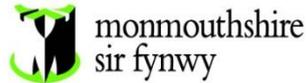


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County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Monday, 2 March 2026

Notice of Reports Received following Publication of Agenda.

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 10th March, 2026 at 10.00 am,

Attached are reports that the committee will consider as part of the original agenda but were submitted to democratic services following publication of the agenda.

Item No	Item	Pages
4.	Estyn Report - To scrutinise the findings of the latest Estyn report.	1 - 20
6.	School Attendance Report - To scrutinise the latest figures on school attendances.	21 - 28

Paul Matthews
Chief Executive

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SUBJECT: Estyn Inspection of Monmouthshire’s Education Services

MEETING: Performance and Overview Committee

DATE: 10th March 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Members of the Performance and Overview Committee a summary of the findings from the Estyn core inspection report of education services in Monmouthshire County Council which was undertaken by in November 2025 and published in January 2026. It will highlight both those areas of strength and the areas for development identified.
- 1.2 The report is intended to support Members in exercising their scrutiny role by:
 - providing a balanced overview of Estyn’s judgements;
 - identify areas where progress has been secured since the previous inspection; and
 - identifying issues where further challenge, monitoring or assurance may be required.
- 1.3 In doing so, the report places particular emphasis on Estyn’s “however” statements, which highlight where practice maybe effective but not yet sufficiently consistent, precise or sustainable across the Authority or may simply require further attention.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members of the Select Committee:
 - Note the overall findings of the Estyn inspection of education services.
 - Consider the key strengths and areas for development identified by Estyn.
 - Identify priority areas for future scrutiny in response to the inspection findings.
 - Request updates, as appropriate, on progress in addressing Estyn’s recommendations.

3. KEY ISSUES

Leadership, Evaluation and Governance

- 3.1 Estyn identifies leadership within the Authority as a clear strength, underpinned by a coherent strategic vision rooted in equity, inclusion and strong values. Inspectors note that this has fostered trust, transparency and effective collaboration across education services.
- 3.2 The Authority has strengthened its processes for self-evaluation and improvement since the previous inspection, and officers use a broad range of information to understand performance and identify priorities.
- 3.3 However, Estyn concludes that there is too much variation in the quality and precision of evaluation across services. Evaluation often focuses on describing activity rather than clearly evidencing impact on outcomes for children and young people. This limits the ability of leaders and elected members to assess effectiveness and drive improvement at pace.
- 3.4 While scrutiny arrangements are in place and Members are engaged, Estyn notes that reports to scrutiny are not always sufficiently precise to consistently enable effective challenge.

School Improvement and Financial Sustainability

- 3.5 The inspection recognises a well-established and coherent approach to school improvement, supported by strong collaboration with the Local Authority School Improvement Service (LASIS). Roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear, and schools receive timely support and challenge.
- 3.6 Professional learning for school leaders, staff and governors is identified as comprehensive, responsive and increasingly impactful.
- 3.7 However, Estyn does raise the matter of the financial position of schools. A high proportion of schools remain in deficit, with limited progress in reducing overall deficit balances.
- 3.8 Although the Authority understands the causes of financial pressure and provides support to schools, Estyn notes that reporting to elected members does not always clearly articulate the impact of interventions or the longer-term risks associated with rising deficits.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

- 3.9 Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is identified as a notable strength. Since the previous inspection, the Authority has established a clear inclusion strategy, strengthened professional learning, and improved early identification and support.

- 3.10 Inspectors highlight strong partnership working, effective person-centred planning and increased confidence within mainstream schools to meet a wider range of needs.
- 3.11 However, Estyn identifies weaknesses in system-wide tracking and monitoring of pupils with ALN. These limitations reduce leaders' ability to evaluate impact consistently, identify trends and plan strategically at an authority level.

Attendance and Inclusion

- 3.12 The Authority's trauma-informed, relationship-centred approach to improving attendance is identified as a strength, with clear improvements in primary school attendance and early signs of progress for some vulnerable groups.
- 3.13 However, Estyn is clear that attendance for secondary-age pupils and pupils with ALN requires further improvement. Inspectors also note that evaluation of attendance strategies is not yet sufficiently rigorous to determine which interventions are having the greatest impact.

Welsh Language and Welsh-medium Education

- 3.14 Estyn recognises a clear and well-communicated vision for the Welsh language through the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), supported by effective partnership working and professional learning.
- 3.15 However, progress is not yet consistent across the system. A minority of pupils do not continue into Welsh-medium secondary education, and a majority of English-medium schools inspected since 2022 have required improvement in Welsh language provision.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The inspection provides assurance that education remains a strategic priority for the Authority and that leadership capacity is strong.
- 4.2 However, the findings also identify a number of areas where Select Committee scrutiny can add particular value, including:
- the consistency and impact of evaluation and performance reporting;
 - the sustainability of school improvement in the context of financial deficits;
 - progress in improving secondary and ALN attendance;
 - the effectiveness of system-wide monitoring of outcomes for pupils with ALN; and
 - the consistency of Welsh language provision across English-medium schools.

- 4.3 The Committee may wish to use the inspection findings to inform its forward work programme and to seek assurance on how the Authority is addressing Estyn's recommendations and mitigating identified risks.

5. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 5.1 An Equality and Future Generations Evaluation Assessment is not applicable in this case as there are no proposed changes to existing service delivery and policy.

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 6.1 There is no option appraisal associated with this performance report, it is not a report for decision.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no resource implication associated with this report.

