

# Chief Officer's Report – Children and Young People

Monmouthshire County Council

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021



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# Purpose

In every other year the purpose of my Chief Officer's report is to inform Council of the progress that the education system has made in the past twelve months. This year the report will be markedly different, the global COVID-19 pandemic left an indelible impact on education across the world and Monmouthshire did not escape.

This report includes the examination and assessment period that ended in August 2020. I set out in my report last year that the accountability framework in Wales had changed significantly; the pandemic and Government's efforts to ensure that schools were not overly burdened accelerated these changes.

There were no end of Key Stage Assessments for the Foundation Phase, KS2 and 3 this year. Furthermore, the outcomes for students at the end of Key Stage 4 and those sitting AS and A Levels were subject to a series of process and policy changes throughout the year. The eventually published Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) have not been compared with any previous years.

My report this year will focus on two distinct elements; a backward review of the response to the pandemic by the schools and education services across Monmouthshire and a future focus on the work that the system will have to undertake to support learners in the aftermath of the pandemic and address the challenges of the ongoing reform agenda in Wales.

The performance report on last year's areas of focus will be reported to Children and Young People's Select Committee in the coming half term.



# Introduction

My Chief Officer's Report is an annual 'state of the County' report that seeks to reflect the progress that has been made across Monmouthshire. Since my first report in 2016 it has reflected some important measures about the nature and standard of provision we offer. These have typically included measures around student outcomes, inspection results, school categorisation results and a range of 'proxy' indicators for wellbeing such as school attendance and exclusions.

This year's report is very different. Nearly none of those measures are available to me. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic education in Monmouthshire has experienced a year unlike any other. We have seen the cancellation of end of key stage assessments, the majority of children learning from home, schools providing childcare and the wholesale movement to a new pedagogical approach of 'blended learning'. New terms such as 'synchronous and asynchronous' have become part and parcel of our language.

Our schools, their teachers, leaders and support staff have been asked to work differently and do different things. Primary schools have been forced to think about how a curriculum predicated on collective play and development can be delivered at home while our secondary schools have managed a whole new approach to assessment.

Monmouthshire's Children and Young People's Directorate has also had to change the way in which it works and where it focuses its energy. Supporting schools to operationalise their obligations to support learners during the pandemic has meant procuring thousands of pieces of IT kit, organising a new payment process for free school meals, increasing cleaning capacity and changing the way in which meals are provided to children in our schools. Some of these may sound trivial but they have demonstrated that the ability to keep a school open and safe has been a huge effort by many people across many teams and is not limited to school based staff.

Ordinarily following a core Estyn Inspection (MCC was inspected in February 2020) an organisation would focus on meeting the report's recommendations. This year has inevitably been different but colleagues have continued to work in the background to further those areas. Draft ALN and FSM strategies have been taken to CYP Select and continue to be developed.

The other focus of a Chief Officer's report is the planning for the coming year. This year the report identifies four themes of work where we will develop further action plans. They are; Purpose, People, Place and Pedagogy. We have already seen areas where we know there is significant work to do. These include promoting wellbeing, understanding where are learners are and what skills they need to focus on and for our youngest learners, socialisation and taking their first steps in education with friends. There are also the themes that remain relevant from our Estyn inspection; pursuing excellence, creating an holistic vision and strategy for learners with additional learning needs, securing better outcomes for our learners eligible for free school meals (FSM) and improving the way we use data in our evaluations. We also continue to develop leadership across our schools and create better learning environments for all a our learners.



# Engagement with Members

6.5.20

Estyn Report presented to Cabinet

21.5.20

All members seminar on the Estyn Inspection

4.6.20

Annual Chief Officer's Report to Full Council 2019/2020

9.7.20

Reflections on Monmouthshire Schools through COVID 19 lockdown and the return to school in the summer

EAs Value for money study

Preparation for the September 2020 return to school

8.9.20

School examination performance Summer 2020

Return to School

13.10.20

School based support for emotional wellbeing

Blended learning in schools

8.12.20

Welsh Medium Education

21.1.21

All members' Seminar on Blended Learning

23.3.21

Feedback from Estyn's Thematic Review

20.4.21

Chief Officer's Report 2020/2021



# The shape of our place

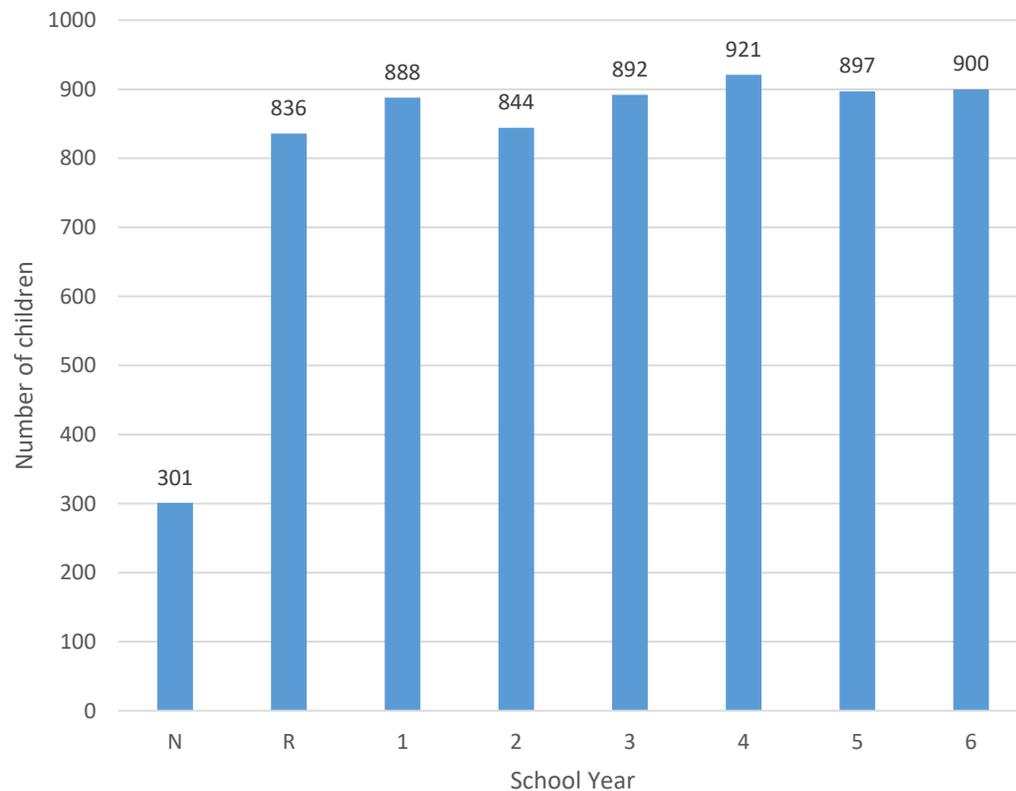


- # pupils
  - 6178 Primary (*38 in Special Needs Resource Bases (SNRB)*)
  - 4800 Secondary (*79 in SNRBs*)
  - 85 in Out of County Special Schools.
  - 14 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
- # schools
  - 30 Primary (*28 English Medium & 2 Welsh Medium*)
  - 4 Secondary
  - 12 Maintained nurseries (*474 children*)
  - 25 Non-maintained settings (*565 children funded*)
  - 1 PRU
- # Staff
  - 76 (57.2 full time equivalents (fte)) CYP Staff
  - 1,571 (1064.4 fte) Primary/Secondary/PRS based staff

