspects that have arisen during the inspection.
- Improve arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and promoting pupils' attendance.
- Strengthen provision to respond to the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and ensure arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of that provision.

3.2 The Education Department is in the process of reviewing its arrangements for planning improvement. We are eager to nurture a culture of continuous self-evaluation in the department in order to ensure that we achieve our purpose. Appendix 2 highlights the guidance that has recently been shared with the Education Department's managers.

3.3 Managers have produced improvement action plans in response to the Estyn recommendations. These plans include clear milestones and are reviewed regularly. As the self-evaluation cycle becomes embedded, the entire process will become an integral part of the department's work.

3.4 The improvement plans and their progress will be discussed with Estyn during our termly contact meetings.

3.5 In Appendix 3 you can see an initial action plan in response to Estyn's recommendations.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:-

- Provide observations on the contents of the Estyn report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd;
- Consider any arrangements to scrutinise the Department's arrangements to respond to the report's recommendations in a timely manner.