8. CONSULTEES

- 8.1 Children, Learning, Skills and Economy Directorate Leadership Team
Cllr. Laura Wright, Cabinet member for Education

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 Not applicable

10. AUTHOR

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A report on education services in

Monmouthshire County Council

**County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
Monmouthshire
NP15 1GA**

Date of inspection: November 2025

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh

About Monmouthshire County Council

Monmouthshire County Council is located in the east of Wales and has a total population of just over 93,000 people. Monmouthshire has 11,340 pupils across 34 schools. The local authority maintains three secondary schools, one all-age school, 30 primary schools (of which three are Welsh-medium) and one pupil referral service. There are 25 non-maintained settings.

The Chief Executive was appointed in 2009. The Strategic Director, Children, Learning, Skills and Economy, took up his post in 2017. The council leader has been in post since May 2022 and the Cabinet Member for Children, Learning, Skills and Economy took up her post in May 2025. The local authority was last inspected in February 2020.

In 2025-2026, the Council's net education budget is approximately £84 million. The delegated school budget per pupil is £6,316 per pupil, which is the lowest of all local authorities in Wales.

Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people in Monmouthshire is noted below:

- Over a three year average, 12.8% of pupils aged five to fifteen are eligible for free school meals, lower than the Wales average of 21.3%
- 2% of pupils aged five and over are fluent in Welsh, which is lower than the Wales average of 14%
- 10% of pupils aged five and over are from ethnic minorities, below the Wales average of 16%
- 12% of pupils have additional learning needs, higher than the Wales average of 10%
- 98 children per 10,000 were looked after by the local authority in 2019, which is slightly lower than the Wales average of 116 children per 10,000

Summary

Leaders demonstrate a coherent and strategically led approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. A clear vision rooted in equity, transparency and strong values fosters trust and collaboration. Clear systems and purposeful collaboration underpin improvements across school improvement, additional learning needs (ALN) provision, attendance, Welsh language development and safeguarding. These factors combine to support continuous improvement in pupils' progress, inclusion and well-being.

The local authority has strengthened its processes for evaluation and improvement although there is generally too much variation in how well leaders and officers evaluate the impact of their work. Leaders prioritise professional learning, reflection and succession planning. Governance arrangements support informed decision-making, although officers' scrutiny reporting lacks sufficient precision in places. Financial management understanding is secure. However, financial deficits in schools create risks that may hinder the sustainability of improvements if not addressed robustly.

Leaders promote a strong safeguarding culture. Schools receive timely and highly beneficial support and advice. In addition, the local authority is proactive in identifying emerging trends and risks in safeguarding. Officers respond effectively to these trends. These factors collectively enhance pupils' safety, well-being and learning experiences.

A clearly articulated school improvement strategy, aligned with the work of the local authority school improvement service (LASIS), establishes robust systems of support and challenge. Well-defined roles, strong accountability and consistent information-gathering enable leaders and School Improvement Partners (SIPs) to develop an accurate understanding of schools. The introduction of refined thematic reviews and swift intervention through the Team Around the School (TAS) approach ensures that barriers to improvement are addressed promptly. This co-ordinated approach ensures that support is timely, targeted and evaluated regularly.

Since the last inspection, leaders have established a clear strategic vision for inclusion and notably improved the provision for pupils with ALN. The reshaping of systems, enhanced collaboration between specialist teams and schools, and strong professional learning for ALNCoS and school staff create increased confidence and competence in meeting a wide range of pupil needs. Schools are increasingly able to meet a broader range of ALN within mainstream environments, fostering a culture where pupils with ALN remain within their communities. A comprehensive early-years ALN model enables early identification and smoother transitions into school. However, the authority's inclusion tracking systems limit leaders' ability to monitor the progress of pupils with ALN securely.

The authority's trauma-informed, relationship-centred approach shapes its work to improve attendance. High expectations, regular consultations, strengthened data scrutiny and multi-agency working ensure attendance issues are identified and addressed early. The establishment of a family liaison team improves communication with families and reduces barriers to attendance. Strong improvements are evident in primary attendance and early signs of progress are emerging in more vulnerable groups. In primary settings attendance rates are improving. However, overall attendance of secondary pupils and for pupils with ALN require improvement.

The authority's clear Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) vision and collaborative structures drive improvement in developing the use of Welsh in schools as well as developing Welsh-medium provision. Strong partnership working, transparent communication with stakeholders and targeted professional learning create conditions for improvement. Increasing numbers of pupils are entering Welsh-medium reception classes. However, a minority of pupils do not continue into Welsh-medium secondary education. A majority of English-medium settings and schools inspected since 2022, have had a recommendation to improve the Welsh language provision. In response to this the authority is focussing on supporting school leaders to develop a Welsh vision and culture.

Messages and evaluations from a youth work inspection that was undertaken shortly before this inspection has helped to inform the wider local government education services inspection, where relevant.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the consistency of evaluation processes to evaluate the impact of local authority work more effectively
- R2 Improve attendance, particularly for secondary-age pupils and key learner groups
- R3 Continue to support and challenge schools to reduce deficit budgets

What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Education services and their impact

How well does the local authority support and challenge their schools to improve outcomes for pupils, including those who are more able?

Monmouthshire County Council has a clear strategy for school improvement. There is a strong approach to supporting and challenging schools. Collaboration between the local authority and the local authority school improvement service (LASIS) is well established and has strengthened over time. This has helped secure an effective and coherent approach to school improvement.