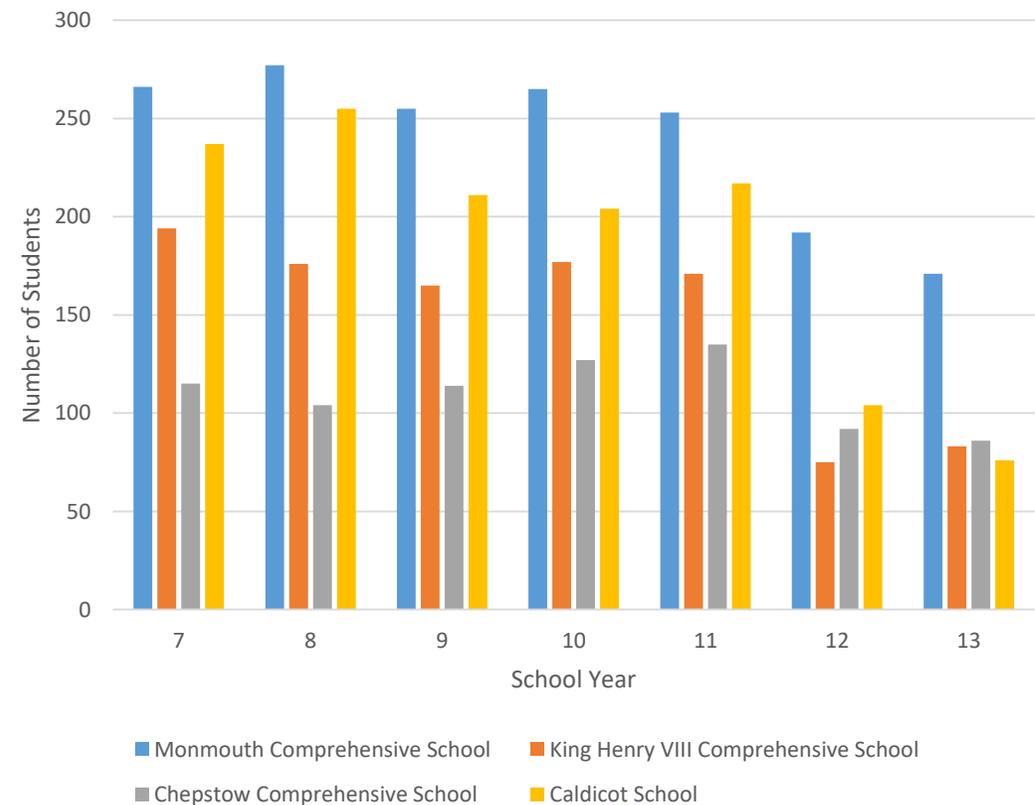


# Age & Gender Population Profile

Number of Primary Children by School Year

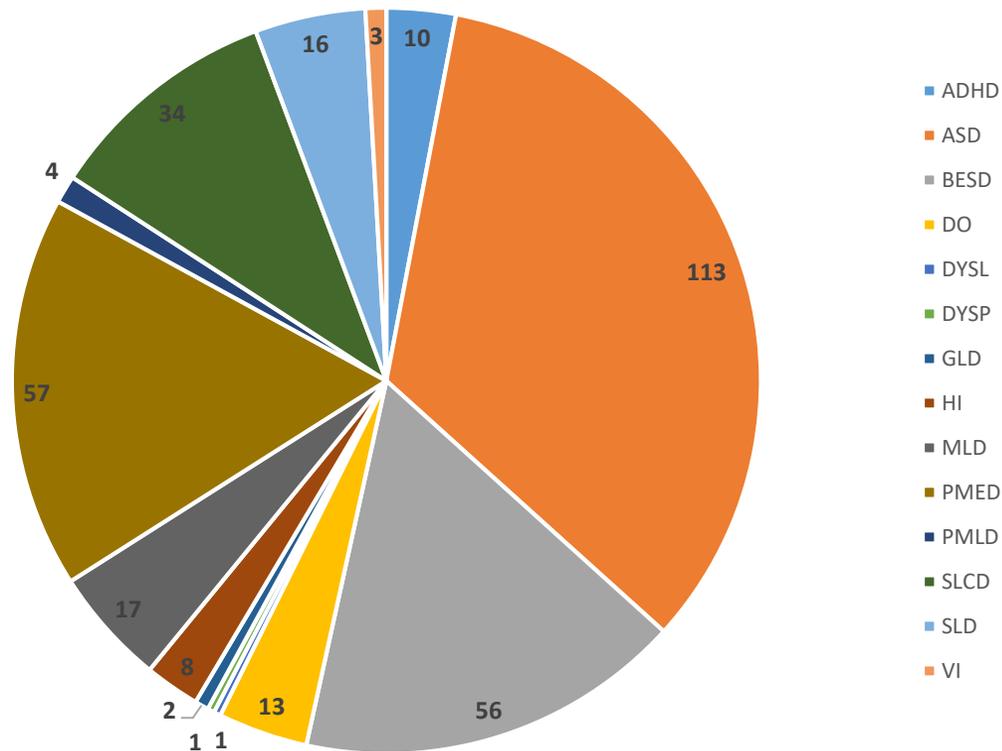


Secondary School Pupils by Year



# Statemented ALN Population Profile

Statements in Monmouthshire by primary need



## Key:

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder

ASD – Autistic Spectrum Disorder

DO – Downs

DYSL - Dyslexia

GLD – General Learning Difficulties

HI – Hearing Impaired

MLD – Moderate Learning Difficulty

PMED – Physical and Medical Needs

PMLD – Profound Multiple Learning Needs

SLCD – Speech and Language Communication Difficulties

SLD – Severe Learning Difficulties

VI – Visually Impaired



# Reflections on 2020/21

## Initial response to the pandemic

The period leading up to the initial nationwide lockdown had been significant for Monmouthshire's Children and Young People Directorate. The Authority had just been through its core Estyn inspection and had spent the intervening period preparing our response to the report's recommendations. However, as March progressed it became clear that we should be preparing for a very different approach to schooling. It started with a reminder to schools that they should review their business continuity plans and ended with a full closure of all schools for face to face learning and the development of 'blended learning' a term that meant little to many in February 2020 but meant everything by April 2020.

The need to provide childcare for two cohorts of children became apparent very quickly. Vulnerable learners and the children of critical workers (NHS staff, blue light workers, a range of public servants and some identified private sector workers) would require childcare. Working with the schools nine childcare hubs were established by Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. By the middle of the summer term that provision would have been re-shaped and include the four secondary schools, at our peak we operated 11 hubs and supported significant numbers of children everyday. Schools staff opened the hubs from 8am until 6pm ensuring NHS and other emergency services' shifts could be completed.

The childcare hubs were supported by staff from schools within the relevant cluster, the local authority managed the registration and allocation of places. Over time the provision flexed depending on take up in certain areas.

The next significant stage was the announcement of the Check In, Catch Up and Prepare a three week window at the end of the summer term when children would return for face to face engagement with their teachers. However, the capacity of schools was limited to 30% and in many Monmouthshire schools the requirement to continue the provision for children of critical workers and vulnerable learners saw the majority of children only offered one session a week.

It was against this limited provision that the decision was made not to provide an additional week in the summer term that the Minister had originally envisaged. It was felt that sacrificing one day in July for five days additional learning in October was not a good investment.

If there was one theme that emerged very quickly in the early stages of the pandemic it was that of collaboration, a real willingness to work together to ensure that our learners' needs were being met. I will reflect on different aspects of this collaborative framework but initially the way clusters of schools supported the hubs in each town (and our 'rural' hub in Raglan), the way in that CYP staff supported schools with the registration and guidance processes for the Hubs and the collaborative approach developed by CYP and colleagues from social care to identify and support vulnerable learners stand out as excellent examples of a system responding at pace to unprecedented circumstances.