Roles and responsibilities of the LASIS and the local authority are clearly defined, securing seamless alignment of support. There are clear lines of accountability that are well understood by all partners, ensuring support is timely and appropriate. The local authority maintains a strong focus on improving leadership, the quality of teaching, learning and outcomes for children and young people. Since the last core inspection, the local authority has strengthened its focus on improving outcomes for more able pupils. This has had a notable impact on the outcomes of this group of pupils, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4.

There are comprehensive systems to gather a range of relevant information about schools and the pupil referral service (PRS). This helps the local authority to have a strong understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in these settings. The Principal School Improvement Partner and local authority school improvement lead work closely. They provide clear guidance to School Improvement Partners (SIPs) which has helped to improve the effectiveness of their work. A useful electronic system makes suitable use of inspection outcomes, data and first-hand evidence to provide clear insight into the progress of individual settings and schools.

The local authority makes effective use of a range of opportunities to support and challenge their schools and the LASIS. These include partnership meetings with officers from LASIS, as well as professional discussions which include leaders from schools and the PRS. These enable officers to ensure priorities are appropriate and support is effectively aligned to need. They evaluate the impact of this support regularly. Thematic reports are a useful process to focus on priorities identified by the authority. These reports provide a suitable overview of strengths and areas for improvement in specific areas. Reports have recently been revised and refined, providing schools and settings with sufficient time to implement any recommendations effectively and ensuring they have greater impact. Schools or settings that require additional support and challenge are identified well and are provided with swift support through a team around the school (TAS) approach. This

approach enables officers and school leaders to address barriers to learning effectively, leading to sustained improvement.

Since February 2022, we have inspected 20 primary schools, 11 non-maintained settings, 3 secondary schools and the PRS. Two secondary schools and the PRS were judged to require significant improvement. Since this time, one secondary school has closed and therefore is no longer in significant improvement. Of the remaining schools no follow-up was required, with many having spotlights of good practice or case studies identified.

The professional learning offer for school staff and education practitioners is comprehensive, flexible and responsive. It provides well targeted support for schools. This offer is regularly evaluated, and officers make changes to their approaches in response to these findings. For example, they are currently piloting a peer review model. The partner schools' model is effective in facilitating school led support, with robust systems for quality assurance and monitoring impact. As a result, schools benefit from tailored support to help them strengthen teaching, leadership and pupil outcomes. Governors also benefit from a comprehensive programme of support. This includes mandatory elements, as well as local and national priorities such as Cymraeg 2050 and the impact of poverty on the attainment of children and young people.

How effective is the local authority's provision for supporting children and young people with ALN?

Since the last inspection, leaders have established a clear strategic vision for inclusion and notably improved the provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). The authority provides robust and increasingly effective support for children and young people with ALN. There is strong, coherent leadership that places inclusion at the centre of the authority's work. This has created a culture of inclusivity, where most children and young people with ALN are educated in mainstream schools in their communities.

The local authority's beneficial inclusion strategy draws appropriately on national policy frameworks and outlines a clear continuum of provision across mainstream, outreach and specialist services. Its strong emphasis on early intervention and a rights-based approach has helped to shape more preventative practice across the county. Expectations for inclusive classroom approaches are explicit, and schools are becoming increasingly confident in adapting teaching and planning to meet a wider range of ALN within mainstream contexts.

Leaders have played a pivotal role in reshaping systems, expectations and provision. The inclusion team, educational psychology service and specialist advisory teachers offer a valuable range of professional guidance that strengthens the capacity of schools and settings to meet pupils' needs effectively. Through successful collaborative working, they have built high levels of trust between the authority, settings, schools and the pupil

referral service (PRS). As a result, individual children and young people's needs are generally identified early and addressed promptly.

The authority has responded effectively to the statutory requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Officers have taken a methodical approach to the transformation, ensuring that schools and settings receive appropriate guidance throughout. Person-centred planning is a well-established feature of practice. Pupils benefit from high-quality local authority individual development plans (IDPs) that inform the additional learning provision (ALP) and ensure smooth transitions between phases. This ensures continuity of support as needs evolve.

Officers prioritise the early identification of needs effectively. The authority has developed a comprehensive approach to supporting pre-school children, enabling staff to identify needs at a very early stage and provide meaningful guidance to families. Early years ALN provision is well co-ordinated and supports transition into nursery or school well.

Overall, the authority's inclusion tracking systems limit the ability of leaders to monitor the progress of pupils with ALN and evaluate the impact of provision at a system level. This constrains strategic planning and reduces the precision with which leaders can identify trends and evaluate outcomes.

Professional learning for ALN is of high quality and well aligned to local priorities. Training for additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCOs) is comprehensive, and the authority's cluster-based work helps to promote consistency and shared understanding. Staff across settings, schools and the PRS, benefit from a wide range of high-quality universal and targeted training delivered by the educational psychology service and specialist teams. This investment has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and support for pupils with ALN in mainstream schools.

Partnership working is a notable strength of the authority's approach. Strong collaboration through well-managed panels and multi-agency fora ensures timely decision-making and coordinated intervention. Relationships with partners such as health and social care are constructive and solution-focused, helping to ensure that pupils' needs are met in the most appropriate provision. As a result, parental disagreements are generally resolved sensitively and efficiently, with a very few escalating to formal appeals.

Monmouthshire's Autism in Schools and Settings (MASS) Programme

Monmouthshire's Autism in Schools and Settings (MASS) programme provides a purposeful and well-aligned strategic response to the increasing levels of neurodiversity identified in pupils. This is underpinned by a clear commitment to viewing autism as a 'difference not a deficit'. The authority's substantial investment in high-quality professional learning has established a shared language and strengthened staff competence, enabling settings and schools to embed person-centred, strengths-based approaches more consistently. The breadth and reach of bilingual training, accessed by more than 1,300 practitioners, has been complemented by a well-structured Autism Champion model, in all settings and schools, that distributes leadership effectively. This professional learning translates into daily practice well.

The programme's emphasis on authentic co-production and strong multi-agency partnership is a notable feature of its effectiveness. Involving young people with autism directly in strategic decisions ensures that provision is shaped by lived experience. Schools report clear benefits, including more autism-friendly environments, improved sensory regulation and more reflective practice. Overall, MASS is helping to drive a cultural shift towards more inclusive and supportive practice.

The authority's specialist resource bases (SRBs) provide valuable specialist teaching within mainstream settings, enabling many pupils with complex ALN to remain in their locality and maintain strong community relationships. As a result of strengthened quality assurance processes, the consistency and quality of provision across the SRBs have improved.

Leaders recognise that specialist and therapeutic capacity within the authority, particularly for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), does not fully meet rising levels of demand. As a result, a few pupils with the most complex needs are placed in out of county provisions. In addition, there is limited availability of Welsh-medium specialist provision.

Overall, leaders have strengthened the provision for post-16 pathways and vocational opportunities for many pupils with ALN. The SRBs for older pupils now provide education to the age of 19. Working closely with pupils, parents and carers and other stakeholders, staff at the SRBs develop a bespoke curriculum with a focus on independence, resilience and key functional skills. The SRBs offer a suitable range and balance of academic and vocational pathways. Opportunities for older pupils with ALN to work in the community and gain regular, valuable work experience are developing well. This includes pupils working in local charity shops, restaurants and supermarkets. This helps to developing beneficial pathways for pupils into further education, training and employment.

How effective is the local authority's work in improving the attendance of pupils in schools, and EOTAS provision?

The local authority demonstrates a strong commitment to improving pupil attendance across schools and for those educated other than at school (EOTAS). Across all relevant services, the local authority has embedded a clear vision for a trauma-informed approach which is underpinned by strong and trusting relationships. This shared understanding underpins the authority's inclusive ethos and ensures a consistent focus on children and young people's well-being as a foundation for improving attendance.

Officers promote high expectations for attendance and provide schools with appropriate support and challenge. Regular attendance consultations and systematic scrutiny of data lead to timely interventions and support. This has led to strong improvements in primary attendance and is beginning to impact positively on other groups of pupils such as pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM). Despite this, the attendance of secondary and pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) remain too low and require improvement.

At all levels, a community-focussed approach, involving multi-agency support, is used consistently. Senior officers deploy grant funding strategically to address attendance issues. The establishment of a family liaison officer team has had a beneficial impact, fostering positive relationships with families. This helps officers to identify and overcome barriers to regular attendance at school. However, the reliance on grant funding for family liaison officers creates uncertainty about the sustainability of this valuable provision.

Officers monitor school attendance closely. They adapt and refine provision in response to their findings to improving attendance across the authority. This has resulted in strengthened systems within the education welfare service, including more robust scrutiny of secondary pupil attendance. However, whilst officers use a full range of data, they do not evaluate the impact of strategies on whole school or local authority attendance carefully enough. As a result, they have overlooked important areas requiring improvement, such as the attendance of pupils identified with additional learning needs (ALN).

The recent introduction of a new leadership team in the pupil referral service (PRS) has brought stability and helped to strengthen strategies to improve attendance for the most vulnerable groups of learners. The use of bespoke learning pathways and appropriate reintegration plans are beginning to have a positive impact on the attendance of these children and young people.

Professional learning is a strong feature of the authority's approach to improving attendance. A broad range of high-quality training enhances staff understanding and capacity of this aspect and reinforces the authority's inclusive vision. This professional learning has also focussed on managing pupil behaviour. Although exclusion rates have

reduced recently, they remain too high and continue to have a negative impact on attendance overall.

How well does the local authority support and develop the use of Welsh in their settings and schools?

The local authority has a clear vision for supporting and developing the use of Welsh in their settings and schools as noted in their Welsh in Education Strategic plan (WESP). They communicate this with all stakeholders and partners. They work collaboratively with a range of partners in developing the priorities of the WESP and through promoting the benefits of bilingualism. In line with the WESP targets, Welsh-medium primary provision has developed appropriately over time.

The Welsh Education Forum (WEF) oversees the local authority's processes for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of its WESP. The WEF provides a forum to promote a strong culture of collaboration and creativity amongst stakeholders for realising the outcomes of the WESP. They evaluate progress against priorities termly and challenge progress robustly. This includes when discussing the pace of change in the development of Welsh-medium education in settings and schools across the local authority.

The local authority shares helpful information to support parents to make informed decisions regarding the language medium of their child's education from a young age. Successful partnerships to promote, support and develop the Welsh language ethos and culture is having a positive impact on increasing the numbers of pupils attending Welsh-medium reception classes. Despite the efforts of the local authority and its partners to support pupils to continue their secondary education through the medium of Welsh, a minority of pupils in the north of the authority do not continue their transition to Welsh-medium education.

The development of the late immersion classes supports the local authority's strategy to increase pupil numbers attending Welsh-medium schools across the authority well. Currently, the promotion sub-group of the WESP is actively engaged in promoting this provision further to inform parents of the opportunity of moving their child to Welsh-medium education at a later entry point in their statutory school life.