In Estyn's letter to the Authority as a part of their specific remit review of the response to the pandemic said:

*'The authority's crisis management has been agile and responsive. Building on existing positive relations with schools and headteachers, senior officers have ensured effective communication and clear expectations. They have consistently sought the opinion of headteachers and worked to respond to their concerns and the needs of schools.'*

The highest attendance we had was on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> June when there were a total of 401 pupils in our school hubs, this was made up of 329 key worker children and 72 vulnerable pupils.



# Promoting a new approach to learning

As soon as the scale of change required by the pandemic became apparent schools, the local authority and our partners in the Education Achievement Service (EAS) looked quickly to understand how we could provide an effective ongoing education for learners. This would have to be in a hugely different way to that in which all teachers had been educated, trained and learned their craft in. The traditional model of face to face teaching was in an instant changed and the challenge to our schools was how could we support children learning at home.

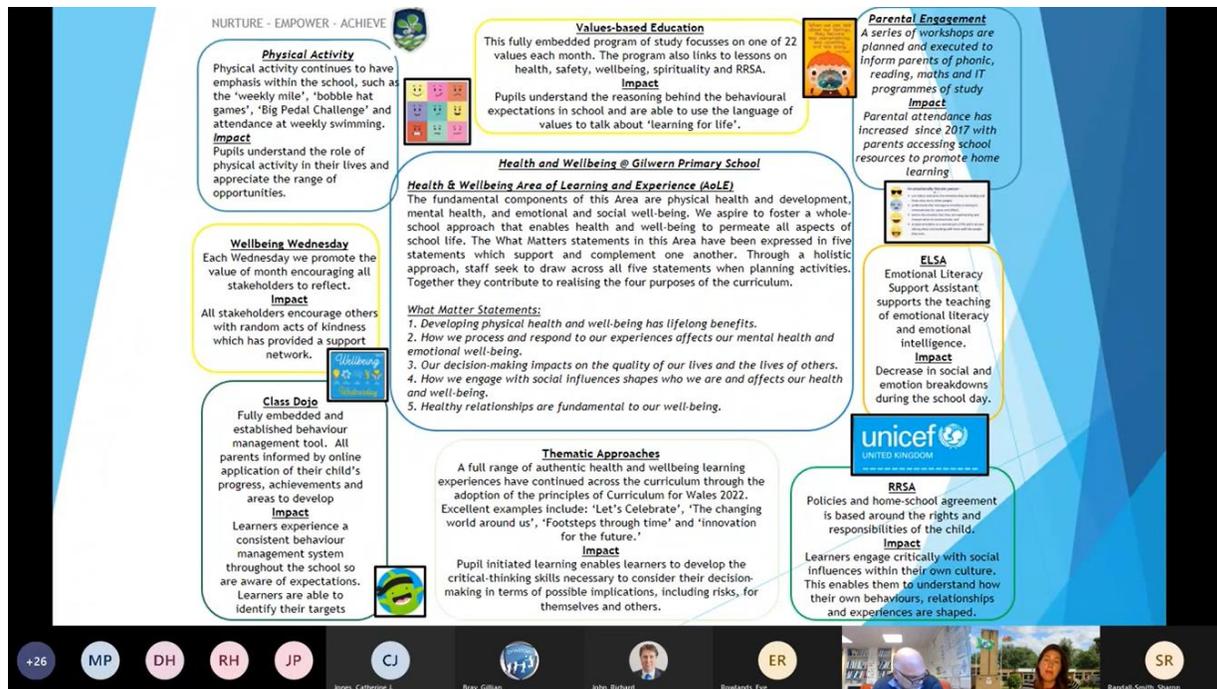
Previous Chief Officer Reports have highlighted the range of challenges that inequity amongst our learners presents in ensuring that all of our learners are able to fulfil their potential. The pandemic now shone a sharp light on this challenge. How did a school support learners who may not have their own suitable IT equipment, or potentially connectivity, beyond a mobile phone? How does a school legislate for family support. Indeed, the challenges in this regard were reflected in many different ways; some families may not be able to support their children in their learning and other families had parents who continued to work, often full time at home (interestingly often having to use a family's sole piece of IT equipment).

It was against this backdrop that the term 'blended learning' emerged. It has not yet become a full part of the educational lexicon in Wales. It would be entirely wrong to suggest that all schools were able to move to this new remote means of educating children easily but we were fortunate in being able to work closely with a number of schools who had made a rapid adaptation alongside our partners in the EAS. An immediate and widespread launch of professional learning and masterclasses saw the digital and pedagogical approaches improve across the County.

One of the key challenges of this change was that families and parents now saw the teaching of their children up close in a way that does not happen when children attend school everyday. A feature of the summer term 2020 was a number of concerns being raised about the quantity, quality and nature of the work being provided to learners (of all ages and stages). Schools worked hard to engage with parents to assure them that the developing curriculum was appropriate. In the 2021 spring term a number of Monmouthshire Schools have presented to County Councillors to demonstrate their new approaches to blended learning. This model of direct engagement by our schools was very successful and will be a part of our engagement in the future.

There has been significant interest in the way in which learners accessed IT to enable their learning. During the course of the pandemic Monmouthshire and our schools have:

- Gathered information from households on their ability to connect to the internet, and to provide Mi-fi units (mobile broadband) where needed.
- Provided laptops to learners that need an internet enabled device to access HWB (the all Wales Education platform)
- Provided several thousand new devices across schools to support future blended learning requirements, with allocation based on FSM in the Comprehensive Schools
- Worked with teaching staff to ensure that they have access to technical support here needed



**NURTURE - EMPOWER - ACHIEVE**

**Physical Activity**  
Physical activity continues to have emphasis within the school, such as the 'weekly mile', 'bobble hat games', 'Big Pedal Challenge' and attendance at weekly swimming.  
**Impact**  
Pupils understand the role of physical activity in their lives and appreciate the range of opportunities.

**Values-based Education**  
This fully embedded program of study focusses on one of 22 values each month. The program also links to lessons on health, safety, wellbeing, spirituality and RRSA.  
**Impact**  
Pupils understand the reasoning behind the behavioural expectations in school and are able to use the language of values to talk about 'learning for life'.

**Health and Wellbeing @ Gilwern Primary School**  
**Health & Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE)**  
The fundamental components of this Area are physical health and development, mental health, and emotional and social well-being. We aspire to foster a whole-school approach that enables health and well-being to permeate all aspects of school life. The What Matters statements in this Area have been expressed in five statements which support and complement one another. Through a holistic approach, staff seek to draw across all five statements when planning activities. Together they contribute to realising the four purposes of the curriculum.  
**What Matters Statements:**  
1. Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits.  
2. How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being.  
3. Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others.  
4. How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being.  
5. Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being.

**Wellbeing Wednesday**  
Each Wednesday we promote the value of month encouraging all stakeholders to reflect.  
**Impact**  
All stakeholders encourage others with random acts of kindness which has provided a support network.

**Class Dojo**  
Fully embedded and established behaviour management tool. All parents informed by online application of their child's progress, achievements and areas to develop.  
**Impact**  
Learners experience a consistent behaviour management system throughout the school so are aware of expectations. Learners are able to identify their targets.

**Thematic Approaches**  
A full range of authentic health and wellbeing learning experiences have continued across the curriculum through the adoption of the principles of Curriculum for Wales 2022. Excellent examples include: 'Let's Celebrate', 'The changing world around us', 'Footsteps through time' and 'innovation for the future.'  
**Impact**  
Pupils initiated learning enables learners to develop the critical-thinking skills necessary to consider their decision-making in terms of possible implications, including risks, for themselves and others.

**Parental Engagement**  
A series of workshops are planned and executed to inform parents of phonics, reading, maths and IT programmes of study.  
**Impact**  
Parental attendance has increased since 2017 with parents accessing school resources to promote home learning.

**ELSA**  
Emotional Literacy Support Assistant supports the teaching of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence.  
**Impact**  
Decrease in social and emotion breakdowns during the school day.

**RRSA**  
Policies and home-school agreement is based around the rights and responsibilities of the child.  
**Impact**  
Learners engage critically with social influences within their own culture. This enables them to understand how their own behaviours, relationships and experiences are shaped.

**unicef UNITED KINGDOM**

MP DH RH JP CJ ER SR

Jones, Catherine J. Bray, Gillian John, Richard Rowlands, Eve Randall-Smith, Sharon



## Supporting Schools

We maintained regular contact with headteachers throughout the last year to ensure that schools remained informed about policy changes and had an opportunity to identify the support they needed from officers to respond to the demands of the pandemic. The rapid deployment of Teams as a means of communication along with regular email updates provided an effective vehicle for the local authority to communicate.

We were in the fortunate position of being able to deploy Monmouthshire's healthy schools team and local authority educational psychologists produced specific advice and guidance to support pupils and families during lockdown. This resource was further supplemented by 'playlists' produced by the EAS. This new way of sharing large amounts of information in a structured ways has been greeted positively by school leaders.

Working with colleagues across social services safeguarding remained a key area of attention. In order to support staff and other stakeholders it was agreed that safeguarding training would be delivered online. This was a significant development from previous practice.

In recognising the likelihood that the pandemic may well go on for an extended period of time Monmouthshire determined that schools should not be required to provide childcare for vulnerable learners and children of critical workers through the Easter holidays. MonLife were commissioned to deliver two weeks of provision across the existing school hubs. This was well received by children and school staff alike. It also meant that schools were prepared to offer the childcare provision through the May half term.

School leadership is challenging at all times and this period has exacerbated this and inevitably led to pressure on our Headteachers. In order to mitigate this we provided HR support but also recruited a recently retired Headteacher who was available to act as a sounding board for Leaders. This was an intervention short of some of the more formal interventions that are offered through regular HR processes.

A consistent area of focus for MCC throughout the pandemic was to alleviate as many burdens on the schools as we could to allow schools to focus on their blended learning offer and supporting their learners. This included supporting them in their risk assessments and interpretation of the operational guidance.

Working with our partners in the EAS we have continued to support schools in particular those who were in a group of requiring additional support. This has not been in the sense of accountability but rather greater support and wellbeing contact. We continued to work with schools, the EAS and Welsh Government to understand the way in which grants can be allocated and spent – this was particularly relevant to the 'Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards' grant stream.

We also worked closely with the EAS to promote a wide range of professional learning (CPD) opportunities to staff at all levels. Consequently, nearly all schools in the local authority have accessed online professional learning provided by the EAS.

Our ongoing focus on learners ensured a continual emphasis on supporting schools to establish pupils' wellbeing, including that of our vulnerable learners.

The table below sets out all of the items procured and delivered to schools through the pandemic

Item	Unit	No. Issued
Dust Mask Disposable (Flat Folded)	Each	1100
Face Mask Organic Vapour Respirator	Each	150
Medical Mask	Each	28855
Gloves Disposable	Box (100)	875
Kwik Wipes	Tub	508
Hand Sanitiser (47ml)	Each	493
Hand Sanitiser (1L)	Each	334
Hand Sanitiser (5L)	Each	221
Reusable Masks Black/Blue	Each	9440
Virucidal Spray (750ml)	Each	278
Virucidal Spray (5L)	Each	19
Unisafe Spray (750ml)	Each	197
Monmouthshire Masks	Each	20
Woven Cloths	Roll	49
Disposable Apron	Each	28800
Blue Rolls	Each	456
Visors	Each	228

## Vulnerable Learners

Throughout the pandemic there has been a sharp focus on supporting those learners who we understood to be vulnerable. This was not driven by set a defined criteria but through a professional discussion with Headteachers and social services colleagues that had a very simple threshold at its heart – anybody who was safer in school, should be in school.

The children who were supported by being in school ranged from those with additional learning needs through to those children who school leaders felt would be better served in school. All of our Special Needs Resources Bases (SNRBs) were open throughout the pandemic. Not all families who were offered places in school chose to take them up. It is a reminder that the pandemic did not affect our communities equally and each family took their own decisions about how their children should be supported.

In a further example of collaboration early help teams in social services worked closely with Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and the Education Psychology team to prepare specific wellbeing support for vulnerable learners. Many of these interventions were presented to the CYP Select Committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

There was extensive phone contact with referred vulnerable families on a regular basis. Where necessary visits were made to families and where there were concerns referrals were made to Early Help Panel, women’s aid, young carers or formal MARFS were submitted to social care.

EWOs provided families with information on food banks and how to access them. They also liaised with relevant agencies and the third sector and delivered work packs to vulnerable pupils identified by schools.

This development of on-line training for Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators and school staff (by ALN Transformation Team) increased participation and supported improving knowledge and skills of school staff in preparation for ALN reform changes.

Furthermore, the Education Psychology Service’s (EPS) new training platform was also rapidly developed with a high take up. This development allowed the EPS to establish that their role was more than providing cognitive assessments. It particularly helped ‘showcase’ their well-being responsibilities and has helped shaped future provision in this area.

However, in some regards, lockdown was a significant distraction with regard to the level of preparation, training, interaction that we had hoped to establish with Headteachers in preparation for the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform. Whilst work around this carried on at an ALNCo level there remain concerns that not all school leaders are as engaged as they should be.

Within our understanding of vulnerable learners were those children who were potentially at greater risk to harm through being at home for an extended period of time. An inability to have ‘eyes on’ those children caused concern amongst all professionals. As the pandemic progressed it became apparent that whilst the level of referrals from schools had understandably fallen community referrals took their place.

Schools undertook a significant range of engagement activities, many calling all pupils regularly and calling other students on a daily basis. As the pandemic progressed changes in the guidance from the Welsh Government allowed greater use of synchronous (live) lessons. This development allowed teachers and support staff to have far more frequent contact with their children and learners.

Hub	Number Identified	Provision Secured for	Taken up	Not taken up		
				Children Isolating	Refused	Not Needed
Deri View	13	13	10	0	1	2
Dewstow	18	18	12	0	6	0
Llanfoist	6	6	4	0	0	2
Overmonnow	12	12	6	0	6	0
Raglan	2	2	0	0	2	0
Rogiet	9	9	6	0	3	0
Thornwell	6	6	6	0	0	0
PRU	6	6	4	0	2	0
Early Years	11	11	9	0	2	0
Caldicot	2	2	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>5</b>
	100%	100%	68.23%	0%	25.9%	5.89%

Number of FSM pupils at start of pandemic 1355  
 Number of FSM pupils March 2021 1662  
 We have made 55,000 payments to parents with a total value of £1.2m

## Working with partners

It has hopefully been clear throughout the report to this point that the response to the pandemic has been driven by partners working together in an accelerated and innovative way. Whilst I would always have hoped that the relationships with our partners (schools, MCC support services, Welsh Government, other regional authorities (including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB)) and the EAS) was strong the pandemic has proven to me that these are robust and highly effective relationships.

Headteachers have responded excellently to the challenges of the pandemic and the need to work closely with the Authority has further developed already good existing relationships. As Estyn said in their most recent letter to the Authority:

*Overall collaboration and sharing of information have been effective. The local authority has used technology well to ensure clear communication, collaboration and sharing of information with and between schools. For example, regular headteacher meetings held via Microsoft Teams have helped to ensure that schools remained informed about policy changes and able to express their views on the support they require from officers.*

A further area of positive development was working across MCC's own directorates. The work under taken in the Enterprise Directorate to ensure that schools were cleaned, children provided with meals and transport arranged in a timely manner gave schools greater confidence. There were challenges of course, such as the difficulty to recruit new cleaning staff to meet the additional requirements of the Schools' Operational Guidance.