There is a comprehensive range of professional learning opportunities for both English-medium and Welsh-medium providers to support the development of Welsh across the local authority. However, a majority of English-medium settings and schools inspected since 2022, have had a recommendation to improve the Welsh language. In response to this, the authority is focussing on supporting school leaders to develop a Welsh vision and culture.

LASIS subject specialists monitor the Welsh language skills of the workforce well. They support school leaders to analyse workforce data to inform them of the progression of Welsh skills amongst their staff. This has led to targeted support for school staff to improve their Welsh language skills further. In addition, valuable partnerships have provided pupils with beneficial opportunities to develop their enthusiasm for learning Welsh. The number of pupils studying Welsh as a second language at A level has recently increased.

Leading and improving

Elected members and leaders within Monmouthshire County Council are committed to securing the best outcomes for children and young people. Education features prominently in the community and corporate plan, which takes suitable account of national priorities and the aims of the Well-being and Future Generations Act.

The Strategic Director for Children, Learning, Skills and Economy, and the Chief Executive Officer have established and shared a clear vision for education focussed on securing excellence, equity and the best outcomes for all. This vision is underpinned by the values of teamwork, flexibility, fairness, openness and kindness, and leaders demonstrate these strongly in all aspects of their work. This has established strong relationships between leaders, officers and stakeholders. Leadership has secured improvements in important aspects of the local authority's work, including the provision for pupils with ALN and school improvement support.

The strategic director provides assured, measured and calm leadership. A notable strength is the way in which he has developed a strong culture of trust and transparency where officers feel valued and supported whilst also understanding their responsibility to deliver improvements. There is a strong focus on tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and the strategic director has a steadfast commitment to ensuring the local authority's work aligns well to this goal.

Elected members have a broad understanding of the work of the directorate and have positive relationships with officers. Reports, such as the annual strategic director's report, help to keep them informed of important issues and challenges facing the authority. For example, they understand the need to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. This has supported them with decision-making and to maintain education as a high priority for the council.

Both the people and performance overview scrutiny committees consider the work of the directorate suitably and there are regular opportunities for them to receive reports and important updates about the directorate's work. Although scrutiny members are willing to ask pertinent questions of members and officers, reports to scrutiny are not always

sufficiently precise. As a result, scrutiny members are not always able to hold cabinet to account effectively enough.

The local authority has strengthened its processes for evaluation and improvement. These are understood well by officers and have led to improvements in service areas, including addressing many of the recommendations from the previous core inspection.

Officers at all levels use a range of suitable activities to gather information and data to help them to consider progress against education service plans and to identify broad strengths and areas for improvement across all service areas. This is supported by the annual strategic director's report which makes use of a broad evidence base and provides a sound overview of current performance. Despite these improvements, there is too much variation in how well leaders and officers evaluate the impact of their work. They often focus too heavily on describing activity rather than the impact on improving services or outcomes for children and young people. As a result, improvement priorities and success criteria are not always precise enough to drive more rapid improvements.

Senior leaders have established a strong culture of reflection amongst staff and professional learning is prioritised well. Staff benefit from a broad range of opportunities to develop their professional experiences and skills, for example through broadening responsibilities and achieving professional qualifications. Senior leaders think carefully about succession planning and use professional learning well to support this. Officers value the support they receive through line management and performance review arrangements. Regular one-to-one sessions provide helpful opportunities for officers to reflect on their practice. However, these processes do not always hold staff sufficiently to account for the impact of their work.

The local authority promotes a strong culture of safeguarding. Each directorate has a designated safeguarding person and a deputy, and each central team complete an annual safeguarding audit. These processes ensure that safeguarding is a high priority across all teams.

Throughout the local authority, children and young people are listened to well and their views are taken into account. For example, children and young people's voice is central to the practitioner concerns process, underpinned by the local authority's participation strategy.

Schools receive a high level of beneficial and timely support and advice with safeguarding matters. They appreciate how well officers use their skills and knowledge to support and challenge them proactively. Local authority officers identify emerging safeguarding issues effectively, for example about the growth in knife crime and harmful sexual behaviour.

They use this information to provide targeted support for children, young people and schools. The local authority's rights, respect and equality working group is having a positive impact on identifying trends in bullying and supporting schools to accurately record and deal with concerns.

There is a wide range of high-quality safeguarding training available for staff and school governors. All providers complete regular safeguarding audits and write action plans based on any shortcomings. The lead officer provides schools and other education settings with valuable support and feedback in relation to these plans.

There is a detailed and evaluative annual safeguarding report which is presented to the performance and overview scrutiny committee and full Council. Elected members ask appropriate questions to seek clarification, request further information and to challenge the report presented to them.

There is effective multi-agency work through the various corporate safeguarding groups, sharing of important information and attendance at key meetings. Schools and other education settings can access important information to track actions undertaken by other agencies when they have reported a concern about children and young people. This is a strength of the local authority's work.

Recent budget decisions have reflected that education remains a high priority for the council. Notably, the 2025-26 budget increase was the largest in Wales, raising Monmouthshire's per pupil spend above the Wales average for the first time since 2016-17. Historically, however, the authority's budgeted per pupil expenditure has consistently been below the Wales average, contributing to school overspends and the current deficits in school balances.

As of March 2025, 43% of Monmouthshire schools were in deficit, with a combined deficit of £4.1 million. On a per pupil basis, this was the highest in Wales. Despite efforts to support and challenge schools to reduce these, progress to date has been limited and the deficit continues to increase.