One unexpected benefit of the pandemic was that it brought to sharper focus the differentiation in the roles of the EAS and the local authority. This clarity meant that schools did not receive duplicated messages of support structures. Estyn noted:

*Collaboration with EAS has been beneficial in supporting schools to develop their support for distance learning and the delivery of the Welsh Government's Continuity of Learning Plan. Headteachers across the local authority have been positive about this support and engaged well with professional learning opportunities. In addition to virtual headteacher meetings, the Regional Headteacher and Governor Strategy Group continued to meet monthly and chairs of governing bodies met collaboratively on a six-weekly basis. Challenge advisors maintained supportive contact with schools and regional networks continues, such as the Professional Learning Schools and Deputy Headteacher Network.*

Colleagues noted improved access to health colleagues in terms of their availability to meet via Teams rather than travelling to venues and being able to meet in a more timely way has helped to resolve issues more effectively and built better working relationships. Positively we understand that health will be building and developing their virtual platform.

Further developments with ABUHB has been the development of an on-line training offer by therapy services including Q&A sessions this was very well received by schools and it has changed the way health services interact with school staff and positively impacted on interventions for children. This will positively support their responsibilities under the new Act.

However, there is still a need to have a more formal and face to face 'relationship' with health services, particularly in relation to more complex children in SNRBs.

Working with our schools on the ALN agenda has been accelerated through the pandemic and the SNRB network group has made more progress in the 3 /4 months of the first lockdown than I had in the previous year



# An enhanced focus on wellbeing

The last year has seen Wales public services respond to a public health crisis. Monmouthshire has experienced the worst of the pandemic, families have lost loved ones and we have seen infections and hospitalisations of members of our community, however when compared to other parts of Wales it is undeniable that the impact has been relatively lower here in Monmouthshire.

Despite this, the emergence of wellbeing needs across Monmouthshire has been clear to all professionals. How do we make sure that all of the impact of social distancing, of societal lockdowns, of restricted human contact do not disproportionately impact on learners and their learning.

There are a few areas in the 2020 School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey where students reported that their health behaviours have worsened since the last survey in 2018 and where improvement is required, these include; student levels of life satisfaction, respectful relationships, body image, alcohol misuse and sex and relationships. There have, however, been positive improvements in other areas of student health behaviours such as learner voice, a reduction in the number of students who share sexually explicit images, a reduction in the number of students who have tried e-cigarettes and a reduction in the number of students who have taken part in bullying and who have been bullied.

The Wellbeing Subgroup has an action plan that aims to improve these outcomes through working collaboratively with key LA officers and all four secondary schools. Actions include improving communication, access to targeted support, signposting to services, CPD for school and LA staff, working with schools to improve curriculum provision and promotion of active travel. This group now includes representation from all four secondary schools and primary representation is being explored as the SHRN project extends into working with primary schools.

The Subgroup continues to work on the Action Plan shaped largely by SHRN data aiming to contribute towards the broader MCC wellbeing agenda of:

- Working to ensure that schools and services for children focus on well-being,
- Supporting the resilience of children and young people in relation to their mental health and emotional well-being,
- Developing networks for all ages that support people's well-being in their local communities.

In 2021 the Welsh Government published a new statutory Framework for LAs and schools on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-Being (WSAMH). The guidance aims to address the emotional and mental wellbeing needs of all children and young people, as well as school staff as part of the whole school community. Emma Taylor (MCC's Healthy Schools' Lead) is the new Whole School Approach Regional Implementation Lead and this work will now be supported through the Wellbeing Subgroup.

The cross directorate Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) project continues with the EPS receiving WG Wellbeing Grant money from last year to produce the guidance and training to be delivered during the summer term to schools and other MCC partners. This aims to improve awareness, consistency and pathways in this area.



# Outcomes at Key Stage 4 & 5

In response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the Welsh Government cancelled all statutory data collections that would have been due to take place in Summer 2020.

This was initially announced in the Minister for Education's written statements of 18 March 2020 and 3 July 2020 and enacted in the Relaxation of School Reporting Requirements (Wales) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020.

The last update was the School Performance Reporting Arrangements Important Update (10 August 2020).

The Summer's examination results were subject to a number of differing approaches across the United Kingdom and this was a hugely unsettling time for all learners especially those whose next steps were dependant upon 'examination' outcomes.



# The National Picture

Figure 7.2: National GCSE summer cumulative C/4 results 2010-2020<sup>1)(2)</sup>

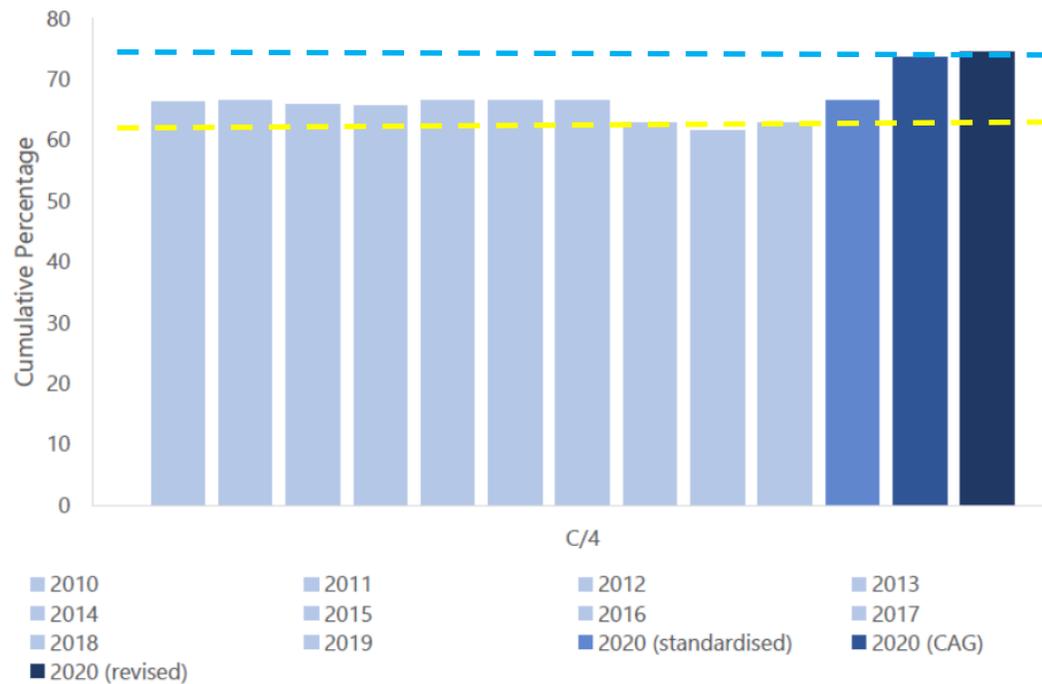
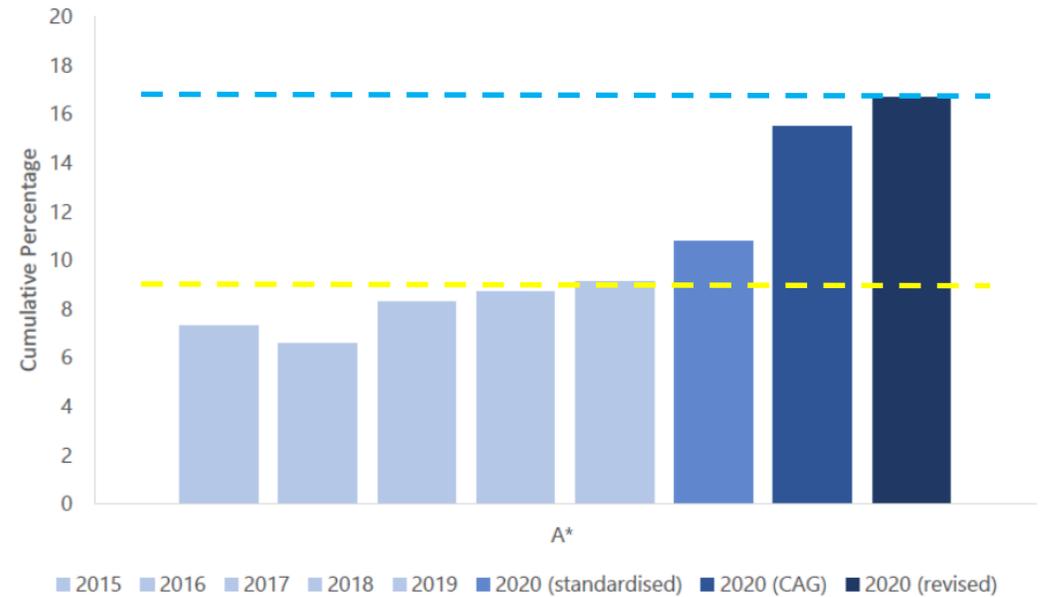


Figure 5.1: National A level summer A\* results 2015-2020



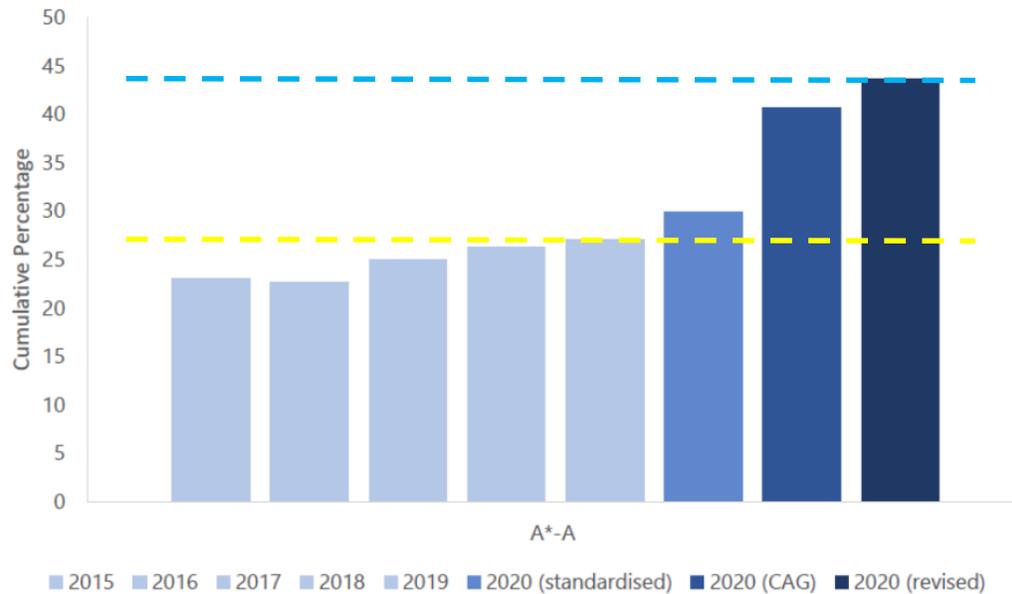
Source: 2015 to 2019 and 2020 (standardised): JCQ; 2020 (CAG) and 2020 (revised): awarding bodies



# The National Picture

The previous three charts (taken from the Qualifications Wales report) show, at a national level, the impact of the changing approach to grade allocation in 2020.

Figure 5.2: National A level summer cumulative A results 2015-2020



Source: 2015 to 2019 and 2020 (standardised): JCQ; 2020 (CAG) and 2020 (revised): awarding bodies



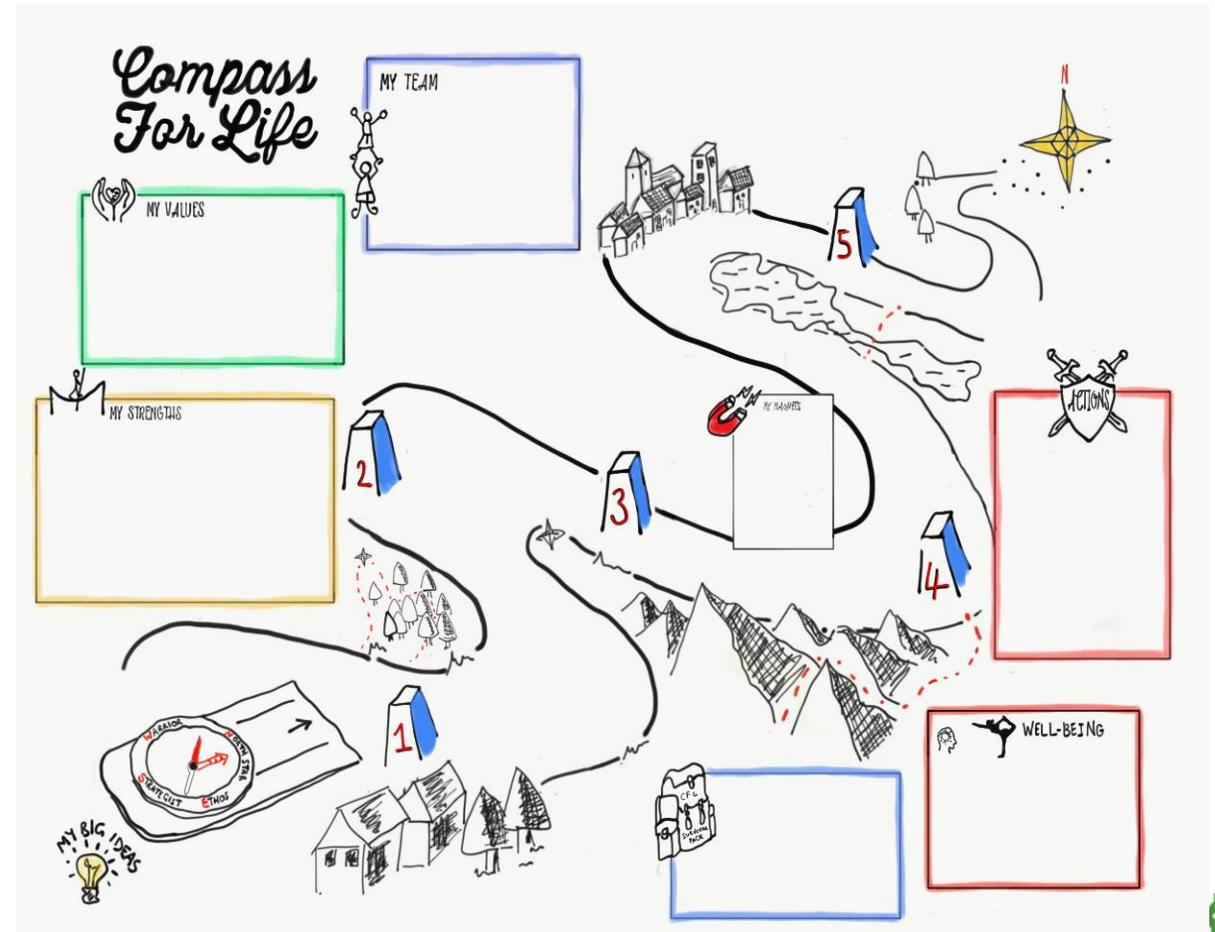
# Compass for Life

2020 saw the launch of a new initiative across all of Monmouthshire's learners in years 5&6. The Compass for Life is aimed at raising the aspirations and resilience of all learners. It promotes children framing their aspirations and understanding the strengths they will have to show and steps they will have to follow if they are to achieve their 'Super North Star'.