The authority has structured processes to monitor school budgets and has a strong understanding of schools' financial situations. It also understands the root causes of financial pressures across education. However, reports to elected members do not sufficiently articulate the reasons for individual school overspends or the impact of the Council's interventions. This limits the ability of elected members to assess and challenge the effectiveness of actions taken. Furthermore, reports do not clearly illustrate the trajectory of rising overspends and the risks this presents to the authority's overall financial position.

Finance officers work closely with schools, offering helpful support, advice and training. The authority is also proactive in responding to issues, for example, expanding the use of school resource bases and reviewing funding allocation methods to ensure they remain appropriate amid increasing demand. The education service recognises the need to make better use of benchmarking data in its support and challenge to schools.

The scheme for financing schools has not been updated since 2018 so no longer reflects the authority's current approach and the changed operating environment. For example, the authority has extended deficit recovery periods to as long as 10 years for a very few schools with substantial deficits.

The authority offers a comprehensive range of service level agreements (SLAs) and there is an overall high level of take up. However, while informal feedback is gathered, there is no systematic process for reviewing SLAs with schools.

The School Budget Forum has a broad membership that includes headteachers, local authority officers, elected members, governors and trades unions. The Forum adopts a proactive and collaborative approach to a range of key issues and recently played a significant role in reviewing elements of the funding formula.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- consulted the local authority on the local inspection questions to be used during the inspection, based on the authority's self-evaluation, strategic plans and relevant data held by Estyn
- analysed the outcomes from open questionnaires, including the views of learners, parents, school staff and governors, local authority staff, regional consortium staff, elected members and general public
- carried out a preliminary visit to the local authority to meet with a range of relevant partners to education services, such as learner representatives, headteachers and governors, and leaders from statutory and third sector agencies working with children and young people

During the inspection, inspectors:

- met with the leader of the council, elected members responsible for education services, elected members responsible for the scrutiny of education services, the chief executive, the director of education, other leaders and managers in education services, other relevant staff in the local authority, the managing director of the regional consortium for school improvement and other relevant staff from the regional consortium
- looked closely at the local authority's self-evaluation processes
- considered the local authority's strategic and operational plans for improvement
- scrutinised a variety of documents, including information on learner outcomes, information on the performance of schools and other education settings, including information from the regional consortium for school improvement, minutes from a range of meetings, reports presented to council or scrutiny, information relating to the safeguarding of learners and other information relevant to the local authority's education services held by Estyn

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- reviewed the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, standardise and ensure the quality of the inspection
- provided a draft copy of the report for the local authority to note any concerns with factual accuracy, and made amendments where necessary

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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SUBJECT: MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITY ATTENDANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION REPORT

MEETING: PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 10TH MARCH 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To inform members of the attendance of pupils in Monmouthshire from September 2024 – July 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Performance Scrutiny Committee receives the report and scrutinise the contents.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Local Authority (LA) places a strong emphasis on regular school attendance, positive behaviour, and wellbeing. Attendance is a key priority in the Community and Corporate Plan 'Learning Place.'
- 3.2 The Education Welfare Services uses a holistic approach to improve and secure good levels of attendance. This includes a wide range of support and intervention and a tiered approach to support and intervention, depending on need and levels of attendance.
- 3.3 The Education Welfare Service works effectively with schools to manage referral and provide support to pupils, families, and school staff. The service comprises of 5.6 full time equivalent Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), four full time Family Liaison Officers and one full time Elective Home Education Officer. Staffing is funded through a combination of core budget (42%) and grant funding (58%). All clusters have a named EWO, to enable them to support families with children in both the secondary and cluster primary schools effectively.
- 3.4 The LA monitors school attendance regularly. Half-termly data reports are collated and shared with all headteachers.
- 3.5 Welsh Government publish the attendance of pupils in maintained schools on a fortnightly basis. The publication of All Wales Core data sets for attendance in each school resumed in the academic year 2022-23 following a pause due the global pandemic.
- 3.6 Over a three-year period, attendance in Monmouthshire has been consistently amongst the highest in Wales and for most of the time, has been the highest.

- 3.7 Participation in Welsh Government focus groups, has supported and enhanced the development of strategies and interventions to improve attendance and inform the LA Engagement and Attendance Policy.
4. **REASONS:**
- 4.1 To enable Members to scrutinize the full report attached as Appendix 1, providing feedback and making recommendations as appropriate.
5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**
- Not required for a performance report
6. **EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):**
- Not required for a performance report.
7. **OPTIONS APPRAISAL**
- Not required for a performance report.
8. **EVALUATION CRITERIA**
- Not required.
9. **CONSULTEES:**
- Strategic Director Children, learning, skills, and economy
CLSE DMT
Cabinet Member for Education
10. **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**
- All Wales Attendance Framework
 - Statutory guidance to help prevent children and young people from missing education
 - Belonging, Engaging and Participating Guidance
 - Monmouthshire Attendance and Engagement Policy
 - Monmouthshire Attendance Handbook
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Monmouthshire Local Authority Attendance Report