The work is promoted by the Compass for Life Foundation and children and teachers experience the same powerful workshop before following a bespoke curriculum. The workshop works through the four cardinals of the compass:

- The Super North Star
- Your Ethos (East)
- Your Strategist (South)
- The Warrior (West)

The sessions in Monmouthshire are being led by Floyd Woodrow, MBE, DCM. COVID has slowed the rollout of the programme but work was completed in four primary schools (Deri View, Thornwell, Overmonnow and Dewstow). The response from learners in all four schools was exceptional and the next group of schools will enjoy their sessions early in the summer term.



# The impact of COVID on our finances

## Schools

All schools have had the opportunity to claim additional expenses / loss of income from the hardship fund. The claims for the financial year have amounted to:

- £540k for staffing. This covered a range of staff costs including: Maternity cover from 28 weeks, staff having to self-isolate or shield. Any additional staff required to maintain class bubbles.
- £175k for all non-pay costs. This covered PPE, sanitisers, social distancing signs and any additional equipment required to maintain class bubbles.
- £178k loss of income. The majority of this is lost catering income for our secondary schools, but also covered loss of letting income in the primary schools including after school clubs.

Schools have also managed to make saving through reduced supply costs, given the blended learning approach it has not always been necessary to cover all staff absences.

In addition to this schools have received grants to support the return to school and any catch up programmes:

- Initial ALPS grant - £518k split over the academic year £302k to end of March 2021 and £216k to the end of August 2021. In addition to this a further £669k was announced in March to support schools returning prior to Easter.

Schools also received:

- £1,098k relating to revenue maintenance this will be used in the main to offset cleaning or caretaking costs in 20-21 allowing schools to roll forward the underspends in to the new financial year.
- £1,217k relating to capital maintenance for schools. This is for costs that are capital in nature. Property Services are identifying the costs that qualify and the balance will be slipped to be spent in the new financial year.

The Month 9 forecast showed a collective deficit balance for schools of £166k with 12 schools in a deficit. As at year end the number of schools in a deficit position had fallen to just two and the collective surplus across all of our schools has increased to £3.4 million.

## Central Budgets

The month 9 forecast for central costs centres showed an in year overspend of £75k the split is:

- £434k underspent ISB. This is a result of grant for teacher pay which had previously been afforded to schools and the over estimation of rates for Monmouth Comp.
- £3k overspent for resources this is a result of additional ICT costs.
- £518k overspent for standard, ALN is included in this as this is overspent by £608k.

Again the Local Authority has been able to claim for any additional costs or income losses as a result of COVID. This has been minimal for costs however £69k has been claimed for loss income for Before School Clubs.

During the year £185k was paid out to Childcare providers for loss of income due to COVID.

Two grants were received in March:

- £245k – ALN, this will be used to support the transition of pupils into secondary school with clusters working together to support this, in addition to this the Educational Psychologist service has increased its capacity to help support and identify the needs of young people at a very early stage.
- £122k – this is for any additional costs for covid that have not been claimed via the hardship fund and will support outdoor structures required to provide space and CO2 detectors.

The continued pressure on the ALN budget is an on-going concern, the appointment of two statutory officers and a cost planning tool will help to identify and control costs going forward.



# Our Future Direction

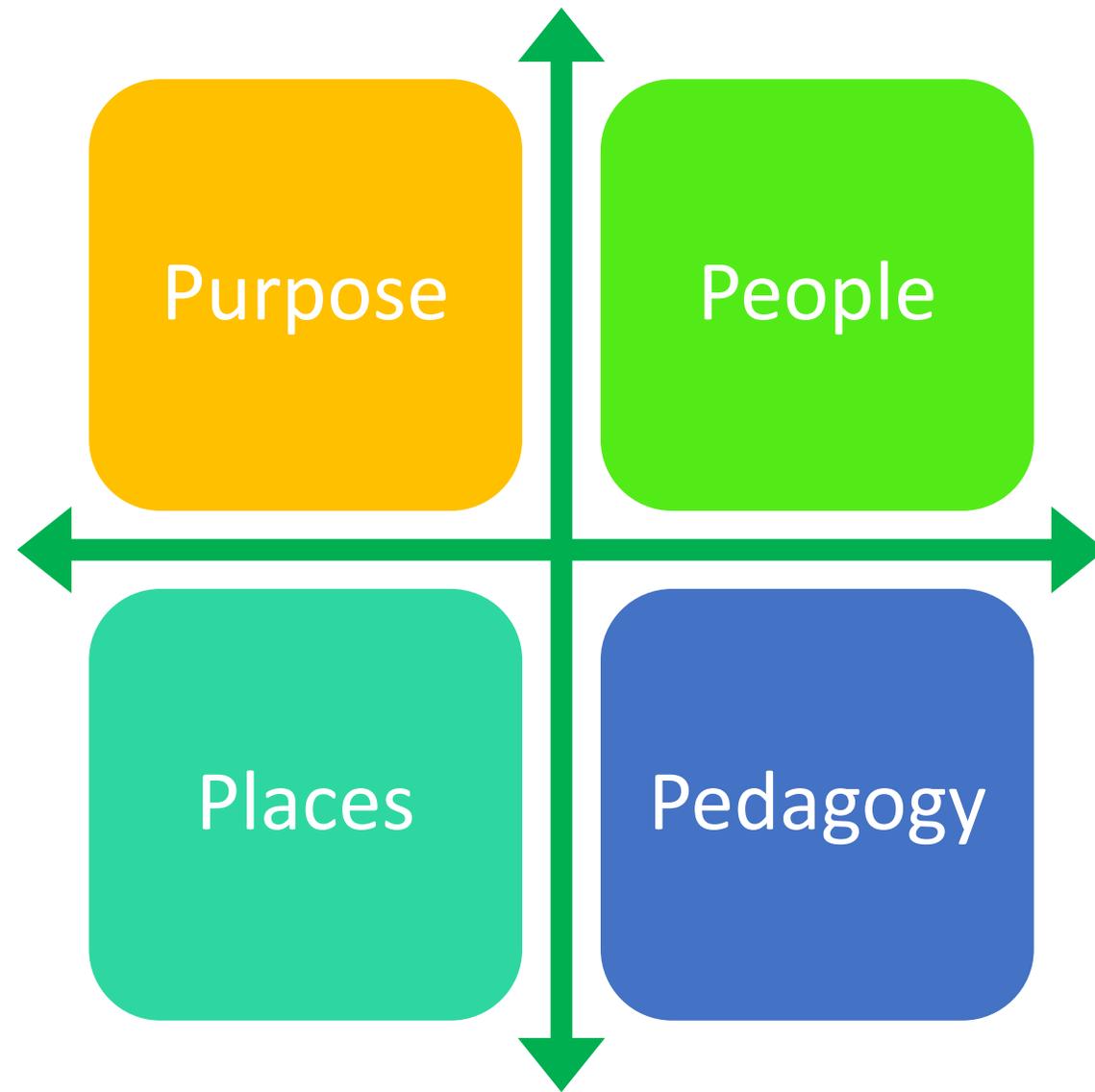
*How will Monmouthshire respond to the challenges of a post-pandemic world?*



# What our context could be...

- Negative impacts estimated at 50% worse for disadvantaged children
- The emergence of a ‘newly’ disadvantaged group of learners
- 80% of respondents agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse. 41% said it had made their mental health “much worse” - increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, a loss of coping mechanisms or a loss of motivation. *Young Minds survey*
- By autumn 2020, significantly lower achievement in reading and maths compared to 3 years ago (UK) – *NFER study*
- 53% of learners questioned were struggling with learning at home – Spring 2020 – *WG review of impacts on Mental health*
- Long term loss of earning in children in the UK estimated at £350bn (and 100bn tax revenue) – *Institute of Fiscal Studies*





# Purpose

## Risk

1. *'Children and Young People have the best possible start in life'* may no longer be an adequate purpose in light of the COVID-19 pandemic
2. We are in the earliest stages of the post-COVID-19 period and as yet we do not understand fully the impact of the pandemic
3. The development of a new purpose (if one is required) will take time and need a collective input to frame it
4. Our purpose needs to reflect the changes to the education context in Wales and beyond. Reform is part of this agenda but so to are maximising the opportunities to our children and young people
5. Capitalise and build on the authority's work on social justice and anti-poverty

## Opportunity

1. Take the opportunity to work closely with our schools and partners to understand the needs that exist over the summer term and how we can prepare to deliver these in the coming years
2. Prepare our schools and services to allow them to align the new needs and the ambitions of the national reform agenda
3. Continue to develop our anti-poverty work and work with partners to maximise the impact this has on our learners and their outcomes in work
4. Continue to work closely with colleagues across the authority and in wider public services to develop a broader set of interventions to benefit Monmouthshire's children and young people



# People

## Risk

1. The pandemic remains a risk to all school based staff
2. School staff may not be prepared for the return to school of their children and new additional needs that they may have
3. School leaders will need a new set of skills and approaches to support their own staff's wellbeing
4. Some more experienced members of staff may choose to curtail their careers leading to challenges around recruitment and retention
5. Learners at all stages of their education may have lost impetus and prior learning
6. School staff may require additional support for new interventions to enable all learners to make progress
7. The new themes of Curriculum and ALN reform require significant professional learning
8. As a County Monmouthshire needs all of its senior leaders, of which Headteachers are a critical element, to contribute to a new approach to public service post COVID-19
9. Increased Tribunals – if Wales follows what happened in England post their reform there will be a tsunami of tribunals, which could overwhelm services.
10. ALN budget – high risk of overspend continuing and growing.
11. Support schools in their preparations for the Centre Determined Grades (CDGs)
12. Implementation of ALNET Act – upskilling and supporting early years settings
13. Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity in the Welsh Medium sector to support the implementation of the ALN Act and the development of Welsh medium more generally
14. Addressing Child Development needs that have arisen as a result of Covid-19

## Opportunity

1. Continue to work closely with colleagues across the Association of Directors of Education, Wales (ADEW) and the Welsh Government to ensure that forthcoming changes to the Operational Guidance are proportionate and timely
2. To work with schools, Qualifications Wales and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) to support the establishment of Centre Determined Grades
3. Continue to support all school staff ensuring that their wellbeing is maintained allowing them to support their learners
4. Work closely with partners to understand the most effective interventions to support learners returning to school
5. Continue to play an important role in regional endeavours to support schools to be ready for the implementation of the new curriculum and the ALN Act.
6. Develop greater integration of school leaders into the corporate leadership frame
7. To focus on the SNRB development process to provide enhanced and broader support to learners in these settings
8. Work with an integrated early years team to support our non-maintained early years settings



# Places

## Risk

1. The development of the new Abergavenny School
  - Budget and costs increasing
  - Not achieving the correct outcome from statutory consultation
  - Not achieving planning permission or delays in planning permission
  - Programme slips and opening is delayed
2. The lack of specialist provision places particularly regional special schools places and secondary specialist provision in MCC
3. Sustainability of early education and childcare providers (Loss of income last year and reduced demand has left some providers in a precarious position)
4. The need to rapidly develop new Welsh Medium provision in the north-east of the county

## Opportunity

1. The development of the new school in Abergavenny represents a significant opportunity to invigorate a community discussion about a significant investment in the town
2. The initial engagement with staff and governors has been positive and provides an opportunity to think about the new curriculum in a new setting
3. Continued investment in the authority's SNRBs to enhance provision
4. Continued development of Welsh medium provision across Monmouthshire in line with our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)
5. Continued development of our WESP to meet our targets in 2032



## Risk

1. Further extended closures, requiring a continued reliance on distance learning as the primary method of curriculum delivery, could result in learning experiences which do not support effective learning.
2. An expectation that school staff provide face to face and distance learning in parallel with distance learning for extended periods of time could be overwhelming and result in higher numbers of staff absence or leaving the profession.
3. Currently, wellbeing is the main priority for schools. Staff are investing their time in supporting learners as they return to school full time and this may impact on the time available to develop new pedagogical approaches to support the implementation of the new curriculum.
4. All schools and settings, early years and further education provisions will be affected by the Act and will need to change their approach to the identification and management of children and young people with ALN.
5. ALN reform – systems not being in place in schools and LA for September's implementation. A significant part of this risk is related to the late release of information and guidance documents from the Welsh Government.
6. Learners who experienced disadvantage prior to the pandemic are likely to see their needs increase in the post pandemic period

## Opportunity

1. In response to the pandemic, schools have developed bespoke distance learning offers to ensure that pupils can continue learning. The opportunity to innovate and experiment with the use of technology to support learning has given many schools the confidence to build on this further and develop a blended learning approach consisting of a mix of face to face learning supported by on-line tools.
2. Many schools have benefited from increased opportunities to share pedagogical expertise within and across schools to support the implementation of the new curriculum.
3. Increased engagement across schools through the use of technology is enabling school staff to share learning experiences and planning across clusters of schools. This is facilitating the sharing of good practice and resources and in doing so reducing workload.
4. Access to, and uptake of, professional learning to support pedagogy has increased as a result of the move to on-line training courses. Many schools have used the time to develop staff skills to support learning.
5. Parents have had the opportunity to engage with learning whilst their children have been at home. Schools have provided more support for parents to enable them to support their children and designed the curriculum to be suitably flexible to fit with other commitments. As a result, parents feel more confident about providing support and less pressured about when this support is provided.
6. Some groups of learners have benefitted from learning at home and in a more solitary way and in many cases, engagement from these learners has been far higher compared to more traditional models. This means that schools may be able to develop a more bespoke curriculum which balances home and school-based learning where it is more beneficial for the learner.



# Conclusions

As I observed in the introduction, this report feels and looks very different to those that have been previously offered to Select and Full Council.

However, I hope that this report has captured the challenges of 2020-2021 accurately and perhaps more importantly, the response of our services to support schools and our learners.

The future of education in Monmouthshire is well placed. We have the strongest school leadership we have ever had and the pandemic has promoted a renewed sense of common purpose across our system. The future will not be easy and as I present this report we cannot yet be certain about the full impact of the COVID pandemic but the system's ability to respond is secure.

There are a range of further challenges that we face; implementing the new Curriculum and the ALN Reform Act will require commitment and energy but they allow us to form our own teaching with pedagogy and wellbeing at its very heart.

Our ambitions with regards to ensuring that all learners achieving the very best that they can remain undiminished and we will continue to ensure that the emergent Welsh Government accountability framework is implemented effectively across the county. We will not relent on our work to ensure that success in school is not diminished or unduly affected by a young person's background.

Whilst COVID has presented a huge challenge to our system I believe it is a test we have passed and we will now look to the future and build on the good work that exists and has been recognised in both of Estyn's reports this year.