Academic Year 2024-25

Focus: Pupil Attendance in Schools

Date of Report: 10th March 2026

1. Support and Challenge for Schools

- 1.1 The local authority (LA) places a strong emphasis on regular school attendance, positive behaviour and wellbeing. Attendance is a priority, as reflected in the Community and Corporate Plan 'Learning Place'. This means that the LA makes explicit links with a range of issues that can impact upon attendance such as poverty, social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, and additional learning needs (ALN), and ensures that promoting positive attendance is everyone's responsibility. The LA reinforces the importance of good attendance with parents/carers regularly through communications from the Strategic Director.
- 1.2 The LA Education Welfare Service adopts a holistic approach to improve and secure good levels of attendance and wellbeing. Officers work in partnership with school-based staff to ensure pupils and their families receive beneficial and timely support. Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) work within clusters of schools. This means they know the schools well, and the support they provide to families with children in different phases is consistent and cohesive. The LA makes use of punitive measures and a prosecution process where necessary, although this is a last resort and only undertaken when all other avenues have been exhausted.
- 1.3 The LA's Attendance and Engagement Policy provides a graduated approach for schools and the PRS to support improvements in attendance, through the consistent application of effective school-based strategies, well-established systems and processes such as:
 - targeted support for pupils and their families from Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and Family Liaison Officers (FLOs)
 - bespoke support for pupils to re-integrate into school after a period of absence
 - targeted interventions to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism, particularly for vulnerable pupils
 - support for pupils and families who elect for an education at home
 - a robust approach to managing pupils missing from education
 - advice and guidance including an Attendance Toolkit and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) guidance
 - close collaboration with key services such as inclusion, social services, health and the police

- 1.4 The Education Welfare Service (EWS) regularly analyses a wide range of attendance data to track and monitor levels of attendance for schools and groups of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals (FSM), ALN, and those who are persistently absent. This enables them to identify trends across the LA and evaluate the impact of their support on school attendance over time. This work forms the basis of consultation meetings and supports schools to reflect appropriately on their own data so that they evaluate the impact of their work to plan and implement long-term strategies to improve pupils' attendance.
- 1.5 EWS hold consultations with secondary schools and the PRS fortnightly, and primary schools half-termly. These meetings provide worthwhile opportunities for EWOs to challenge individual schools on the impact of their strategies to improve pupil and whole school attendance and understand the reasons behind cases of school absence. These discussions also include a review of individual cases to ensure interventions are appropriate, check attendance coding, carry out official register checks. This identifies pupils where non-attendance is a concern and a potential consideration for intervention and enables EWOs to provide appropriate advice, guidance and undertake planned interventions in a timely manner.
- 1.6 It is the expectation that nearly all pupils should attend school. However, when this is not possible and schools have exhausted all avenues, referrals for EWS support and intervention are considered by a panel. This approach ensures that there is a coordinated and consistent approach to referral, recording and reporting processes and a clear process for closing cases. The EWS undertakes relevant assessments in partnership with learners, parents/carers, school staff and other relevant parties, concerning low attendance at school or for those pupils receiving EOTAS provision.
- 1.7 Extensive multi-agency work has enhanced the understanding of, and support offered, around EBSA by professionals, including school staff, working with pupils and their families. This focuses on early identification and preventative support so that timely intervention occurs to promote positive outcomes and improve attendance, to prevent entrenched patterns of EBSA and persistent absenteeism. The LA uses a multi-agency Inclusion Panel and the Fair Access Panel to seek clarification on the most appropriate next steps or provision for particular groups of learners where low attendance or learner engagement are barriers to learning.
- 1.8 The LA fosters positive relationships through a range of approaches of which attendance is a key feature. FLOs promote good relationships within schools and the community and link closely with wider Community Focused Schools (CFS) work. They work with pupils, families, schools and community agencies such as food banks, and ensuring families are accessing services they may need. This collaborative working supports better engagement with schools, improves communication and helps to overcome barriers to attendance. CFS colleagues also use school spaces to develop and promote school community

engagement for families through the provision of school uniform support and community gardens.

- 1.9 The EWS work collaboratively with the School Health Nurse Team and CAMHS InReach to ensure, wherever possible, there are appropriate strategies in place to support pupils and families overcome their barriers to engagement with school.
- 1.10 The Rights, Respects and Equality (RRE) multi-agency group promotes positive relationships and works to reduce bullying, including work around the anti-racism agenda acknowledging the potential impact of these issues on the SEMH needs of learners and their attendance.
- 1.11 The Wellbeing in Schools Partnership Group brings together school representatives with a range of services, both internally and externally, to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of learners. Focussing on key priorities identified through consultation with group representatives and responding to the School Health Research Network (SHRN) pupil surveys.
- 1.12 The ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) programme is a well-established educational psychology-led evidence-based intervention designed to build the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of their pupils within their own resources. During 2024-25, all schools had at least one active ELSA, with approximately 70 active ELSAs working in our schools.
- 1.13 Following the pandemic, the LA has had an ongoing focus on trauma informed and relational practice, funding and providing on-going supervision for many school staff and professionals across the county, including all members of the EWS. Recently this has led to the development of a local, sustainable programme of Trauma Informed Practice Skills and Strategies (TIPSS). This supports staff working closely with children impacted by trauma to develop skills, strategies and confidence to intervene and support the development of positive relationships which promote positive engagement and attendance.

2. Attendance Data

- 2.1 The Education Welfare Service (EWS) regularly analyses a wide range of attendance data to track and monitor levels of attendance for schools and groups of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals Half-termly attendance data reports are collated and shared with all headteachers.
- 2.2 The EWOs and Vulnerable Learner Lead (VLL) share data regularly to ensure that attendance and exclusions are correctly coded. LA officers ensure that ALN Bespoke packages are correctly monitored and reviewed, including levels of attendance where appropriate. Outcomes from this work are shared with relevant parties and used to inform decisions about support and intervention.
- 2.3 Welsh Government publish the attendance of pupils in maintained schools, at a local authority levels every two weeks. Since 2022-23, following a pause due

the pandemic, Welsh Government release annual All Wales Core Data sets for attendance in all schools.

3. Persistent Absence

- 3.1 The definition of persistent absence was amended in November 2023 from pupils with attendance below 20% to pupils with attendance below 10%. As a result, levels of persistent absence across Wales increased initially. While persistent absence remains higher, the level of persistent absence in Monmouthshire is reducing appropriately.
- 3.2 This area is a priority for EWS and all schools. Support for persistently absent pupils follows our tiered approach to securing improvements in attendance and can escalate to intensive levels of support including meetings with parents, referrals to other services, and pastoral support. If the EWS exhaust all avenues and attendance has not improved, the LA may consider punitive measures.

4. Attendance Performance 2024-25 Academic Year

- 4.1 Overall attendance in Monmouthshire between 1st September 2024 – July 2025 is 92.2%, placing Monmouthshire first in Wales.
- 4.2 In the Secondary Schools Core All Wales Core Data Sets for 2024-25, Monmouthshire's attendance is 0.4 pp above the national average. However, at -12.2pp, the gap between e-fsm pupils and non-fsm pupils is greater than the national average of -9.9pp. Persistence absence rates in Monmouthshire secondary schools are reducing appropriately and are 5.1pp below the national average.
- 4.3 In the Primary Schools Attendance Core Data Set for 2024-25, Monmouthshire's primary school attendance is 93.9%, 1.2pp above the national average. The gap in attendance between e-fsm pupils and non-fsm pupils has increased to -5.5pp however, this is 0.2pp below the national average. The level of persistent absence is improving and in Monmouthshire is 10.2pp lower than the national average.

5. Attendance Performance over time

- 5.1 The table below compares attendance in Monmouthshire with the Wales average between 2018-19, pre-pandemic, and reporting years from 2022-23 until 2024-25. During this period overall attendance in Monmouthshire in both primary and secondary phases have remained above the Wales average.

Phase	Data	2018-19	2019-20	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Primary	Monmouthshire	95.4%	No data	92.9%	93.6%	93.9%
	Wales	94.7%	No data	91.5%	92.2%	92.7%
Secondary	Monmouthshire	95.1%	No data	88.1%	88.2%	89.5%
	Wales	93.8%	No data	87.5%	88.0%	89.1%

6. Intensive Support for Schools

- 6.1 Regular data monitoring meetings with the Strategic Director provide beneficial opportunities to critically review trends and concerns around attendance and exclusions at a strategic level. Where needed, this is followed up in professional discussions, often resulting in targeted support and/or further challenge to the school or the PRS. In a few cases, this can lead to more detailed scrutiny and challenge through a Team Around the School (TAS) approach between the school, the LA and the school improvement service.

7. Vulnerable learners

- 7.1 The EWS engagement in developmental work with Welsh Government to strengthen processes for Children Missing Education (CME) and regular attendance at the All-Wales CME Network meetings, ensure that the LA is well informed to monitor and support this group of vulnerable pupils effectively. The CME policy processes are robust, followed up and investigated by the EWS team in a timely manner from the point of notification. Regular updates are communicated to schools, relevant professionals, and other LAs where a pupil may have moved out of the area. There are good recording systems and action monitoring in place to share pupil information through the secure transfer system if they are not found or a destination is unknown.
- 7.2 Children who may have missed education (CME) are supported to return to school as soon as possible. The LA provides support to learners who have been EHE for a period and wish to return to a mainstream school by facilitating discussions with schools. Where the LA with responsibility is not Monmouthshire; these cases are discussed at Fair Access Panel (FAP).
- 7.3 The number of pupils who are Electively Home Educated has increased significantly since the pandemic. The EWS has a dedicated EHE Officer to ensure that parents are aware of their responsibilities if their child is EHE and carry out initial and annual visits to review provision and well-being. In addition, the LA provides support to EHE families, signposting them to suitable educational experiences, organising EHE events and supporting pupils to sit external examinations where appropriate.

8. Estyn Inspections

- 8.1 Estyn inspected the following five primary and two secondary schools between September 2024 -July 2025. Ysgol Y Fenni, Archbishop Rowan Williams

Church in Wales Primary, Magor Church in Wales Primary, Shirenewton Primary and Rogiet Primary, Caldicot School and Chepstow School.

There were no recommendations to improve attendance in primary schools and strengths noted included robust and effective systems and processes, with strong and improving rates of attendance.

8.3

In Chepstow School, Estyn recognised that robustness of processes and attendance tracking. While attendance at the time of the inspection remained below pre-pandemic levels, attendance improved at a faster rate than nationally, including for e-fsm pupils, the number of pupils persistently absence reduced.

8.4

Although Estyn recognised improvement in attendance levels in Caldicot School, the rates did not improve well enough in 2023-24 and were below similar schools across Wales. Consequently, Estyn left the school with a recommendation to improve attendance.

9. Resource Implications

9.1 The increase in staffing and the appointment of FLOs during 2024-25 is having a positive impact on attendance, particularly in primary schools. However, nearly half of the EWS budget comprises of grant funding which is an on-going risk to the service in terms of recruitment, retention and support for pupils, families and schools.

10. Conclusion

10.1 The report provides members with information on the attendance in Monmouthshire schools for the academic year 2024-25. Overall, the LA is performing above the national average in most measures and in the primary phase, attendance is returning to pre-pandemic levels. However, overall attendance in secondary schools, particularly e-fsm attendance, is not improving rapidly enough.